Bound by Duty

by SoftObsidian74

Summary

Hermione has a chance to do what Lily failed to do. Will she accept her destiny? More importantly, will the men in her life accept theirs?

Notes

This is a bedtime story/gift written for TarnishedAngel. Be warned: It is rather (too) lengthy - approximately 426K words (Part I: Reconciling the Past (Chapters 1-20), Part II: 6 Days To Eternity (Chapters 21-31), Part III: Her Dark's Own Light (Chapters 32-50).

This fic was written over a 4 year period from 2008-2012. I was fortunate to find many great friends through the writing of this story. Many of them offered great feedback and a critical eye as betas. The betas for this story are: Lady of Clunn (1-50); WeasleyWench (Ch. 2-35);
DynoNugget (Chapters 20-34); Wildcatcdc (Chapters 35-40); LiterarySpell (Chapters 35-49); Dee Michelle (Chapters 35-43); and Kerri240879 (Chapter 50).

Plot Beta: Emily Waters (from Chapters 18-50); Brit Picker: Lady of Clunn

Other Contributors: Tarnished Angel for the very detailed challenge; Julian Venere for the concrit and feedback; Sara D. a.k.a. ForgetfulLove for the wonderful donated artwork (Ch.39), Del Borovic for the amazing commissioned piece (Ch. 14); and TriosPleasure for the awesome banner.

This story is AU in that it ignores some of Book 5 and all of books 6 & 7, unless I thought it served as a nifty plot device.

And finally, please note that while this story contains BDSM elements, it is a fantasy, and should not be taken as an effort to portray "proper" BDSM relationships ::::rolls eyes::: :D

Disclaimer: The characters and canon situations in the following story belong solely to JK Rowling. I am not making any money from the publishing or writing of this story.

Banner by TriosPleasure
Prologue: The Other Prophecy

Life is like a game of cards. The hand you are dealt is determinism; the way you play it is free will.
~Jawaharial Nehru

A person often meets his destiny on the road he took to avoid it. ~Jean de La Fontaine

Hermione Granger's Sixth Year (1996)

In Godric’s house a Mudblood falls
6th year she’ll rise to Merlin’s call
She will take them in
and they’ll take her ‘nigh
Dark virtuous angel
Who bleeds in lust
And in passion cries

Suffer their anger
Suffer their pain
She’ll suffer for sacrifice
and a love with no name

And the Dark Lord will fall
To Her love’s dark light
One from his house
Two from her right
And when all 3 claim her
In love’s carnal hedone
None can defeat them And it will be done.

It had been twenty years since that prophecy had been made, and Snape still was awe struck that he was included in it. He couldn’t believe that he had actually almost played a role in the defeat of the Dark Lord. If only one certain brash and cocky Gryffindor hadn’t taken it upon himself to humiliate Snape, things may have turned out very differently. He turned him against her; his Lily.

Of course he blamed himself too, he hadn’t meant it; she was never a Mudblood to him. On that fateful day however, her betrayal hurt worst than anything he had ever felt in his whole miserable life. She chose THEM over him, and when he saw her with them…well….

Letting out a long sigh, he shook his head, trying to shake off the nostalgia of bad feelings washing over him as the perverse scene of Lily being utterly degraded and used by them, and enjoying it, snuck into his consciousness again.

If he had had any doubts before about his decision to become a DeathEater, that one thing had made up his mind for him. The depravity and betrayal of that act alone had single handedly sealed his allegiance to the Dark Lord.

But here he was again, at Hogwarts, on the so-called “right” side, teaching her son, Potter.
Oh, the irony.

But this prophecy hadn’t been fulfilled. Things had been changed and events had been altered; the weather hadn’t arrived according to forecast.

If he had learned anything over the last two decades it was that prophecies were merely predictions more so than mandates. They could be changed and bent; they weren’t law.

So that was the end of it, right?

No, something wasn’t right.

He played it once again, letting the smooth cold glass roll around in tiny circles over his palm as his nagging thoughts poked at his gut…

“A Mudblood. A sixth year Gryffindor Mudblood. One from the Dark Lord’s house, a Slytherin, of course, and two from her right?”

Aside from the missing Slytherin, if he had no previous knowledge of the history behind this prophecy, Snape would have bet a few galleons that the prophecy was about Ms. Granger.

But it wasn’t about her. It couldn’t be. It had been about Lily He was sure of that.

Still, if it had been about Ms. Granger, he was certain that the bit about the ‘two on her right’ would refer to none other than her sidekicks- that thick-headed younger Weasley boy and the infamous and insufferable Harry Potter.

“But this couldn’t be about the here and now because this prophecy was made nearly sixteen years ago. Prophecies couldn’t come back around again if they weren’t fulfilled could they? The time for this prophecy had passed. Yes, of course…”

Despite going back and forth rationalizing this in his head, Snape found himself glued to his chair and pouring himself another glass of Firewisky as he tried to drown the nagging feeling that as the sixth year for the Golden Trio began, he would again have a role to play in deciding how a prophecy played out to determine the fate of the wizarding world.

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20 years ago (1976)

James watched as his best mate took her again, from behind as he always did.

“Ah fuck it to bloody hell,” he thought to himself when he couldn’t stand it any longer.

He reached into his pants and released his cock from his pants so that he could wank to the scene in front of him. As much as he enjoyed remaining in control around her, he enjoyed watching her on her hands and knees even more, especially when she was like this-totally resigned to her position and purpose of being used in their presence.

Eventually, they would both take her; like they had been doing for so many nights, only this time Moony would join them.

Further away, leaning against a tree as if to brace himself from the shock of the scene before him, Remus watched eagerly. His face was one of lust, surprise, and curiosity.

Sirius preferred to take her in the position that most suited the mating ritual of his Animagus form. He
was at his best and at his worst when he was fucking her from behind like that. Focused, panting, driven as if his life depended on releasing his seed inside of her, he was relentless, and he was working her over particularly good tonight as she squirmed and bucked back on his cock like a bitch in heat.

Sirius chuckled at the thought.

Sensing that he was drawing close to his climax, he slowed down and wound his hands through Lily’s long red tresses, twisting her hair as his fingers slid closer to the root. Pulling her head back so she could see James’s stare at her as Sirius leaned forward brushing his lips against her ear. “What was that you just said, cunt? I didn’t hear you,” he whispered as his free hand came down firmly over her right arse cheek, the sound of the smack ringing out in a faint echo over the dark forest.

Her brilliant emerald eyes began to tear up even as her ears peaked listening for any hint of his usual playfulness. But there was no humour in his voice tonight, and as she looked up at the face of her first love, James, staring back at her with his cock in his hand stroking intently, she saw that there was no humour there either. And then there was the heavy breathing she heard coming from Remus standing near the adjacent tree, she could feel him, he was ready to pounce at any moment.

She was surrounded by pure unadulterated lust and something else… the faint but definite ominous threat of swift punishment hung in the air if she failed to comply. There was no playfulness here, only raw need. A thirsty need to hear her acquiescence; to hear her confirm what they all knew - she was owned.

“I…I need to be fucked….please,” she whimpered.

“Please what?” Sirius growled as he raked his nails over her already bruised arse cheek.

The tears had already started to flow, but Lily knew that tears never deterred Sirius, she rather thought he enjoyed it.

“Arghh” she cried out after he thrust deep into her wet folds and held still with great effort, pulling her hair back harder as he waited for her response.

“Please fuck me, please please fuck me, Sirius.”

Sirius grunted. Not quite the words he was looking for, something along the lines of Sir or even Master would have been preferred, but that would have to do for now. He was too far gone and close to cumming to play around with her. As he began to slowly pull out, he loosened his grip on her hair, and placed his other hand on her hip while pulling her back onto his cock roughly.

“Say it nice and loud for me love, make sure Moony and Prongs can hear you.”

“Ooo, please, please please fuck me, Si-Sirius...please,” Lily moaned loudly as he began to pummel into her wildly reaching toward his release. She knew it would be over soon and tried to arch her back to take more of him, finding herself once more conflicted and ashamed that she found herself reaching yet another climax. She couldn’t hide it here, she couldn’t deny that she was getting off from the humiliation of hearing herself beg to be used on the bare ground of the Forbidden Forest by two of her closest friends while her boyfriend watched and wanked.

“That’s a good girl,” Sirius choked out as he reached his peaked bucking hard as his seed shot into her.

James could feel his own orgasm approaching and he tried to slow down so he could enjoy Remus’ first crack at her.
“Go on mate - don’t be shy now,” he croaked in a strained voice.

Remus licked his lips, unsure how far he could go or how he should jump in. He had known James, Sirius, and Lily for almost 6 years now, yet he had never known them like *this*.

He pushed off of the tree he had been using for support and walked slowly and carefully over to the two. Rubbing Lily’s cheek lightly with his hand and then reaching down to cup her chin to bring it up so that he could look down into her eyes, he searched her face to make sure everything was alright. He wanted to be sure because he knew once he started, there would be no turning back. And when he saw her look up with tear filled eyes, it almost gave him pause to stop and ask if she was OK, but then he saw it.

Her eyes were considerably darker than they had been before and her tongue darted out sliding slowly along her bottom lip, biting it as if in anticipation. That was all he needed to do what he had fantasized about doing to her for years. Taking his cock out of his pants while he grabbed a handful of her hair, he began to rub himself over her face slowly and deliberately.

“Oh Lily, sweet sweet Lily, you really are the sweetest witch I’ve ever met. Tell me, do you think I taste sweet too?” he whispered, keeping his eyes steady on hers as he began to rub his cock firmly across her face, making sure the whole length of it slid along her jawline, around her forehead, down her nose until it reached her lips, before lifting it and smacking it across her lips. With determined insistence he began to push the head into her mouth, working it slowly.

Lily gasped, inhaling some of his length as she did so. She was a bit taken aback. She had never seen Remus like this or ever even thought about him as a sexual creature for that matter. She felt herself grow excited despite her recent string of orgasms.

Sirius was finished with her and hunched over on his knees breathing hard and resting on her back. She didn’t want to disturb him so she ran her hands along Remus’ calves coaxing him to his knees so that she could take the rest of him comfortably into her mouth without rising.

James smiled. Remus fit right in and it was working out just like he knew it would, it was natural fit. They were natural. All of them knew each other and got along well. It was almost laughable when Lily had suggested Snape may make a suitable partner. He couldn’t believe that she wanted to share this special thing they had with Snape.

Snape of all people could never be included into the fold! There was no way that James would allow Snape to touch his Lily, even if Lily did insist she felt like it was “just the way things were meant to be.”

Codswallop!

James didn’t believe in fate, he made his own way. And in his book Snape didn’t belong. He was creepy, condescending, and was just plain evil. It amazed him that Lily couldn’t see that.

Lily was his, always was and always would be his. His to share, his to protect, his to watch over, and he would be damned if anyone like Snape would ever enjoy her.

It had always been him and Lily, and now sharing Lily with Sirius and Remus seemed right; like it always should have been. He knew he couldn’t share her forever, Lily was his and his alone. One day he would marry her and settle down and have a family. But right here and now, this their time to share their love with his two closest mates, and no one else!

James was so occupied in his own thoughts and enjoying the shared ecstasy of his best mates that he
didn’t see or feel the gawking pair of black eyes watching them all in horror and disgust. Snape slipped away stealthily, running back up to the school as he replayed the scene he witnessed again and again in his head.

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What James didn’t know was that when one interferes with Fate’s plans, Fate creates new plans. In his possessiveness and snobbery, he had set into motion a chain of events that would leave him and Lily fulfilling another prophecy with their very lives, dooming their son to face the Dark Lord, one way or the other.

A seasoned Seer would have told him that Fate is a lot like karma, it comes around and back again, tempting new actors to fulfill old roles to meet destined ends. And if James and Lily wouldn’t fulfill their destiny as Fate had planned it the first time, they would fulfill it in another way…. 

And so when Fate made its rounds almost twenty years later, it decided that one Hermione Granger would fill the role that Lily had unwittingly refused, the son of James and Lily Potter would fulfill another, and their friend Ron and a Slytherin named Draco Malfoy would fill yet another still. Their roles would be tied into a single purpose; to ensure that a certain Dark Lord would meet his destined (and long overdue) end.

But Hermione Granger still had a choice, like Lily once did, because there was always Free Will.

And Free Will seem to always interfere with Fate’s plans…
PART I
Reconciling the Past

"Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future."
-Oscar Wilde

Lily Evans was the kind of girl people wanted to be around. She was a rare beauty, not drop dead gorgeous or particularly striking, but more of a subdued beauty, the kind that couldn’t be captured in a drawing. Her skin was delicate without hardly any blemishes. Her long, full, red hair evoked pictures of sunsets right before dusk, and her eyes rivaled the glow of emeralds catching the bright light of a bewitched ceiling. They were always sparkling and often betrayed her, showing every emotion she felt, no matter how much she tried to control her face.

And not least of all, she was kind. The type of person who would go out of her way to help others in need, even at the risk of the disapproval of others.

Many thought it was just a natural attribute, but Lily felt differently. She knew she had darkness in her that she hid well. A darkness that was quelled by her position as a Muggle-born attending Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. She felt she had no right to arrogance or cruelty; those were afforded to those who belonged there. Sometimes, she thought herself lucky to not have been born a pure-blood. Her talents as a witch and her looks would have surely spoiled her, projecting her to a nasty disposition, or so she told herself.

No, she was kind because kindness was a consequence of empathy. Lily had great empathy for others, especially those who were regarded as outcasts. She guarded an enduring insecurity that she was only one step away from being one herself.

Mudblood. That word had disappeared at one time, or so she heard, but now it was back again with the rise of anti-Muggle sentiment growing in the wizarding world. The animosity and resentment toward Muggles and those who were born of Muggles had seemed to be growing more palatable.
each day, and there were whispers about Mudbloods who had wrongly invaded Hogwarts, endangering the legacy of pure-blood society and culture. But Lily also knew that the hate and fear were real on both sides.

Her parents and sister were mere Muggles. She had grown up within a world that feared, loathed, and preached against witchcraft. She was taught that it was akin to devil worship in her Muggle world, anything associated with it was a one-way trip to hell... and alienation. Her sister, Petunia, was a perfect example of the fear and hate toward wizards in Muggle society. And she almost, *almost* understood why Muggle-borns were hated in this new world she had chosen to embrace.

But whatever Muggles did or did not do, it had nothing to do with her new life, her existence at Hogwarts. Lily had not grown up in it, she was not familiar with it, and at times, too many times, she felt that she didn’t belong in it. She was caught between the fear and hate of two worlds, and sometimes it had made her hate herself, not feeling at home in either.

So she felt it, felt it to her very core whenever that word was uttered. It didn’t help that many of her friends in Gryffindor referred to her affectionately as the “Gryffindor Princess” because she knew others, pure-bloods, would snicker at the thought that anything Muggle-born could be royalty in a wizarding house.

The only time Lily felt comfortable at Hogwarts, was when she was with good friends.

And then, one of her friendships turned into something more.

Lily was always conflicted by her fascination with James Potter, the feelings exacerbated by the man’s nasty disposition towards Severus. Lily had begun seriously dating James during their fifth year. When she was with James, she felt like a prize; he seemed to gush with pride and admiration that she had chosen to date him.

During those first several months, they would spend their time together talking, holding hands, and making out. He would never push her to do anything else, and Lily wasn’t sure that she was ready to do anything more. James came from a pure-blood family, and she didn’t want to live up to the reputation that Muggle-borns were so desperate to fit in that they were easy to lay, especially with someone so popular and revered by the school. She felt she had to keep up a respectable image, at least until she got comfortable and felt she could trust him. But she wanted more, so much more, things she couldn’t even articulate.

Things she didn’t have to articulate to Severus – he just knew. Severus knew her better than anyone, and he had always been there for her. He had looked after her since she had arrived at Hogwarts. He had been there when she got her letter, when she had bought her first familiar and her first wand. Severus was a true friend, and his opinion meant the world to her. Whenever she found herself feeling inadequate or out of place, Severus would be there to soothe her fears away with reassurances that she was a most impressive witch in every way, even more so than many of the pure- and half-blood witches he knew. He wasn’t a particularly warm person, and she knew that whatever his intentions may be, using outright lies and flattery was not in his nature. He really did respect her as a real witch.

It was no wonder, then, that she felt a fierce loyalty to the boy. Despite what James said, Lily felt that Severus had been called into her life, if not for any other reason but to watch over her like some sort of dark guardian angel, and she hated the way James, and Sirius in particular, treated him. It often tore her heart to hear their stories of how they had “gotten him”, and she found herself scolding them and becoming increasingly conflicted with each passing year.

She and Severus had a close, unique friendship that couldn’t be described simply. He made her feel
like she was free to say and do anything. There was none of the nervous flirtation and self-consciousness that she and James shared. Severus knew her. He could read her like an open book.

The summer after their fifth year had closed. James would come to visit a few times a month, leaving Lily at home to spend more time with Severus. She had coaxed him into exploring Muggle tourist attractions in London, such as the Tower of London and Big Ben.

Then things started getting… complicated.

It had started to become more apparent after James would return home from a visit. She knew Severus had always been fond of her and didn’t doubt that he had fantasized about her sexually because he made no efforts to conceal his fascination with her. When James would arrive for a long weekend, she knew it hurt Severus. She noticed that he had become quite aggressive in his flirtation with her, sometimes being outright suggestive, running his hands through her hair, or tickling her as if he were her lover.

That summer, while trying to maintain a long-distance relationship with James, a secret love affair with Severus had begun. It had started after James’s fourth visit; she had walked him to the train for his ride back home and as always when she was alone, she felt watched.

She had cut through the park heading off to the bike path leading to her cul-de-sac. It had grown dark, and she had been aware that it hadn’t been the wisest choice to walk home from the train station, so she had picked up her pace. She had figured it was probably Severus, but it hadn’t failed to creep her out any less. It had made her nervous when he played these sorts of games.

As she had passed a particularly dark section of the path, she had yelped when she had felt a hand pull her arm. Her body had followed as she had been pulled roughly into an overgrown bush. She could place his scent anywhere. Her breath had quickened at his aroma, eyes traveling slowly from his mouth to his cold black eyes. Severus had looked livid, a quiet controlled type of rage.

“Why do you insist on seeing that arrogant git?” he had asked in a low hiss, shaking her firmly as if she had been a disobedient child.

Lily had felt her control waning with his obvious anger. He had had some nerve!

“Sometimes I wonder who the real git is between the two of you; you have no right to question who I date. I’m not yours,” she had said in a low murmur, her eyes falling in awkward discomfort.

He had stilled. “Is that so?” he had said with a disturbing chill to his voice.

Suddenly, he had grabbed her by her throat and had pulled her close to him so that her nose had pressed firmly against his chest as he bent over to bite her neck after each word as if to emphasize his meaning.


Lily had begun began to breathe heavily, not understanding why her skin seemed on fire and responsive to each bite. Despite the cooling summer chill that had come with the end of dusk, she had suddenly felt rather warm.

“I’m not an object, Severus. I do not belong to anyone. Besides, mmm… you’re… you’re… oh… my friend.” She had said the last word breathlessly as she had tried to back away. But his grip on her throat had been steady as he had begun to press down harder upon her larynx as if to punish her for not agreeing with him.
She had found herself quite confused. She should have been frightened, but she didn’t want it to stop. It had felt so good to not be in control, to have her physical inferiority and vulnerability to Severus so bluntly emphasized. It had felt good for Severus to use it against her, to show her how much he had wanted her, how much he had needed her. She had been special to him, and now he had crossed an unspoken boundary to express it.

“I’m more than that witch,” he had whispered, looking at her with a knowing smirk.

“Do you think that James knows that you despise being treated like a delicate little princess? Hmm?” he had questioned as he closed his hand tighter around her throat, causing Lily to gasp and reach up to grab his wrists in a feeble effort to resist.

“You think that he knows that you fantasize about being treated like the unworthy witch that you fear you are?” His hand had closed tighter.

“I’m not just your friend, Lily. I’m your guardian, I’m your shadow. I can see through all of your bullshit, remember that,” he had whispered into her ear as he had loosened his grip on her throat, sliding his hand down to her nipple to twist it lightly through her t-shirt. She had gasped and had squirmed, pushing her hips against his as if begging for more of the same treatment.

Severus’ smirk had grown as he had twisted her nipple harder through the fabric while pulling. Lily let out a low moan.

“I know you better than anyone; I know what you need,” he had breathed, beginning to show his own arousal and effort to restrain himself.

Lily had nodded absently as she looked up at Severus through half-lidded eyes.

That simple of act of acknowledgement, an affirmation that he knew her better than anyone else, even Potter, had undone him. Severus had swallowed hard and had kissed Lily Evans for the first time. Her tongue had been tentative, slipping out only after his coaxed it out. He had alternated between lightly biting her bottom lip, to sliding his own tongue along hers, exploring her tongue and then her whole mouth even as he let his hands slide underneath her shirt and bra to twist her nipples, pulling them hard until she had gasped in his mouth.

When they had finally broken apart, they had been breathless and both red in the face. Realizing that she had allowed him to touch her, to touch her like that, she had blushed and had looked away when she couldn’t bear his stare anymore.

“So, I guess you think I’m weird?”

“What?” Severus had asked, narrowing his eyes.

“Cause I… I enjoyed that.”

“What did you enjoy?” Severus had teasingly questioned.

Lily had exhaled, giggling while shaking her head. “All of it.”

“All of it?”

“Yes, all of it.”

Then they had stood there looking at each other for a long time. It had grown dark, but their eyes had adjusted.
Shaking his head, he had begun, “He’s an arrogant arsehole, not good enough for you, Lily.”

“You’re no walk in the park, either, Sev. I like him a lot. I think I can fall in love with him. I-I can love both of you.” She had nudged him, reaching up to touch his hair.

Severus had scrunched up his face at that. “That doesn’t make sense; you can’t love two people at once. Not if you really are in love.”

“No, I don’t think that’s true, Sev. I think you can love several people at once. How do you explain it when a person meets someone, loses them, and then meets someone else that makes them feel just as good as the lover they lost? What if that person met both lovers in the same time and space? Do you really think they would love either one any less?”

“Even if what you say is true, you can’t possibly love them both equally and give of yourself equally; someone always loses.”

“You think you’ll lose me?” she had asked, searching his eyes, worriedly.

“I won’t let you go, Severus. I’ll always be in your corner, and I know you’ll always be in mine.”

He had stared at her for a long moment. “Swear it.”

“I swear.”

Severus had let out a small sigh and had given her a small smile. “Come, let me walk you home.”

That had been the first night, of many that summer, for both Severus and Lily. They had explored each other physically and mentally in almost every way they could think of and in other ways they had read about in books. Lily had discovered that it hadn’t been a passing interest. She had grown addicted to the pleasure that not being in control brought her. She had enjoyed the temporary sanctuary that giving up control to him gave her. She had no need to think about being an honorable, respectable witch, trying to prove that she belonged, or a girl who carried the invisible crown of a good Gryffindor princess. She had no need to think about how to be around him... she could just be. She had enjoyed the ways he would challenge her, excite her, and tease her.

Severus had enjoyed testing her body to see how she would respond, what aroused her, what could bring her to climax, what caused her fear, what caused her to climax in spite of her fear, and what her absolute limits were. And when she and Severus had discovered that not only did she enjoy a bit of pain with her pleasure but also enjoyed the feeling of being used and degraded by someone she cared about, she had felt as if she were looking at the world with new eyes.

After that summer, everything between she and James had changed. She had become more confident and secure in her sexuality, armed with the knowledge that someone loved her, and if James rejected her for being who she really was, she would be all right.

And James hadn’t rejected her; what Severus had opened up for her, she opened up for him. Each new discovery she had made with Severus had been a lesson for James on how to please Lily. James had taken to making sure that he explored as many of her fantasies as possible, as well as a few of his own. So when she had jokingly brought up her desire to be shared by three wizards, he had been eager to comply.

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20 years later…
Today was a good day. Hermione had just earned an ‘O’ in Divination. Ha! It had been her weak spot for the longest time, never failing to tug at her nagging insecurity that a real witch was born and not created. Hermione had never felt as if she were really born a witch. She had been born a great many things, but having Muggle parents continuously haunted the dark places in her subconscious she tried to ignore.

And she never ever admit to it. In fact, she fought against it with every fiber of her being.

Proving herself had become so much a part of who she was that it had become nature. Once Sorted into Gryffindor, she had been conscious of upholding the standards of what was expected of a Gryffindor witch. A Gryffindor witch. Not a Gryffindor Muggle implant. She had read fiercely, making sure she knew lessons weeks ahead of time. She knew the history, politics, and culture of the wizarding world as if she had grown up in it. And most importantly of all, Hermione Granger worked to make sure her place in Gryffindor, and Hogwarts, was never doubted. She lived the embodiment of a Gryffindor in every way. She was smart, brave, speaking her mind when things needed to be said, loyal, staying close to her friends through danger and pain, and most of all, strong-willed, remaining on task no matter the obstacles.

Today she carried her head high, feeling secure in her accomplishment. She smiled to herself and began to half-walk half-jog back to the Gryffindor common room, when she came around the corner and ran into something rather solid and warm. Then she saw the patch of blond hair and wide, silver eyes, and smelled… soap.

Hermione rolled her eyes. Malfoy. She stopped, waiting for the usual insult. But it didn’t come right away. She found herself becoming more confused at his silence, and roaming eyes. He was appraising her.

It seemed to take a minute before Malfoy recognized who he had bumped into. Returning slowly from wide-eyed confusion to his usual cold icy stare, he surveyed Hermione carefully, running his eyes slowly from her head to her toes and back up again.

Lifting her chin, she let him have a good look. Hermione had filled-out considerably since the previous school year. Her breasts were full and quite apparent, even through her robes. Her summer tan was fading but still gave her a healthy glow. Her brown, mousy hair was wild as ever, but it framed her heart-shaped face well and made her baby-doe brown eyes pop seductively. And although she would never say so herself, Hermione was very aware that by conventional standards, she would be considered rather attractive. Hot, even.

She briefly wondered if Malfoy was thinking the same when Malfoy pulled a face like someone smelling rotten meat. His cruel mouth curled into a familiar sneer.

“Gods, watch where you’re going, Mudblood. I should make you buy me new robes for soiling them with your filth.”

Hermione bristled, setting her jaw. She wasn’t going to let him get to her today.

“You bumped into me, Ferret! Why don’t you watch where you’re going!” Her brief sense of bravado began to fade as a sly smirk grew on Malfoy's face.

“Get out of your way?” he chuckled as he began to walk backwards towards the dungeons. "Soon you'll be out of our way, you fucking Mudblood. Your days are numbered now that the Dark Lord has returned… enjoy Hogwarts while you can.”
Hermione stood watching him retreat, one fist balled at her side. She hated hearing the M-word coming out of his mouth, and these days with more reported sightings of Death Eaters and Voldemort’s return, that word seemed to roll off of his tongue easier than it had in their second year. And it wasn’t just him. Hermione heard it in far off dark corners of the school, in hushed voices in the dining hall. It wasn’t everyone, or even most people, but it was enough to remind her of her place. No matter how many O’s she got, she would be that.

But, somehow, it hurt more coming from him.

She would never be good enough to people like Malfoy. Oh, to hell with people like Malfoy, it was the fact that she would never be good enough in his eyes that was the most maddening. He was beautiful, smart, rich, and he was born into the top of the wizarding totem pole, a position she would never reach.

Hermione tensed as her vision began to cloud with tears. She turned and headed for one place where she knew for certain she would always belong. After saying the password to enter the Gryffindor common room, she ran up the stairs to the boys’ dormitories where Ron and Harry were sleeping in Ron’s bed.
I love you too—I don’t really see
Why can’t we go on as three
We love each other—it’s plain to see
There’s just one answer that comes to me

"Triad" by Jefferson Airplane

None of them could say at exactly what point it had all started; the details were fuzzy, but they did remember their first kiss. There had always laughter and silliness where the three were concerned, but there was also the pain, danger, and fear that came along with being associated with infamous name ‘Harry Potter’. Since their second year, there had been an unspoken understanding that she and Ron had what adults called “chemistry.” And so naturally, as they grew into adult bodies of their own, that chemistry also grew, and it was evident to everyone around them.

But there was another kind of chemistry, hidden from the naked eyes of others who saw and interacted with the Trio from day to day. If ever exposed, it would reveal something much more magnetic than chemistry between the three, stronger than the trivial crush everyone imagined existed between Ron and Hermione.

It had started after the Cho fiasco in their fifth year. Hermione and Ron had tried harder than ever to be there for Harry; that year had been particularly hard for him. And so, at first, it had started with light touches of comfort and support. Slowly, those touches had become lingering hugs, rubbing knees while sitting next to one another, and reassuring hand holding. And when Harry’s scar began to burn again, more fiercely than ever, those little reassurances had turned into soothing shoulder rubs and sneaking into each other’s beds to cuddle. And then there had been long, meaningful stares in comfortable silences, and admiring caresses of the hair, cheek, and lips.

Once Harry had figured out that he couldn’t isolate himself to protect others, none of them were ever alone if they could help it. Wherever there was Harry, there was Ron and Hermione.

And then there had been that kiss—their first kiss.

When Ron had first kissed her, Harry had been there, watching. There had been no awkward embarrassment the way an outside observer would have expected, but it had felt like something was missing—Harry.

Hermione remembered that day clearly, because it had been the first day of what had felt like what would be the rest of their lives together. Ron had leaned in close, lifting her chin to meet his lips, trailing his hands up her neck to pull her forward. Sliding his tongue along her lips hesitantly, he had tasted them, had savored them, and then, finally, had penetrated them. Using his tongue slowly and deliberately, he had caressed every inch of her mouth. He had been thorough, communicating years of pent-up desire and longing, and when he had pulled away, they had looked into each other’s eyes, and then they had turned to meet Harry’s.

Ron had smiled then, and Hermione had inhaled in anticipation. Sweeping her hair up into his hand, Ron had slid behind her and had started to kiss her neck softly, and he had pushed her gently toward Harry.
She remembered Harry looking down at her quietly, steadily, waiting for her approval, and when she had looked up, inching her face closer as if expecting to be kissed, he had taken her mouth as passionately as Ron had done only moments before.

When Hermione had broken the kiss to gasp for air, Harry had reached around her grabbing Ron’s hips, pulling him closer into them, and then Ron kissed Harry with the same fervor he had kissed Hermione with… and they hadn’t looked back since.

She never felt pressure to please both of them as if she were some sort of toy, even though there were times that she wanted to be precisely that.

But they wouldn’t let her. They worked hard to please her. They treated her like she was something to be revered: a goddess. She never doubted that they loved her. It seemed almost perfect. Almost.

Hermione was still a virgin, although Ron and Harry had both taken each other’s virginity quite some time ago. Sometimes they did it in front of her, and she liked to watch. But with her, they were different, and hadn’t really gone past heavy petting and dry humping. They did enjoy pleasing her orally, but they had both seemed uncomfortable with the possibility that she could return the favor. They relied on each other for that. In fact, they seemed uncomfortable with any suggestion or act that they thought would offend or degrade Hermione.

It always seemed as if the boys were waiting for Hermione to be the one to take it further. And she never did. It frustrated her and reminded her that even sometimes they too were eager to believe in the perfect image she had crafted to prove her worthiness.

So she didn’t tell them; she couldn’t tell them. She didn’t want to destroy the image they had of her; she didn’t know if they would still love her if they knew that she was more than slightly imperfect. And most of all, she feared they would reject her and think she was sick because she wanted to have her choice taken away when she was with them. She wanted to be taken and totally ravished. She didn’t want to be the one to initiate it or even suggest it; that’s not how she dreamed about it happening. So, she took what pleasure she could in their pampering.

Lately, the three of them had been spending more time together than usual, sneaking away to be alone by the lake at the edge of the Forbidden Forest, off to the Shrieking Shack, or hanging back in the common room when everybody went to Hogsmeade.

That last one was probably not the best idea. Everyone went to Hogsmeade. They knew they would have to be more careful even as their desire to be around each other became stronger. There were times when Harry would get reckless and suggest that they say ‘fuck them all’, and that worried Hermione, because he was such a wild card when it came to other people. Ron was much more cautious, there were opinions, Ginny and his parents, to worry about, and he was protective of Hermione and her reputation. What would others think of a girl who would let that sort of thing go on? Hermione was no tart, and he wouldn’t have anyone thinking she was.

So, they were aware of how others would view their relationship and how they should conduct themselves. This usually required Harry keeping his distance in public, being the good mate that he was supposed to be, as others gossiped about the possibility of Ron and Hermione being an item. They hated the charade, but they loved each other too much to risk losing what they had by facing public scrutiny.

It was friendship, it was passionate, it was unconventional, it was love, and it was totally them.
Draco was pissed. The little Mudblood had gone and gotten under his skin again. His father had told him that after the return of the Dark Lord, things would be different. Muggle-borns would be shaking in their knickers and showing more respect to real wizards. But nothing had changed as far as Granger was concerned. Was she really that daft? A war was brewing, her kind were the primary targets for death, and still she insisted on carrying herself and talking to him as if she were better than he is.

But he was pissed at more than what he saw as disrespect and the fearlessness of one Hermione Granger; he was pissed that he couldn’t have her. He couldn’t deny that she had grown into a beautiful and very smart young woman who possessed the kind of confidence many guys dreamt about in a lover.

Not that he ever doubted his ability to take her if he really wanted to; he had plenty of lessons in dealing with the opposite sex. In the tradition of a few of the oldest pure-blooded wizarding families, his father had hired courtesans for Draco to play with since his fourteenth birthday, making him more sexually experienced and knowledgeable than even some of his Hogwarts professors.

No, he literally couldn’t have her without jeopardizing his status at the school, endangering his family, and turning his back on every value he had been taught.

It was the same reason he resented the whole business with the Dark Lord. As far as Draco was concerned, any situation where he couldn’t assert control was a load of rubbish. He liked having his way. His remark to Granger was more of an effort to rile her up than an actual wish; he was not particularly pleased with the return of the Dark Lord, especially since his family seemed to be indebted to servitude to the maniac. Whatever his father had preached, it still didn’t make sense to Draco that a group of powerful pure-blooded wizards had to bow to one man in order to retain their natural right to control the wizarding world. As far as Draco was concerned, you either serve or you rule, and he never fancied himself as the serving type. But he couldn’t say any of that, it was not in his power, he had no control over the matter.

And so, like the business with the Dark Lord, he also hated Granger for pointing out the limits of his ability to do what he wanted to do.

To hell with that Mudblood bitch.

He strode through the Slytherin common room, wearing a frown that warned the younger students to scurry out of his way as the older ones watched him warily for a potentially dangerous outburst. He rolled his eyes at their nervousness.

What a bunch of poufs.

Crabbe and Goyle strolled over to greet him, and he waved them off dismissively. He had felt Pansy watching him moments before she began to walk cautiously towards him. It was not her usual approach. She usually greeted Draco in the common room with wildly exaggerated fanfare. He knew that she loved the attention she got from the other Slytherin girls when she would drape her arms around his neck. Draco found it quite sad that Pansy needed to depend on being at his beck and call to gain the envy of other girls. Without him, she was rather plain. She knew it, he knew it, and so did everyone else. Still, it felt good to be worshipped, and to have the proof of it always presenting itself so shamelessly, especially on days like this.

“Draco, you look like you’ve had an absolutely dreadful day. Is there anything I can do to brighten it a bit?” she cooed and smiled suggestively.

He wanted to break something… or someone. He actually had someone in particular in mind, but she
wasn’t available. She would never be available to him. And with that thought, he ground his teeth and looked down at Pansy with a rigid smirk.

“Go sit on my bed and wait for me.”

Pansy beamed, she had never been invited into Draco’s bed without prompting on her part, and it was definitely never said so openly in front of the others.

“Oh, darling.”

She turned around proudly with a smug smile, giving a condescending glance to a group of girls glaring at her in jealousy from the couch. She swished her hips seductively as she began to walk toward the boys’ dormitory steps.

“Oh, and Pansy…”

“Yes, Draco?” she purred as she turned around expectedly.

“My cane is on the top middle shelf of my wardrobe, make sure you’re starkers and holding it in your teeth when I get up there.”

There was a low smattering of ‘ooos’ coming from the boys, and snickers and gasps from the girls. Pansy’s smile dropped and her body visibly tensed as if waiting for a blow right then and there. Draco only used the cane when he was in the mood to cause real pain, and there was never a guarantee of pleasure to follow it up when he was in such a state of mind.

He watched her with curious bemusement.

“Is there a problem?” he asked casually.

Shaking her head slowly and casting her eyes to the floor, Pansy turned back on her heel and ran quickly up the stairs to wait for him.

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Pulling back the curtain around Ron’s bed, Hermione let out a small gasp. Not because she was surprised at seeing Harry lying on Ron’s chest in his bed, but because they were doing it in the middle of the day when anyone could have walked in. She tried to close her mouth as Ron yawned opening his eyes. He met her surprised expression with a smirk even as he moved his hand up to stroke the top of Harry’s head.

“Oi, don’t just stand there, Hermione, pull the damn curtain back, you trying to advertise?”

“No, but apparently you two are; what are you playing at, being so obvious like this is your private room or something?”

Harry smiled despite having his eyes closed, and then blinked a few times adjusting to the light, trying to get his bad eyes to focus in spite of the fact his glasses were sitting on Ron’s dresser.

“It’s all right, Hermione, my scar was really burning earlier today in Advanced Transfiguration, and McGonagall excused me and Ron from class. Anyway, there’s a trick alarm at the door. It’s set to alert us of coming intruders at about fifty meters.”

“Yea, well, it didn’t work did it? I got past,” Hermione snapped.

“Actually it did, but since we knew it was you, we didn’t bother to move.”
“No way! It tells you who’s coming?”

“Yea, another brilliant Fred and George contraption: not only does it tell you who’s coming, but it gives a rather blunt description, too.”

“Yea? And what did it say about me?” Hermione asked, folding her arms over her chest.

Harry raised his head from Ron’s chest to look up at the redhead. They locked eyes and then burst out laughing.

Hermione scowled at Ron.

He tried to his best to look serious, but it wasn’t working, so he decided on another approach.

“Hmmm… c’mon here; we missed you.”

“No, what did the damn thing say about me?”

Ron rolled his eyes. “Does it matter? Come here… hey, have you been crying?”

Hermione looked down at the floor, suddenly forgetting her anger at their little inside joke and remembering the reason why she had come to see Ron.

“So where’s everyone?” she asked as she looked around the room, trying to clear her eyes before looking up at him again.

“Hagrid invited the lot of them to see a Banshee he caught in at the edge of the Forest last night.”

Harry opened his eyes fully then. “Yea and they’re really rare in these parts.”

“A Banshee? Those are Dark creatures like Dementors. What was it doing so close to the school?” Hermione asked more to herself than to the boys.

Ron looked down at Harry as if he may know the answer, but Harry only shrugged.

Hermione frowned and slide inside the curtain, closing it behind her as she climbed onto Harry’s back, straddling him, and then leaned forward placing her hands on his shoulders.

Rubbing his shoulders in firm gentle circles, she ground herself into him playfully.

“Mmm,” Harry hummed.

“So, Harry, how long did the burning last this time?” she asked.

“Well, it—”

“Hey don’t try to change the subject; why were you crying?” Ron’s stare was always demanding when he wanted information. Hermione squirmed on top of Harry.

“Mmm… gods,” Harry moaned.

“Oh, that’s right, you were waiting for your test score in Divination today. What’s the matter then? You got an ‘E’ instead of an ‘O’?”

“For your information, I got an ‘O’ in Divination,” Hermione said with smug satisfaction.

“Figures… so what is it then?”
Hermione looked down and shook her head.

“Was it that tosspot Malfoy again?”

When Hermione didn’t answer him and went back with renewed concentration on massaging Harry’s back, Ron groaned, “I swear I’m gonna kill ‘im one day. What did he do to you? You alright?”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Yes, Ron, I’m fine. He was just being his usual charming self and I let him get to me; I’m fine really.”

“Hmmm, oh… Hermione, why do you let him… mmm, get to you? Right there, yes, yes.”

Ron looked down at the boy moaning against him and shifted uncomfortably, feeling himself beginning to become aroused. “Harry, you’re such a slag… it can’t be that good.”

Harry chuckled and looked up Ron and then back at his lap with a smirk.

“Looks like it’s good for you, too.”

“Actually, it’s not.”

“No? I know what is, though.” He placed both hands firmly on the bed on each side of Ron’s hips, rising up so that Hermione was sitting on him as if he were a pony.

“Whoa, there, boy,” she warned as she tried to balance her weight so she wouldn’t fall.

Harry kissed Ron briefly, smiling at him mischievously. In one quick motion, he turned and flipped Hermione onto her back against Ron’s chest. Ron moved up to a sitting position, pulling Hermione between his legs to sit against him as if he were a pillow, and then reached down to pull her robe over her head, discarding it next to the bed.

“Hey, guys, I didn’t come up here to—”

His hands swept over her hair, pulling it to the side so that he could run his tongue along her neck. That was Hermione’s weak spot, and she stopped her futile protest mid-sentence and bit her lip to soften the moan that escaped her lips.

Harry climbed back onto the bed, positioning himself in between Ron and Hermione’s legs, and made quick work of undoing Hermione’s shirt. He lowered his head to kiss down to the center of her cleavage, running his tongue over the exposed mounds of flesh being pushed up by her bra. With one hand steadying himself on the bed, he took his free hand and ran it under her skirt, placing his hand under her thigh inching ever closer toward her arse.

Unconsciously, Hermione began to spread her legs wider, giving him room as she pushed back, rubbing her arse firmly against Ron’s hardening cock.

Ron moved his hands behind Hermione and began to work on undoing her bra clasp.

Harry looked up when he saw the straps begin to fall and then slid down so that he could pull it down her arms, throwing the offending garment to the side.

“Thanks, mate,” Harry said appreciatively.

“No problem.” Ron grinned as he began to squeeze her breasts. He held one firmly and offered it to
Harry, who took it into his mouth, sucking it gently, teasing the nipple with his tongue even as he slipped his hand into her knickers. She was very wet, as always, and he slid his index finger along her heated folds.

Hermione squirmed then, and reached her hand around to pull Ron to her mouth even as she pushed herself up as if begging Harry to work his fingers in her.

She moaned into Ron’s mouth as Harry began to work his way down, nibbling and licking, pulling her knickers down as he went, before sliding them completely off. When he reached her mound, he ran his hand over it, stroking it playfully before looking up at her.

“I don’t know why you insist on hiding such a pretty pussy behind all of this,” he teased as he motioned at the cluster of soft brown curls.

Ron had pulled back from their kiss and was now concentrating with new intense interest on playing with her tits, squeezing and caressing them.

Hermione looked down at Harry, slightly annoyed.

“I already told you, I don’t want to do any spells in that area that may end up causing damage, and I definitely don’t like the idea of putting a razor down there…”

“Hmm, well maybe one day it won’t be an option, we’ll just have to hold you down and do it for you,” he said, looking at her with a weird smile, and the glint of something dark in his eyes.

For a few seconds, there was a heavy silence in the air. Ron raised his eyebrows and looked fixedly at Harry as if he had said something really taboo and then looked quickly down at Hermione, waiting for her reaction.

Hermione felt her breath quicken and she gulped, not sure if she should act offended, dismissive or show her excitement at the suggestion. Before she could decide, Harry had pushed two fingers and had started planting kisses along her inner thigh.

“Ahhhh!”

Hermione writhed and pushed back against Ron and then back up against Harry’s fingers, trying to fuck herself on them. Ron swore under his breath, annoyed that he hadn’t taken the time to take his boxers off. Not wanting to break the flow of things, he resigned himself to helping Hermione get off as quickly as possible so that he could take care of his own growing need soon after.

Sliding his hands down Hermione’s arms, and pulling up her hands so that his hands clasped over hers, he guided their hands over her breasts and then traced her stomach. Hermione smiled. It felt good for Ron’s hands to be intertwined with her own as they both touched her body.

“Need some help, Harry?” he breathed as he broke one of his hands free from Hermione’s and slid it down to her entrance where Harry’s fingers were buried. Harry pulled out one finger giving Ron room to slide two of his own fingers into her. Hermione began to grind herself determinedly against both of their fingers.

Harry’s face was just inches from her center, watching with keen interest as Hermione pushed against them. He could smell her, and the scent was intoxicating; he wanted more.

“Looks good enough to eat,” he murmured as he flicked his tongue out playfully against her clit.

“Then get to it,” Ron suggested as he withdrew his fingers and spread them out against Hermione’s
folds, holding her wide open, giving Harry better access.

Harry didn’t know if he could get any harder, but he did at the sight of Ron holding Hermione’s open for him. He licked along Ron’s fingers up to the knuckle and then back down to his fingertips before slipping past the opening Ron’s fingers offered, plunging his tongue deep into Hermione.

Hermione gasped and began to grasp at Ron’s arm, raking her nails down as her hips rose up to take in more of Harry’s tongue.

“Mmm, yes… yes. Don’t stop, please, Harry, oh.”

And Harry didn’t, not until she came in his mouth, moaning with great relief, grinding herself against his tongue with her legs wrapped around his head, one hand clutching his hair, the other hand holding onto Ron as if her life depended on it.

When she finally released his head from the grip of her legs and hand, Harry rose slowly, grinning proudly.

“Wanna taste, Ron?”

“You know I do.”

Harry moved up and hovered over Hermione so that he could meet Ron’s mouth, Ron licked Harry’s lips clean, enjoying the taste of Hermione on Harry’s mouth before fully plunging his tongue in for a passionate kiss. Harry shifted to a more comfortable position, pushing Ron and Hermione back further. Falling on top of Hermione so he could get further into Ron’s mouth, he began to grind his length against her stomach, pushing her into Ron harder.

“Hmmpff… ca- brea—”

Harry looked down at Hermione, not understanding what she was saying. Hermione pushed Harry up and inhaled deeply.

“I said I can’t breathe,” she gasped.

“Oh, sorry about that.”

They all giggled as Hermione pushed Harry completely off her and began to rise.

Out of nowhere, a bright, red light snapped in the air over Ron’s bed, causing Hermione to shriek. A squeaky voice begin squawk, “Irish Wanker fifty meters”…… “Irish Wanker forty-eight meters.”

Harry and Ron groaned, “Seamus!”

“Diffinio,” murmured Ron, putting an end to the warning alarm as Harry hopped off the bed, quickly walking toward his own while Hermione rushed to put on her clothes.

By the time Seamus came through the door, Ron and Hermione were sitting across from each other casually on Ron’s bed, Ron strategically covering his slowly softening erection. Harry was on his own bed, laying face down, rubbing his scar quite convincingly.

“Eh, what are you guys up to?” Seamus asked. Not really looking at them, but looking toward his wardrobe as if he didn’t have much time to talk.

“Well,” they all replied simultaneously and then smiled at each other, shaking their heads at the
obviousness of the situation that only they seemed to see.

“Um, yea all right then, just came back to get me family’s warding charm. Banshees seem to like Irish blokes; this one thinks it knows me or something. You know it actually said my name. I gotta tell my dad. It was getting a little too close there for sec, you know I—”

“We were just leaving anyway,” Ron said hurriedly. “Let’s go, guys.”

They all muttered their goodbyes and walked out onto the school grounds toward their usual spot by the lake. They didn’t notice or feel the watchful stare of distant eyes upon them.
You let me violate you,
You let me desecrate you
You let me penetrate you,
You let me complicate you…
… My whole existence is flawed
You get me closer to God

“Closer” by Nine Inch Nails

Lily had continued to see Severus when she wasn’t spending time with James. James still didn’t know the full story about their relationship. She had doubted James would have touched her if he had known that most of things they enjoyed together sexually, she had learned while experimenting with Severus. As for Severus, he had seemed resigned to sharing her with James, although begrudgingly.

But it had become much harder to find time to get away to see Severus, because James’s friends always kept a close, watchful eye upon him in hopes of catching him alone to taunt him. They had all disliked Lily’s friendship with Severus but had not dared to say anything against him in her presence out of respect and fear of the guilt trip she would lay on them.

It had been causing strain on her relationships with both James and Severus, because their time with her was much more limited and supervised at school. Sneaking away to be with Severus took careful consideration and planning, and the subterfuge was wearing her out. She felt anxious but sure that the time for decisions about choosing between the two would soon arrive if she were unsuccessful in convincing James to consider Severus for her fantasy of being shared.

The first time Lily had suggested that they try having someone else join them for sex, she really had been joking. But the subconscious works in powerful ways, and before she knew it, she and James were discussing potential partners they could ask to join them. She hadn’t known that he would take making it a reality so seriously. He had seemed almost obsessed with the topic once it had been broached. He had, of course, considered the pros and cons of including his friends Sirius, Remus, and Peter.

The idea of Peter being a partner had been quickly dismissed, primarily because Lily had seemed particularly turned off at the thought of having sex with him. James also hadn’t thought that he could handle it, not that he wanted to share Lily with Peter anyway; he had never totally felt comfortable around the boy. Peter always had seemed all too eager to please James and Sirius, sometimes acting more like a groupie than an actual friend.

Lily had been really worried about who it would be, if they would be able to keep it a secret, and how it may affect her relationship with both James and Severus. She had also been concerned about the consequences of others finding out and what it could mean that her boyfriend was so eager to make it happen.

“What’s in it for you?” she had asked softly while studying him one night as they sat on the deck of the Astronomy Tower, looking at the stars.

“What do you mean? I like pleasing you; it’s what you want right?” he had replied a bit nervously.
“Yea, but there’s got to be more to it than that. You seem really excited about the idea, almost too excited…”

“What? You can get off on it but I can’t?” he had answered a bit defensively.

“That’s not what I’m saying.”

“Well, what are you saying? You’re starting to make me feel guilty about it, like I’m some sort of pervert or something.” His voice had risen, and he had grown visibly tense.

“Well, first of all, you are a pervert… and so am I,” she had offered with a smile, trying to calm him down a bit.

He had watched her carefully, waiting for her to finish.

“Second of all, I’m not trying to make you feel guilty, James, it’s just that… I don’t know…” she had drifted off, trying to figure out what exactly it was she wanted to know.

“What, Lily? Say it.”

She had sighed. “Do you love me?”

“Of course I do. What kind of question is that?” He had studied her for a moment and then it was as if a light bulb had flashed in his head.

“Oh, I see, you think because I’m interested in sharing you, I think you’re some sort of slag or toy… is that it?”

Lily had looked up to his eyes, searching them for any hint of the brand of charming manipulation he used when he was trying to get out of trouble. Instead his eyes had been full of tenderness and sad incredulity.

“Lily, I love you. I’ve loved you longer than you’ve even known. There’s not a day that goes by that I don’t feel lucky that you even considered me, let alone let me call myself your boyfriend. Anything I do, I do it to make you happy,” he had said as he stroked her cheek, staring into her eyes.

“I see the look in your eyes when I, when we, act out the things you fantasize about. I’d do anything to keep that look on your face. But please understand that as soon as this stops being fun for you, then it stops completely. I’m not going to lie to you, I really, really enjoy everything we do… but your happiness comes before anything. Okay?”

It was the first of many similar conversations. Lily’s doubts about living out this particular fantasy would resurface and she would question James again and again.

When she had expressed these fears, he would make it clear in all of his actions and words that he loved her dearly and simply wanted to fulfill her fantasies and his own, by exploring this new arrangement. And so, finally, she had agreed.

Once she had decided she was really going to go through with it, James had asked her for her top picks, and she had casually suggested Severus. She had made a convincing case, pointing out that she had known him for years, she trusted him, and that he had kept a low profile, thus guaranteeing less public scrutiny or the possibility of gossip. Lily had been convinced that Severus was a natural fit for both of them, if only James could just see what she saw.

“It also helps that he has a somewhat unconventional nature; I’m sure he’d be an interesting partner.”
“Are you serious?” James had laughed for a few minutes at that. When it had looked like Lily wasn’t sharing the joke, he had begun to cough and shake his head.

“Um, NO! I’m not sharing you with that overgrown bat. He doesn’t even look like he washes. Besides, I don’t trust him.”

“You don’t even really know him,” Lily had offered in defense.

“That’s right, and I’d like to keep it that way,” he had replied firmly, putting an end to that particular topic, but not the end of the discussion.

“Now, let’s talk about real possibilities shall we?” he started.

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Sirius had had plenty of sexual experience, and in fact had quite a reputation throughout not only Gryffindor, but Hufflepuff and Slytherin as well. He didn’t particularly like the Ravenclaw girls, perhaps because they had bored him with mind games and conversation when he was more intent on physical matters.

When James approached him about joining him and Lily in a threesome, he had thought that perhaps it was James’s way of testing him to see if he could trust him to be around Lily despite his notorious reputation. When he had realized it was a serious request, even he had been shocked at his hesitation to agree.

It had sounded great in theory, but when it came down to it, it was serious business sleeping with your best mate’s girlfriend, especially since his girlfriend was also a close friend. What would happen if it didn’t go well? How would it affect his relationship with James and Lily? He didn’t want to lose their friendship; they were all he had since his family had practically disowned him for rejecting their values about blood purity.

He had wanted to make sure everyone was on the same page and that their friendship would be intact, no matter how the affair turned out. And so, after much consideration, he had asked James if they all could go and talk about it.

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“What about Sirius,” James offered one day in a manner that sounded as if it had been rehearsed several times.

Lily had rolled her eyes at his failed attempt to sound spontaneous.

“He’s like our brother, James. I’m not sure I can even picture kissing him. Besides, he fucks everyone… I don’t want this getting out.”

“Well, first of all, he’s not our brother; we’re not that kinky, love.”

She had smiled at that. James had been pleased that she was at least comfortable enough to smile about it; it was a good sign.

“Secondly, he really doesn’t kiss and tell; it’s not his fault that girls gossip about their exploits with him. Third, as you pointed out, he has experience, which may be good, considering what we’re into; we don’t want the person freaking out on us. We can think about the third person later once we see how this goes.”
She still had looked slightly uncertain but nodded.

“I’ve already spoken with him,” he had blurted out, bracing himself for her scorn.

She had merely raised her eyebrows and shook her head at him as if his eagerness was both pitiful and cute.

“You know, he’s not so sure about going through with it, either.”

“Really?”

James had nodded. That had made Lily feel better, like she wasn’t being totally mental about the gravity of the proposal.

“So, um, how ’bout we all meet up somewhere and talk about it?” he had offered.

Lily had shrugged and then seemed to think a moment about it before nodding. James had felt relief then and put his arm around her as they continued to walk back up to the school.

And they had all talked, and Sirius and Lily threw out at least a dozen worst-case scenarios, all to which James had a reply and solution. After a few hours, their comfort with the idea had grown, and they all had agreed to give it try.

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They were in the upper parlor of the Shrieking Shack. James and Sirius knew this place well, but Lily had never been there and was surprised to hear it wasn’t actually inhabited by evil spirits. It had taken some convincing to get her to come at all. Only after they revealed to her the nature of Remus’ condition, and how they had been using the shack and the rumors to conceal his difference, did she relax enough to come along.

Sirius was extremely aroused just by the nature of the situation. Here was his best mate and his beautiful girlfriend, who was his own friend, and they were starkers on the floor with him and it was okay. His cock remained rock hard from the moment they disrobed.

Lily crawled over to James, kissing his feet and working her mouth up his legs until she reached his balls, licking them, giving her tongue’s full attention to each one before moving over his shaft to run her tongue to the head.

She swirled her tongue around the head, and took it into her mouth, holding it there, looking up at James as if waiting for him to give her permission.

James pulled his cock away from her mouth and stepped back a little.

“Do you think you deserve it?” he asked snidely, looking down at her.

Sirius mouth dropped and his eyebrows went up. That was so not the James he knew when it came to Lily, at least not the James he knew who followed her around like a lovesick puppy dog. And somehow that made it hotter.

Lily nodded.

“Hmm, I don’t know…”

“Please,” she whispered.
James smirked then, gripping her hair tightly as he pushed her mouth onto his cock.

Throwing his head back, he moaned, “That’s it Lily, suck me good,” as he twisted his hands through her hair, pulling her mouth onto him while he pushed his hips forward.

Lily tried not to gag as the head continued to hit the back of her throat. She had been practicing on Severus, trying to take it deep in her throat, but it never failed, her gag reflex was strong. Still James was pleased with her effort to try, and it excited him more that she wanted to please him so much that she persisted in her efforts to try.

Sirius didn’t know what to do, but he knew a great opportunity was right in front of him, and he didn’t want to waste one minute of it. He watched her for a few more moments and then hesitantly asked in a voice more timid than his usual brash tone, “Has she ever taken it in the arse before?”

James had lowered his head and opened his eyes to give Sirius a look that said “of course, look who you’re dealing with.”

Sirius had laughed at that, “Oh yea, right, well then that’ll make it that much easier for me then.” As he dropped to his knees behind Lily, he reached down to dip his fingers into her wet core. He slid them deep into her and brought them out to use her wetness as a lubricant to prepare her arsehole for penetration.

“It might take a bit more than that, mate,” James suggested.

“Yea? You got something?”

“Got a spell.”

“No shit? They have spells to lube your arse up? What kind of freaky books you guys been reading?” Sirius asked looking at him like he was seeing James for the first time.

James smiled at him and whispered “Umorio,” pointing his wand at Lily’s backside, causing her to moan as she felt her arsehole become slick with a warm substance that began to run down her legs.

“Now, you do realize that I’m a bit bigger than you, right?”

James rolled his eyes. “Which head are you referring to exactly?”

Sirius smiled as he placed both hands on Lily’s arse, spreading her cheeks apart and pushing the head of his cock at the opening of her puckered hole.

Lily felt herself tense up. Sirius was indeed thicker than James, and she and James did not have frequent anal sex, he preferred her other orifices much more.

“Relax, Lily, I’m not going to hurt you, well not any more than you want me to,” he said with a smile in his voice he began to circle his finger around her arse, easing in the tip slowly to prepare her.

She relaxed at little at that and began to chuckle over James’s cock, trying to show that she was going to try to relax.

Sirius’ finger sliding in her slowly was beginning to feel really good, and she began to squirm against the intrusion, her body begging for more. Lily had been so distracted by the preparation and anticipation of Sirius at her backside that she had stopped sucking.

Lily chuckling on his cock instead of sucking it wasn’t what James had in mind. He had told Sirius
that Lily enjoyed rough sex and a little dirty talk, but he hadn’t really gone into detail about the particular nature of their sex life.

And so he had decided that now was as good time as any for him to find out the true nature of what they did together, especially since Lily wasn’t being particularly obedient, and Sirius was making the whole encounter a bit too humorous for his own tastes.

He removed his cock from her mouth with a ‘popping’ sound and smacked it across her face hard.

“Did I tell you to stop sucking, cunt?”

Lily seemed slightly taken aback, in one moment the mood between the three seemed to change from a little naughty fun to the more serious understanding she and James shared.

“No… sir,” she said apprehensively, even though she felt herself grow wetter, loving the hard edge had she heard in his voice.

“So, you think because there’s a new cock in the room that you can start ignoring mine?”

“No, I—”

She was cut off by his hand closing over her throat; that was Lily’s favorite, and James always knew how to use it to put her in the headspace he needed to get what he wanted.

“Shut the fuck up,” he rasped, tightening his grip slowly over her throat as he had pulled her up to a standing position, holding her there, regarding her intensely.

Sirius had sat down, and was watching them in awed fascination. He had waited for one of them to break into a fit of laughter or turn and tell him that they were just having a little fun at his expense.

But that didn’t happen.

Instead, what he saw was his best mate, a playful and rebellious chap, but still a decent fellow, transform into a rather intimidating and slightly dangerous looking man who was regarding the woman he loved with a look that held no promise of romance or reassurance. It was unreal.

Lily had begun to tremble; no matter how many times her air supply was restricted, it had never failed to both scare and arouse her.

“Don’t worry, love, I’m going to do exactly what you think I’m going to do,” he whispered in her ear, creating a fresh wave of goose bumps on her neck.

Sirius wanted to ask, “And what the bloody hell is that exactly?” but thought better of it. The mood had definitely changed, and his usual quips somehow seemed inappropriate, and so he remained silent and glued to his position on the floor, watching them.

Letting go of her throat, he murmured, “Compesio” and pointed his wand at the ceiling.

A long, heavy iron chain descended from the ceiling. Attached to it was a huge silver hook, adorned with a pair of silver cuffs.

James stared at Lily, waiting patiently. Trembling, she slowly lifted her arms to meet the cuffs, and, at that, he offered a small smile.

“Good girl. Padfoot, come over here,” he instructed as he put each of her wrists in a cuff, closing it tightly and pulling her forearms, testing the way her skin moved within them to make sure they
wouldn’t cause her undue chaffing or bruising.

Sirius stood up slowly and walked around to Lily’s front to stand beside James. He had been quietly contemplating whether his friend had gone mental and what he would do if this wasn’t what Lily wanted. His doubts were quickly put to rest when he looked at her. Lily was gone. Her eyes had a blank vacancy in them that reminded him of the Muggle dolls he’d seen in London storefront windows. Her body was visibly trembling, her nipples were hardened little pebbles, and the most obvious evidence of her arousal was running down her thigh.

James then turned to him and looked at him plainly as if beginning a school lesson.

“You see, Lily here sometimes forgets her place, and she needs reminding from time to time.”

“Oh, I see,” Sirius replied, crossing his arms across his chest, trying to look casual, composed, hiding his nervousness about what was about to happen.

“And this is how we remind her,” he said turning back to face Lily.

“Lily, why don’t you tell Sirius where your place is.”

Lily appeared to be struggling for coherent thought, shaking slightly, and drawing up a blank, she reached for the first answer that came into her head.

“On… on my knees?”

James clicked his tongue a few times. “Wrong answer, love.”

“Silencio,” he said with weariness, taking away her ability to protest or scream.

“Um… don’t you need to hear her in case you go too far?” Sirius asked hesitantly.

“We have safe words, yes, but we also have safe gestures, don’t we, Lily? Our safe word is Filch.”

Sirius laughed at that. “Of course, that’ll sober anyone up.”

“Lily, show him our safe gesture for when you’re not gagged.”

Lily blew air in her cheeks, making them swell up in an exaggerated manner that made her look like a chipmunk.

Sirius snickered.

James ran his hand over her hair, letting it slide down trailing her back and then rubbing her arse tenderly.

“Now, where were we? Since you don’t seem to remember your place, how to act, or what to say, I guess we’ll just have to go over that again.

“Here,” James said as he threw something gold and flashy towards Sirius. Sirius caught it and looked at it. There were two clamps joined by a golden chain. The clamps were molded in the shape of snarled claws; they looked like miniature golden bat claws.

Sirius stared at them for a few moments, before James cleared his throat.

“Put them on her.”
Sirius raised his eyebrows at that.

“Oh, go on… better to do them both at the same time, less hassle.”

Sirius stared at the claws and then back at Lily a few times. Her body was visibly tense in anticipation. He gripped the handle of both the left and right claw, spreading them apart until they lined up to her nipples. Studying her face, Sirius winced as he closed them over her nipples and let go.

Lily’s mouth opened to yell but no sound left her mouth.

“Lily’s a bit dramatic. Do ignore her,” he said as he had pulled the chain hanging from the claws, which stretched out and bit into her nipples, causing Lily to roll her eyes in the back of her head.

James had seemed satisfied with that and walked over to the bureau to pick up a wooden paddle that Sirius somehow failed to notice before. It was long, rectangular, and padded on one side. James turned the unpadded side towards Lily’s arse and had began a series of rapid smacks. With each smack, the chain jingled, pulling on the claws on her nipples. He would pause occasionally to rub her arse and whisper things in her ear before resuming.

Lily gasped silently with a look caught between pain and ecstasy. Every inch of her body felt alert, her skin tingled, and she felt the moistness sliding down her thighs. At the same time, her awareness of self had been heightened, she also felt herself beginning to disconnect, slipping into a mental space that seemed to block out all sense of the outside world. Her concentration focused on every little thing James said and did. Severus had called it subspace, and she had been certain that if there was a such thing as heaven, it had to feel like this.

“Wow,” Sirius said under his breath as he ran his hands through his hair. He was disturbed, watching James taking the paddle to Lily’s backside even as tears spilled from her eyes. He was disturbed but also the most aroused he had ever been in his life, and that was really saying something.

He got closer to Lily, watching her face. She was crying but she was also visibly panting as if she was really getting off on it. He slipped his fingers into her wetness and had began to finger her while he used his other hand to hold her head up so that he could kiss her. He was shocked to find how aroused the paddling was making her, and she begin to squirm on his fingers, trying to push herself closer to climax. But before she could, James had stopped paddling her, and with that, Sirius had removed his fingers and waited to see what he would do next.

James took the padded side and rubbed it over her arse tenderly, kissing her shoulder.

“I think she remembers now,” he said looking at Sirius, cuing him to take the clamps off.

Sirius carefully removed each clamp, causing Lily to scream in silence as the blood rushed to her nipples.

With that, James moved around to face her, kissing her cheek, and rubbing her nipples with soft soothing caresses. After a few minutes had passed, he pulled back and looked at her lovingly before ending the Silencing Charm.

“Now, Lily, where’s your place, love?”

“Wherever you want it to be, sir.”

James smiled and stroked her hair. “That’s my girl. Now, you were doing something before that unfortunate slipup. Let’s get back to it shall we?” he said sweetly while he started to remove the cuffs
from her hands, allowing her to sink back onto her knees into her previous position.

And so it began. Over the next several months, the three spent more time with each other, sexually and as friends. Sirius had grown more comfortable with the two, experimenting and exploring his own fantasies, and after some time, committing to being with only them.

And eventually, Lily had fallen in love with Sirius.

As her love grew for James and Sirius, so did her guilt and inner conflict about her relationship with Severus and how the two treated him. The more time she had spent with all three, the more she had become convinced that she belonged with all three; being with each of them had seemed so natural. She had considered herself both lucky and cursed that she had found three loves of a lifetime in the same time and place, and two of them hated the other. If only James and Sirius would put the past behind them and try to get to know Severus, she was certain they could come to accept him.

She had decided that soon there would need to be a very frank discussion, but soon became later, and later never came.
Lessons

I think about all the education that I missed,
But then my homework was never quite like this…
… I heard about your lessons, but lessons are so cold,
I don’t know about this school.

-“Hot for Teacher” by Van Halen

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“Does that git ever shut up?” Ron whined as they walked to the far side of the Black lake to a patch of pebble-covered beach.

They had often come to this spot to get away from the watchful eyes of other students and professors; little did they know they were always being watched, even now.

“He was only trying to make small talk, honestly. Both of you need to learn how to do a better job at trying to keep up appearances. We can’t isolate ourselves too much, or it’ll start to become really obvious,” Hermione explained.

“Yeah, well, it’s not exactly fun making small talk when you’ve got a semi is it? Seems like we’re always getting interrupted, and I’m usually the one stuck with blue balls,” he complained.

“Exaggerating a bit, are we? I’d like to think you get more than your fair share,” Harry said smirking as they found a spot they liked and began to settle.

“I’m just saying, it’d be nice to have our own dormitories or something,” he mumbled with a frown, looking out across the lake.

“Yeah, right, you don’t even get that at home,” Harry teased as he inched closer to the redhead, giving him a jab with his elbow. Ron gave a small smile at that.

“Honestly, Ron, you should be used to it by now; have we ever had enough time alone for all of us to get off?” Hermione reasoned.

“You seem to manage just fine,” Ron said looking sideways at her with an edge of resentment in his voice.

Hermione didn’t say anything, but she felt the jab and tension coming off him.

Harry looked at Ron and reached up to tenderly run his hand through the red locks of hair. “You know, if you’re that frustrated, mate, I can always take care of it for you,” he whispered in his ear.

Ron smiled back at Harry, focusing his eyes intensely on the boy before turning his head to brush his lips against Harry’s ear to whisper, “Oh yeah, and how would you do that?”

“Why don’t you let me show you?” Harry breathed in his ear.

Hermione rolled her eyes, and exhaled rather loudly.

Harry began to kiss Ron’s neck, running his hand along the redhead’s jaw line gently. Ron moaned softly, turning his body into Harry’s.
Hermione cleared her throat and adjusted herself so that her legs were slightly parted, causing her skirt to rise up suggestively. She flipped her hair rather dramatically, revealing her neck as she brought her left hand up to run through her hair, while eyeing the two boys.

Neither of them looked at her though as their kissing became deeper, sending off waves of passion which seemed to hit her like slaps in the face.

It wasn’t that she minded watching them; in fact, she’d once enjoyed masturbating to climax while watching them achieve theirs. But this was different. Ron was purposefully ignoring her, and she couldn’t tell if it was because he was miffed about not getting off or if it was because he felt he couldn’t ask her to help him to do that. But what was painfully apparent was that this sort of treatment was becoming more frequent after she had gotten off, or at least once they had thought she had gotten off. In truth, her orgasms were becoming increasingly less satisfying, and the exclusionary exchanges between Harry and Ron afterwards usually killed whatever orgasmic bliss she’d had.

Harry began to unzip Ron’s trousers and reached into his boxers, bringing his cock out as he mimicked what he was about to do by sucking on Ron’s tongue. Ron groaned against Harry’s lips just as Harry broke the kiss and began working his mouth down Harry’s neck.

She watched them in silence, her annoyance and the pain of them not noticing her grew. Hermione folded her arms over her chest and studied the two, trying to hold back the tears creeping into her eyes.

Gripping Ron’s cock firmly, Harry began to stroke his hand over it back and forth as Ron let his head fall back and sighed with great relief before lying back fully on the pebbled sand.

“That’s just great, you’re going get dirt in your hair,” Hermione warned.

Ron looked at Harry giving the statement a dismissive smile and eye roll while Harry smiled down at the boy continuing his ministrations.

Sensing Hermione’s ire rising, Harry glanced up at her. “Are you just going to sit there and watch?” he asked invitingly with a small smile.

No! She wanted to respond. She didn’t want to watch, but she didn’t want to move, either. She wanted to scream, but throwing a tantrum would only make her look like a spoiled brat, considering they had just pleasured her only moments before, and neither one of them had gotten off. This was not the time for her to vent, and she knew that if she interrupted the mood, they both would resent her for some time.

She stood up and looked down at Ron who had his eyes squeezed shut. She didn’t want to kiss the git right now; she really didn’t even want to look at him. She smirked, pulled her knickers off and straddled down over Ron’s face, rubbing herself forcefully over his nose and mouth, causing him to gasp and choke a bit as he tried to get adjusted. Harry snickered before lowering his mouth onto Ron’s cock.

Hermione watched as Harry took a good share of Ron’s entire length into his mouth, sucking as he moved his mouth up and down in fluid motion. She wiggled over Ron’s tongue, finding that the scene in front of her was quickly dissolving her anger and making her very aroused. Ron raised his hands up to grip both sides of Hermione’s arse, spreading her cheeks as he moved her forcibly over his tongue even as he pushed his hips up in an effort to fuck Harry’s mouth.

Hermione’s grinding on Ron’s face became insistent as she began to ride his tongue. He found himself becoming more aroused at that, and forgetting himself, he reached back with one hand that
had been gripping her hip to slap her arse hard before resuming his grip. It wasn’t until the slap hit their ears that he realised what he had done and paused, Harry’s eyes shot up to examine Hermione. She let out a loud gasp, and then a low moan as she begin to squirm and rock back and forth on Ron’s tongue with a renewed sense of arousal. She looked down and saw Harry watching her as he continued to suck. When it became obvious that Hermione was aroused and not angry about the smack, Harry resumed his concentration on Ron’s cock, closing his eyes, and taking in more of Ron.

Hermione examined what Harry was doing as he seemed now to have most of Ron in his mouth. She moved down to lean over Ron’s body, putting her elbows in the sand so that she could get up close to Harry’s face to take a closer look.

Harry continued to suck and tease Ron’s cock, so engrossed in what he was doing that he was oblivious to Hermione’s studious gaze, only inches from his face. His eyes went wide when he finally opened them to see her watching him. He stared back at her intensely as if trying to figure out what the hell she was doing.

Slightly shaking with arousal and anxiety at how he may react, she moved in closer.

“You do it so well… can you teach me?” she whispered as she licked her lips.

Ron’s mouth remained on Hermione, but he had stopped licking, his nails dug into her arse as his body tensed in anticipation.

Harry flinched slightly and narrowed his eyes at her, as if the thought of her sucking on Ron’s cock was the crudest suggestion. Hermione pursed her lips, beginning to feel her frustration rising again when Harry suddenly gave her a cock stuffed smirk. Moving up so that only the head was between his lips, he drew it out of his mouth and moved his mouth to the right side as if to give Hermione room. He then grabbed the base of Ron’s cock and began to slowly slide his tongue up the side of the shaft, his eyes fixed on Hermione. Hermione wasn’t sure if it was an offer but she moved in closer, keeping her eyes upon Harry’s and began to mimic what he had just done by moving her tongue slowly from the base of Ron’s cock to the tip where Harry’s lips were puckered and waiting for her. He raised his lips over the head just enough to give her a kiss and then winked at her.

“Merlin… you guys are trying to kill me,” Ron groaned.

Hermione let out a muffled giggle, sending vibrations over the head of Ron’s cock, causing him to moan. Harry gave her another smirk and then moved his mouth over Ron’s head, sliding his tongue over it, as he sucked it gently into his mouth. Then he opened his mouth obscenely to demonstrate to Hermione what he was doing with his tongue before pushing the head towards her to try.

Hermione licked the head playfully, and then closed her mouth over it while continuing to swirl her tongue the way Harry had just done, and then looked up at him to see if he approved. Ron moaned his agreement with the gesture, but Harry wasn’t smirking in response this time; he was surveying her closely as if in deep thought, the dark glint he held earlier in Ron’s bed back in his eyes.

She paused, suddenly, becoming self-conscious and began to raise her head to stop sucking.

“Gods, please don’t stop,” Ron whimpered.

Harry moved up into a sitting position. He gripped the hair at the back of Hermione’s head and began to push her face lower, then pulling her head back up until it nearly left Ron’s cock. He repeated the same motion, forcing her to devour him.

Hermione felt her body shiver as Harry’s hand pushed her mouth over Ron’s cock. She knew that
there were other ways he could have shown her how to do this, that it wasn’t necessary for him to use force to guide her mouth up and down onto Ron’s cock. It felt very controlling and a bit degrading, and she couldn’t explain why it felt that way, but it was turning her on more than anything she had ever done.

Ron began to push his hips up to meet her mouth when Harry would push down, creating a familiar rhythm. Ron had completely stopped lapping at her centre and was focused intently on coming now. Harry began to speed up the pace of Hermione’s head movements, forcing her to concentrate on her breathing. Each time she made a move to slow down or move off of Ron’s cock for air, Harry’s hand forced her head back down. She looked back up at Harry and saw that he seemed very focused and excited by what he was doing, biting his lip as his breathing became audibly rapid. Harry’s apparent arousal seemed to make what she was doing even more important and she felt herself becoming wetter. She began to squirm over Ron’s face again.

Ron began to grunt into Hermione’s core as he ground his hips harder against her mouth, the pressure of his orgasm beginning to build.

Harry loosened his grip on Hermione’s head but didn’t remove his hand from the back of her head, while Hermione kept the pace that had been set for her, working her mouth fast and steady over Ron’s cock. When Harry bent back down to slide his tongue over Ron’s balls, Ron tensed and groaned loudly into Hermione’s pussy as his climax washed over him. He continued to pump his hips as he came into her mouth while Harry continued to tongue-bathe his balls. Hermione had anticipated Ron’s climax, feeling him go rigid, but hadn’t expected the salty, bitter taste, or the amount, and began to cough as she tried to swallow like she had seen Harry do so many times.

“You okay?” Harry asked, pulling back and moving his hand from her head down to pat her back in concern.

Gulping down the remaining residue in her mouth, Hermione licked her lips and then gave one long lick to Ron’s cock before kissing along the length.

“Hmm-mmmm,” she hummed, pressing her lips against Ron’s softening erection.

Harry continued to watch her strangely as she continued until Ron cried out, “That’s enough, stop, please don’t, stop touching me.”

Smiling in satisfaction, Hermione sat up over Ron’s face and gave one last wiggle, and then stood up looking down at him.

Ron looked up at her with an expression of awe and curiosity.

“I’m sorry, Hermione, got a bit carried away,” Harry apologised, looking flustered and embarrassed.

“It’s all right Harry. I actually kind of liked it. I wouldn’t mind doing it again,” Hermione said softly.

“Yeah?” Harry asked cocking his head to the side. He was studying her again.

“Yeah.” Hermione nodded slowly.

“Hell yeah!” Ron blurted out looking back between the both of them.

Harry and Hermione both laughed as Ron smiled goofily back at them.

“We’d better get back up to the school; I have no idea how long we’ve been down here.”
Harry groaned while Ron rolled his eyes as he began to sit up, pulling his trousers up and moving toward the water before cupping his hands into it to splash onto his face.

“You know, Ronald, there are cleaning spells you could use that are a lot quicker and less messy,” Hermione said in her usual instructive tone.

He turned and smiled at her. “Yeah, but then I wouldn’t be able to smell you on my face for the rest of the day, would I?”

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Draco shut and locked the door to the boys’ dormitory room as if it were his own, and moved toward his bed. He and Pansy played this game often, and his dorm mates knew when to make themselves scarce. Despite the fact that the room was empty, they had an invisible audience that was unknown to either one of them.

Pansy was sitting on Draco’s bed as instructed, completely naked, clenching his hand-crafted black cane with a silver plated dragon head between her teeth. A fair amount of drool had run down her chin, along her pert breasts and belly and had collected in her lap by the time he finally arrived. His angry scowl was gone now, and he face was the same cool, controlled expression he usually wore as he pulled his robe over his head and began to unbutton his shirt.

“Do you know why you’re holding my cane between your teeth, Pansy?”

Pansy had learned that it was best to be as demure as possible when Draco decided to use the cane and shook her head softly instead of shrugging and rolling her eyes the way she really wanted to.

He walked over to her as he began to undo one of his cuffs, looking down at her with the same impassive expression.

When he undid the other cuff, he pulled his shirt off, revealing his slender, pale chest, his muscles lean but apparent. He took his hand and brought her chin up to stare into her eyes more closely.

“Well then, I suppose a few lessons are in order. First, I’m going to teach you not to drool all over my property and yourself like a stupid troll who has no control over her bodily functions.” He sneered as he snatched the cane from her mouth. She inhaled sharply and wiped her mouth as she swallowed to get control over herself again. “And then, you’re going learn a lesson about when and how to approach me when we’re in the company of others. Where are your knickers?”

Pansy looked around the room quickly and pointed.

“Go get them.”

She stood up tentatively and then walked to the side of the bed to retrieve them before holding them out to him. He stared at her before rolling his eyes.

“I don’t want them; put them in your mouth.”

Pansy looked down at her knickers, and began to slowly push them into her mouth.

“Crotch first,” he said as if daring her to protest.

She pulled them out of her mouth, turned them inside out and began to push them crotch first into her mouth as much as they would go in until only a little bit of material was visible.
“You know the position. Face down, arse up.”

Pansy climbed onto the bed shakily in a kneeling position before falling over to clutch the pillows, spreading her legs and raising her arse high in the air. Draco ran the cane over her back as if soothing a pet before turning the dragon head of the cane toward her arse and running it down over the entrance.

Pansy tensed. He wouldn’t…

Draco smirked at her evident fear, and the insane idea of him forcing such an object up her arse without any lube. What kind of sicko did she think he was? He snickered.

“Don’t worry, bitch. I’m not that cruel.”

Her body relaxed at that, and she exhaled to which Draco responded by swinging the cane back against her arse in one swift, hard movement.

Pansy’s whole body flinched in response as she screamed out, the sound muffled by the knickers in her mouth.

“But I can be a bastard sometimes, eh?” he chuckled as he brought the cane down again, this time against the back of her thighs.

She howled and made to move away from him.

“Don’t you dare move,” he warned.

She stilled and waited for the next blow. It didn’t come then. He took his hand and rubbed along the areas that he had hit as if trying to soothe them before pulling back his hand to smack the tender flesh there.

“That’s for drooling. Don’t ever let me see you do that shit again unless my cock is in your mouth. It’s most unattractive. Understand?” he asked as he hit her arse again, this time in the same place, causing her to yelp around her gag as she nodded quickly.

“Now, on to our next lesson,” he said, as he walked slowly around the bed, rock hard with arousal from the visible tension her body was showing as it awaited another strike.

In all his encounters with other women, Draco never felt the same excitement or even urge to cause pain as he did with Pansy. While he did find himself occasionally fantasising about hurting some of his conquests, it wasn’t a frequent occurrence and it hardly ever presented itself when a female was actually at his disposal. He did, however, have a need to be the one in control, and he found that dominating a willing woman was a definite turn on for him. What he didn’t understand was why it turned him on so much to cause Pansy pain. When he first discovered that hurting her made him hard, he was somewhat troubled and conflicted.

But that didn’t last long when he discovered how far she was willing to go to please him. He even offered her the use of safe words and gestures, with the knowledge that they ensured that when she was in her submissive role she was in no danger and was enjoying the act, but Pansy didn’t want safe words. She seemed committed to riding out whatever he dealt out. Whether she actually got off during the experience or not, she never shied away from taking it. And so, he had resigned to the fact that perhaps it was because she was so willing to take it, and that he enjoyed giving it; either way, he had stopped trying to figure it out.

“Pansy, do you think that you’re my girlfriend?” he asked, pausing and waiting for her to respond.
Pansy clenched her teeth around her knickers, a flush of embarrassment creeping into her face as she shook her head slowly.

“That’s right,” he affirmed as he brought the cane down on her arse again, this time in a different spot.

“Do you want to be?” he asked, waiting again for her response.

This time she nodded emphatically and pushed her arse out more as if asking for a strike.

He snorted. “Then,” he said as he proceeded to crack the cane over her arse and thighs several times as he spoke, “you’ll learn to not approach me in public as if I were already your boyfriend.”

The cane came down against her thighs twice in rapid succession.

“If I want to see you, fuck you, or use that nasty little mouth of yours, I’ll let you know,” he said as he struck the left side of her arse.

“Otherwise, stay the fuck out of my way, especially when I’m in a bad mood. Do you understand?” he asked as he delivered a particularly harsh blow to the opposite side of her arse.

Pansy was visibly shaking and crying, her whimpers and screams becoming fainter around her flimsy gag as she buried her face into the pillow she was gripping tightly. Draco stopped and walked around her after his last strike, coolly regarding her and the red angry welts his cane had left all over her arse and thighs. He moved to the head of the bed where and grabbed her roughly by her hair, pulling her head back. He yanked the knickers out of her mouth, and pushed his crotch squarely into her face as he leaned over to whisper in her ear.

“Now, apologise for being such a presumptuous and desperate little slag.”

She moved up as if about to get into a kneeling position on the bed when he interrupted her.

“No hands.”

Pansy sank back down bringing her head up to meet his belt buckle as she started to undo it with her mouth while he looked down at her and watched.

There was tapping on the window, which was becoming more insistent the longer it was ignored. Draco huffed and let go of her hair, causing her to flop back against the pillow as he went to open the window. A regal, and rather old-looking, grey owl flew into the room with a familiar piece of parchment and seal over it. He sighed as soon as he recognised it, unhooking the note and breaking the seal to read it.

*Draco,*

*You need to come home. We have things to discuss. I’ve made arrangements for you to leave school for the weekend. Make sure you are packed and ready on Friday.*

*LM*

Draco rolled his eyes and mumbled under his breath, “What now?”
James and Sirius knew they were skating on thin ice as they ran through the hall toward their common room. They had already been caught twice that year by Filch, and one more infraction and they both could be facing something far more serious than his usual brand of punishment. McGonagall had threatened to not only deduct one hundred points from each of them but to sideline James from Quidditch for the rest of the year. And yet, here they were again, hiding under James’ Invisibility Cloak and running to make it to their beds way past curfew.

They were almost at the door when the best, and worst, voice they could hope to hear cleared his throat and said, “A little late to be out isn’t it.”

Looking at each other in wide-eyed shock, they both pulled the Cloak down and looked up the bemused face of the headmaster, Albus Dumbledore.

“Ah, y-yes, sir, we were just er…” James stammered trying to come up with a quick explanation.

“Ah, no need James; I’m sure you two have a perfectly sound explanation for why you would risk coming in past curfew for a third time this semester despite the possibility of not being able to play Quidditch and having two hundred points deducted from Gryffindor. I know that such a risk would only be made for the most honorable reason,” he said as he gave both youths a grave stare of concern.

“Yes, sir,” they both said in unison.

“Although, I understand there will be mistakes, you should take care that no one else has noticed your absence. I can’t excuse your infractions if it continues to occur frequently and becomes public knowledge.”

They both nodded their understanding.

“Very well, then, off to bed with both of you. Long day tomorrow, Gryffindor’s big match against Slytherin; I assume you’d want to be at your best,” he said, giving James his usual warm smile.

“Yes, sir!” James replied as he nodded his head thankfully.

They climbed the stairs to the common room, said the password, and turned to smile at the headmaster before the door closed again.
Albus Dumbledore was a great wizard, no doubt, but just a man. Sometimes people forgot that, and that was just fine by him. In his own view, it took quite a bit of humility and greatness to not be consumed by his own accomplishments. His résumé was quite impressive: once serving as the Head Of Gryffindor House, an accomplished former Transfiguration Professor, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Order of Merlin First Class, Supreme Mugwump, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, and acclaimed to be the most powerful wizard of his time. He knew he was more talented than most wizards, more capable, and widely known to the wisest in the wizarding community.

And although a few close friends had hinted that he may be a tad arrogant, biased in his favor of practices and people who favored his views, and slightly self-absorbed in his work and accomplishments, he generally disagreed. He believed himself to be a fair, equitable, and if he did say so himself, a very humble wizard. He was very aware of his role and responsibility to be a neutral supporter of all four Houses in his school, as well as the importance of maintaining the support of the alumnae and parents who provided valuable donations and patronage to the school. Dumbledore had perfected his role as a political diplomat, often mediating frequent disagreements between the school’s governors and donors who held onto strong House loyalties born out of age-old rivalries. Nowhere was the rivalry the strongest than between Gryffindor and Slytherin. As a former Gryffindor and Head of the Gryffindor House, he was quite careful not to reveal his loyalties; it was essential to earning the respect and trust that allowed him the freedom to run his school the way he saw fit.

He stood for a good while in contemplation outside the Gryffindor common room door rubbing his chin before moving on down the hall toward his own quarters.

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Peter Pettigrew stared out of his dormitory windows, trying to keep his eyes to any change in the texture or imprint in the ground below him, which would indicate the approach of James and Sirius hidden under James’ Invisibility Cloak. He had seen the use of it enough times to spot footprints in the muddy school grounds or a brief flash of feet or clothing when the two were running. He stared at the ground waiting, but felt his eyelids becoming heavy with sleep. He looked around the room at the empty beds of James and Sirius, and then his eyes finally rested on Remus who looked so content in his sleep.

Then it washed over him again: the loneliness.

He was lonelier now more than ever. It seemed that with each passing day his friends were excluding him from the group’s activities. Lately, he often found himself finding out about what they were up to from gossip more than firsthand experience, and even that didn’t tell him much.

He had done everything they wanted him to do. He had kept their secrets, had gotten them information, had risked getting in trouble whenever one of them wanted to play a prank, and he had even covered for Sirius, aiding him in getting notes whenever he skipped class to have a go with one of his many slags.

And what did he get for it? He had apparently gotten the boot over a Mudblood who was shagging the biggest and smelliest bat to ever be trained how to speak. Whenever Lily wasn’t with James and Sirius, she was with that Snape git. And in Peter’s opinion, it looked like a lot more than the friendship James thought it to be. It was amazing to him that James didn’t even suspect anything between them.

But Peter counted his knowledge of things like that as one of the few benefits of being the most unpopular member of the most popular clique. He had grown to be very observant of human
behavior; it was a survival tactic that kept him useful to his friends, as well as vigilant against making
any error that may cause his removal from the group. That was his biggest fear: that James, Sirius,
and Remus would see how awkward and lonely he was, how grateful he was to be in their company,
and begin to distance themselves from him.

But that was happening anyway. Something was going on, and apparently Lily Evans was good
enough to be included in on it, but he wasn’t. A Mudblood bitch was replacing him!

He heard the door open to the common room and quickly jumped in bed to feign sleep. When James
and Sirius got into the room, they were snickering and talking in hushed voices.

“Peter… Peter!” Sirius whispered.

Peter acted as if he were starting to stir out of a deep slumber; he opened his eyes a little, trying to
look slightly startled.

“Peter, listen, did anyone ask about us tonight? Where we were?”

Peter yawned and shook his head.

“You sure?”

“Er… yeah. Why? Where were you guys?” he asked, trying to sound mildly interested.

“Never you mind that, mate; we’ll tell you later. Look, I really need the notes for Ancient Runes, a
group of us are meeting to study tomorrow, and I missed class today. Can I borrow yours?”

“Oh, yeah, sure thing.” Peter nodded his head and smiled.

Sirius smiled back and gave him a wink before turning around to jump into his bed, pulling his
curtain shut.

Peter gritted his teeth and stared at that curtain for a long time before finally falling to sleep.

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Meanwhile, elsewhere in the castle that same night…

Lily had been running; she was late; she was supposed to meet Severus at eleven o’clock in the
lowest part of the dungeons. Sirius and James had been particularly insatiable that evening, and
James had grown suspicious of her peculiarly tight schedule. She knew he suspected something. She
had known it wouldn’t be long before he would investigate her whereabouts, but for now, he seemed
to trust her enough to let her go without further questions or following her.

“You’re late,” he hissed, walking around her slowly, eyes roaming over her disapprovingly.

“I’m sorry, got held up,” she said still trying to catch her breath.

“By Potter, no doubt,” he said in a disgusted tone.

She didn’t answer; she just bit her lip nervously, expecting some sort of punishment in retribution for
not only being late, but letting James be the reason for delaying her arrival.

Severus slapped her full in the face. Lily gasped; he had never done that before. Even more alarming,
and somewhat troubling, to her was the wetness she felt between her legs as a result. She faltered
against the brick wall, looking wide-eyed at him, trying to measure if she was in real danger.
“You think you can continue to disrespect me? Treat me like I’m the back-up plan when you’re done playing with your little boyfriend?” he questioned in a disturbingly soft voice.

“No, no, Severus. I’m sorry; I didn’t mean to keep you waiting.”

“Of course you didn’t, but that doesn’t matter, does it? You’ll have to ask my forgiveness nonetheless.”

Lily kept her eyes upon him, watching and waiting for the worst.

“Strip,” he ordered.

Lily quickly pulled her robe over her head, revealing a thin, black lace bra barely covering her pink nipples. She wore no underwear, and her smooth clean-shaven pussy was framed by black garters securing black thigh-high stockings that were ripped in places.

“Was this for him or me?” he snarled.

“For you,” she replied, barely audible, unable to meet his gaze.

This time when the slap hit her, it sent her back against the wall. She gripped the solid barrier trying to brace herself for yet another one, but it never came. When she had recovered and opened her eyes again, she saw him regarding her with a cold, distant glare.

“Do you think I’m naïve, Lily?”

She shook her head to reassure him, but he continued as if he didn’t even care if she answered.

“Or…” he laughed to himself as if in private thought. “Or perhaps you think I’m so enamored by you that I don’t see that you’re playing both of us?”

Lily shook her head fiercely. “Severus…”

And with that, he was at her throat within a second, pushing her further into the wall.

“What did you just call me?”

“Master…” she offered apologetically.

His nose inches from hers, he mockingly laughed in her face.

“You think I don’t know that you call him that as well? I can smell his come on your breath. You really are a whore,” he whispered in her ear before he pulled her back off the wall and turned her around, pushing her face first back into it. Lily could taste blood in her mouth, and she was truly scared. No matter what they did together, Severus would never mention James, and he had never treated her like this in anger.

Wrapping her hair around his hand tightly with one hand, he took his foot, kicking her legs apart, obscenely displaying her against the wall, her hands pressed against the stone support in an effort to keep her balance.

She could hear him undoing his pants with his other hand, and waited, wondering how he would take her.

He ran his long shaft against her arsehole, sliding it along it forcibly as if threatening to take it without any lubrication, and she tensed, fearing that he would. But then he slid his rigid cock to her
wet entrance and thrust completely inside of her, pulling her back onto him fully with each forceful thrust.

“How do you think it makes me feel, knowing that everything I’ve shown you, you run back and do with him?” he grunted as he slid almost completely out of her before pushing himself back in again with the same force.

Pulling her hair back, and gripping her hips firmly, he began to fuck her hard, his voice frighteningly steady as he spoke, “I show you just how you need to be fucked and you go and teach him. Hmm?”

“I-I’m sorry,” she whimpered.

“Every time I show you how you need to be treated, crawling and begging for cock like the whore you are, you go back, and ask him for the same, so you can enjoy it again and again.”

Lily began to moan loudly as her climax approached; she pushed back onto him, trying to show him how good she could make him feel, hoping that it would put his fears to rest. But Severus was more annoyed than anything. She was getting off again tonight, and once again he was not the first, but the last. He pulled out of her and turned her around, pushing her to the floor, squeezing her cheeks, forcing her mouth open.

Stroking himself, he came, aiming at the opening her mouth offered and spattering a good amount on her chin.

Breathing heavily, he put himself back into his pants and looked at her soberly for what seemed like a very long time.

“I told you before, you can’t serve two Masters.”

Lily looked at him, not knowing what to say.

“I love you, Lily, but I can’t share you anymore. Not like this. You have to decide if you want me or if you want him. I won’t play second fiddle to anyone.”

He waited for a moment, and when Lily kept her eyes fixed on the dungeon floor in silence, he turned, preparing to leave, when she reached for the only thing she could think of to make the situation better.

“What if… what if he agreed to share me with you,” she called out.

He shook his head and smiled a sad smile. “If you can get that git to agree to that, I have no problem with it. But I highly doubt that will be an option. Either way, you need to make a decision soon.”

And with that he left quietly. Lily stayed fixed on the floor, unable to move, biting her lip and shaking with the knowledge that the moment she had been dreading all year had finally presented itself.

Her time was up and she had a decision to make. Severus had told her he loved her and given her an ultimatum, and Lily didn’t know what she would do. James had refused to share her with Severus even though Severus would consider sharing her openly. But if James wouldn’t allow it, Severus refused to share Lily undercover any longer, like some sort of dirty secret. He wanted everyone to know that she was his, publicly acknowledged for his place in Lily’s life.

When Lily finally snuck back into the Gryffindor common room far past curfew, sore, and physically and emotionally spent, she didn’t know that she would never have to make that decision. It had
already been made for her.
On the day I was born the nurses all gathered ‘round,
And they gazed in wide wonder at the joy they had found.
The head nurse spoke up and she said leave this one alone,
She could tell right away that I was bad to the bone.

-“Bad to the Bone” by George Thorogood

Peter Pettigrew finally found the strength to stand again. It had never failed that after a good wank, he would go weak at the knees and find himself in a deep slumber, no matter how inconvenient the time and place. He hadn’t come that hard since before he had become a Weasley pet over twelve years ago, but the sight of watching the Mudblood Granger, the infamous Harry Potter, and, his former owner, Ron Weasley having sex was just the trick to do it.

“These kids are just as freaky as James and his lot were,” he thought, shaking his head as he began to hurry along the path he had marked through the forest in order to find a place outside the school’s protective enchantments so that he would be able to Apparate. He was in no hurry to return to Malfoy Manor to report on what he had seen. There wasn’t much to report. They’d had knowledge that the trio was really a triad months ago, but Peter was anxious to discover anything of importance that would give him more favor with the Dark Lord, and felt, at least, that he was somewhat useful in his effort to keep an eye on the trio. For some reason, the Dark Lord had not only been interested in Harry as of late, but also in his Mudblood friend.

He hated that he had to walk. After so many years of remaining in his Animagus form as a rat, he still found walking awkward and felt self-conscious that his movements were too much like the loopy, drugged beggars he’d seen in the seedy sections of Diagon Alley. He also hated that his Lord had decided to set up headquarters at Malfoy Manor. The old familiar feelings of inferiority, inadequacy, and being the most unpopular and unattractive person in the “in” crowd never failed to resurface vigorously whenever Lucius Malfoy and his friends were near. The Dark Lord seemed to favor him despite all of Pettigrew’s efforts and unwavering loyalty. Whenever Lucius, Bellatrix, and even that shady git Snape were around, it was just as if he were back in school, disappearing into the background.

Once he got to the end of his path, instead of Disapparating, he decided he would take the long way back.

“Are you certain, my Lord,” Lucius asked, incredulity lacing his words. Had the Dark Lord really commanded him to tell his son to do such a thing?

“Did I stutter?” Voldemort hissed.

“No, of course not; I will see to it,” he bowed, backing away slowly before rising to turn, and take his leave.

“Lucius, I don’t want to take any chances he misunderstands the importance of his assignment; you will discuss this with him in my presence when he arrives this weekend.”

Lucius’ upper lip twitched as if he were trying to avoid showing his displeasure at the command.
“Of course, my Lord,” he said as he made long strides to the door before faltering and pausing as he brought his right hand up to his forehead as if trying to block an invasion.

Voldemort chuckled darkly. “Mind your thoughts Lucius,” he said in a chilled whisper.

“Yes, my Lord, forgive me,” Lucius stated nervously.

“If I ever discover that sentiment on your mind again, I’ll make sure Narcissa suffers for it, since pain obviously doesn’t scare you enough to prevent such insolence.”

Lucius nodded sharply and bowed once more before leaving.

Voldemort turned back toward the bay window, looking out over the garden to the forest.

It never got old; the feeling that he was surrounded by incompetence and insincerity was always present, despite the fact that it had been there since he was a child, since he had become conscious of his superiority over others. Fear seemed to be the only thing that his inferiors understood; it was what kept them in line. It had always been enough to get him what he wanted. He had grown into living, planning, and fighting in the midst of those who served him only out of fear and gave him praise for fear of what he could do to them.

He had no interest in their needs, feelings, or desires. He knew nothing of empathy, sympathy, trust, and least of all, love.

Love. It was the only sort of magic that remained intangible to him. He had no experience with it, no desire for it, and therefore no mastery of it. It remained his weakness. The pure and light magic of Lily Potter’s love was enough to protect the son that was prophesized to destroy him. It had reduced him at one time to mere shadow, forcing him to be reborn through agonizing patience and pain. He knew he had to prevent that sort of magic from ever getting so close to destroying him again.

And there was that other prophecy. He was sure of it, had heard whispers of it, just like the one that would come later.

This prophecy told of a Gryffindor Mudblood with the power to destroy him with another type of love, a darker love than the one that had almost killed him before. In all of his travels and explorations throughout the world to find the most powerful forms of magic, Voldemort had learned that magic was not dichotomous. There were not only simple categories of dark and light magic, but there were also shades of grey. Dark magic could be used toward achieving “good” just as much as light magic could be misused for evil.

He knew that the love this prophecy spoke of had to be mixed with something more carnal to make it darker; it was probably also meant to be mixed with a great deal of lust. And love and lust capable of evoking powerful magic was not the simple kind of passion born from a desire to just fuck someone; it had to rival the kind of passion evoked by a mother’s love of her child. That kind of love and lust was probably one that could only be summoned by multiple people.

Polyamory. It was an old and rare practice, but when it worked, it could produce a formidable magical power of its own.

Sensing another presence approaching, Voldemort turned around toward the door.

“You called, my Lord?” Snape bowed as he entered the room.

“Yes, Severus. Have you come any closer to finding out the full nature of the prophecy?”
“No, my Lord, we now have reason to believe that the prophecy was destroyed many years ago; none of our ministry insiders can locate it,” Severus answered, his face carefully trained into a mask of impassive neutrality.

Voldemort studied him for a long moment.

“Very well. So, we are at the same place we were when we learned of it. All we know is that it involves a Gryffindor Mudblood with perhaps more than one lover, which undoubtedly points to Miss Granger.”

Rabastan Lestrange who had been standing guard by the door snickered at that. “Just kill the little bitch before she can fuck the whole school. Problem solved.”

Snape sighed heavily. “You fool; group sex magic is not about people getting off. If the aim was just to have intercourse with as many people as possible, it would ruin the ritual, rendering it useless. It was formerly only practiced by only the most advanced wizards and witches,” he drawled in a condescending tone.

“Indeed, it is not magic to be entered into lightly. It’s serious business, a dedication of a select group of people to a specific goal,” Voldemort added, his head snapping back toward Snape as he walked closer to study him.

“I didn’t know you knew so much on the topic. Don’t stop now, Professor. Go on.”

Snape visibly tensed, and cast his eyes to the floor before quickly schooling his features. Lestrange watched the two closely as a covert dance began. It was obvious that the Dark Lord was surprised at Snape’s knowledge of the topic and wanted to know how much he knew, while Lestrange suspected that however briefly it had surfaced, Snape now regretted revealing his knowledge of the subject and was going to be carefully guarded in how he responded to any questions asked.

“Well, as my Lord probably already knows, magical synergy is multiplied when the wizards and witches using it fully offer their hearts, souls, and bodies. Therefore, when a group of wizards and witches who are romantically involved engage in sex together, they have the ability to work in tandem to produce a source of magic capable of unknown power.”

“Yes, yes, I know that Severus, but how does it work exactly?” the Dark Lord asked as he moved closer, keeping his eyes trained on Snape’s face.

The tension between the two was thick, but Snape seemed to have recovered and was holding up well under the Dark Lord’s scrutiny, remaining collected and neutral in his facial expression and tone.

Setting his jaw, he closed his eyes briefly and continued as he instructed.

“My Lord, I’m sure you know more than I about the subject,” Snape replied with false flattery.

“Are you disobeying an order?”

“My apologies, my Lord,” Snape said with a deferential bow. “It has been difficult to uncover information. I will continue to search.”

Voldemort inched closer so that their noses were almost touching, staring intently into Snape’s eyes.

“Yes, you must continue to do your research, and you will tell me if you find out anything else, won’t you?” he said in a chilled voice.
“Yes, of course, my Lord,” Snape responded bowing his head slightly while keeping his eyes on Voldemort.

They stood staring at each other for a great deal of time until, finally, Snape broke eye contact. Voldemort then turned around as he spoke.

“Severus, Lucius has already sent word to Draco to come home this weekend so we all can have a little chat.”

“Yes, my Lord. I already have some ideas about how I can assist him with his assignment.”

“Very good. Now, I suppose you have a class to teach?”

“Yes, my Lord,” Snape said, bowing and starting to turn to leave.

“And Severus…”

“Yes, my Lord?”

“Do give my best to the headmaster,” Voldemort said with a particularly nasty smile.

“Yes, my Lord, as always.”

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“Hermione, where have been?” Parvati squealed when she, Harry, and Ron walked into the Gryffindor common room right before dinner.

Harry and Ron kept moving towards the area by the fire where most of the boys were gathered.

“I couldn’t find Crookshanks; I think he may be off looking for rats or something. Have you seen him?” she asked trying to show sincere concern.

“No, but there’s something you need to see,” she said pulling Hermione toward the girls dormitory stairs.

“What?” Hermione asked.

“Come on, let’s go up; it’s on your bed,” she said excitedly, continuing to pull Hermione.

Hermione threw a puzzled glance over at Harry and Ron who both shrugged slightly before going back to catching up with everyone.

Hermione half ran up the stairs trying to keep pace with Parvati; Padma and Ginny ran after them.

On her bed sat a rectangular black velvet box with a note on top. She tore open the envelope, reading it quickly.

_I hope you keep this as close to your heart as you are to mine._

-A Secret Admirer

Hermione opened the box and let out a small gasp. It was a simple gold locket with faint stem-shaped
engravings encircling a small, brilliant ruby piercing the centre. On the back was a signature engraving with the name Lord Custos.

“Lord Custos, Merlin, Hermione someone really loves you. That’s worth more than a few Galleons. I hear he only custom designs jewellery for special clientele,” exclaimed Parvati.

“I didn’t even know he made jewellery,” Ginny murmured, stroking the face of the locket.

“Me neither,” chimed in Padma.

“Who’s Lord Custos?” Hermione asked, brows furrowed in annoyance at not knowing something the other witches obviously knew.

“Oh, he’s like only the most ingenious inventor. He designed everything from the Sneakoscope to invisible ink!”

“Oh, yeah, I remember that name, read it in A Wizard’s Anthropology a few years ago,” she lied.

“I wonder who it could be. There are only a few guys rich enough to be able to afford something like that,” Parvati pondered.

Hermione picked it up, put it on, and shuddered.

“You okay?” Ginny asked slightly concerned.

“Yeah, I think I’m just really hungry,” she said.

“Well, let’s go then, I hear they’re having shepherd’s pie tonight,” Padma said, licking her lips.

“You guys go on, I have to wash up a bit, and I’ll be right down,” she insisted.

“Waiting for Ron I suppose?” Ginny said, arching her eyebrows.

“Er, yeah,” Hermione said as she tried her best to smile shyly as if Ginny had embarrassed her.

“All right, then, see you in a bit,” replied Ginny with a grin.

Hermione smiled as they left and then went to the mirror to look at the locket to see how it looked around her neck. It was fairly inconspicuous, understated and very pretty. She smiled, rubbing it.

“So I have an admirer. Better not tell the boys, or maybe I will; it might make things a little interesting.” She smirked to herself.

As she showered, she thought about the afternoon and many questions that kept bugging her. Why did she enjoy Harry forcing her mouth down on Ron’s cock? And hadn’t she always had a secret longing for them to just… just take her? Did that mean she enjoyed being degraded, or was it being controlled, or perhaps both? Was she some sort of sex freak? Did Ron want to treat her like that as well? Did other people engage in this type of sexual behaviour? Was it some type of sexual disorder? She was more than baffled about her eager response to what had happened; she was disturbed. And there was only one thing she knew to do when she encountered anything that baffled or disturbed her.

As she dried off and put on fresh clothes, she made a mental note to go straight to the library after dinner to find out any and everything she could about the matter.
Marauders' Spoils Part I

And I was here to please, I'm even on knees
Makin' love to whoever I please…
...And then you came around,
Tried to tie me down, I was such a clown,
You had to have it your way, or no way at all.
Well I've had all I can take, I can't take it no more,
I'm gonna pack my bags and fly, bye bye...
So why don't you turn me loose, turn me loose,
I gotta do it my way, or no way at all.

“Turn Me Loose” by Loverboy

Remus was in deep thought. James had approached him about something that seemed extremely obscene, yet strangely appealing. James wanted Remus to join him, Lily, and, good gods, Sirius in the type of bedroom games he’d only seriously contemplated in fantasies. Over the past week, he had been watching all three with a silent scrutiny he had never given to anyone before. He hadn’t noticed anything different about Lily besides the fact that she appeared extremely busy and tired lately. If anything, his observations of her had confirmed that she truly had a rare disposition for empathy and kindness. He had sensed it in from her from the moment he had met her. He also felt she was good for James, balancing out his tendency to think himself better than others and show off. Definitely his better half.

James and Sirius had been somewhat distant lately, but he had just dismissed it as their usual tomfoolery, which Remus did not find particularly amusing. He especially did not enjoy their little pranks and jabs at unfortunate outcasts such as the Snape boy, who, while he found the other wizard a bit odd, had never done anything to Remus personally to warrant such attacks.

They were lucky Lily hadn’t caught them yet. Remus had a feeling that if she had known about their pranks, considering the depths of their relationship with her, that she would probably not be pleased. Their increasing animosity toward Snape was beginning to garner the attention of other Prefects, and that would only mean trouble.

What had taken him completely by surprise was the fact that Lily had been shagging both James and Sirius for almost the entire year, and he and Peter had suspected nothing. Then again, he didn’t really talk to Peter much; Peter pretty much did all of the talking, and he would listen sympathetically, especially when he would whine about James and Sirius. He sort of felt sorry for Peter, and being a little different himself, Remus knew that the boy just needed to feel like he belonged.

Remus enjoyed James and Sirius’ company, but he wasn’t sure if he was ready to entangle himself in their dark games. He knew it could quite possibly be the most intense experience of his life, but he still had his reservations. It seemed completely unnatural to him for Lily to want to be with more than one wizard, but he couldn’t deny the appeal of their offer. He knew he wasn’t in a position to judge others’ choices, due to his own affliction, so he promised James that he’d think about the offer. So, for nearly a month, Remus contemplated the answer he would give his friends.

James looked at the new toy he had received as an anonymous gift for his birthday only a few days
before. The detail and craftsmanship of the map was extraordinary. Hogwarts was such a huge castle with so many people, and yet it only showed people and places that were of interest to James whenever he viewed it, wherever they were. Bloody brilliant. It was probably the best birthday gift he had ever received, and he didn’t even know who to thank for it. He soon gave up trying to determine the identity of his benefactor; instead, he spent his time consumed with discovering the functions of the parchment and what secrets it would reveal to him.

It took him a while to figure out how to use it. It came with a temporary Summoning charm that gave him directions and allowed him to personalise the map to his liking. He had to make his own key by casting a Summoning and deactivation charm of his choosing for it to function properly. Being the prankster he prided himself to be, he naturally chose the informal Marauder slogan and sarcastic oath “I solemnly swear I am up to no good” to activate it and “Mischief managed” to deactivate it. The initial Summoning charm allowed him to mark the map however he liked, and he chose to label the map with the nicknames that he and his friends has chosen when they had become Animagi. This would also allow each of them access to the map as long as they used the proper Summoning charm.

James had already decided that it was time to include Remus in on their trysts and made plans to talk with Lily about it immediately, even though he had already been discussing it with Remus. At first James studied the map, merely seeking places for him, Lily, and Sirius to meet, and he was eager to uncover the hidden secrets of Hogwarts.

Then, he began to get curious and surveyed the map, engrossed in the goings on of the others in residence at the castle. As he glanced at the map, he found that a rarely used study room behind the room used for Charms class where Crabbe was apparently becoming very friendly with a rather unsavoury Hufflepuff and Muggle-born to boot, named Emma Knight—something that would have surely exposed him to ridicule from members of his House if it were ever discovered. He also noticed that Frank Longbottom was creating a great deal of friction with a rather cute Gryffindor named Alice—she, James thought, was a bit out of Frank’s league—in a room that James did not recognise and that was not clearly identified on the map. That was weird. James reckoned that the room depicted was the Room of Requirement or some other hidden secret he’d had yet to discover. He chuckled. He didn’t know that Longbottom had it in him, but he was strangely happy for him.

He began to wonder about other people who he wanted to confirm suspicions about. His eyes roamed to the Slytherin area and he saw Narcissa in Malfoy’s bed with Malfoy’s name almost squarely on top of hers. No surprise there. What did surprise him was that Lucius’s groupie, Snape, wasn’t sitting next to the bed jerking off and cheering him on. Seemed like something the wanker would do. Perhaps he was with his creepy cronies: Nott, Avery, and Mulciber. No, they were in the common room, so where was Snape?

At first, he thought it was a mistake, or perhaps he misread. The lower dungeons came into focus on the map and he saw Snape there, but he wasn’t alone. There was another name there. It was nearly hidden by Snape’s name because it appeared that it was under Snape’s name as if Snape was on top of the person much the same way Malfoy was on top of Narcissa. Then Snape moved slightly to the side and he saw the entire name: Lily Evans.

No.

He studied it again and noticed that Snape and Lily’s names were sliding back and forth against each other very rapidly.

James’s mouth dropped open as he clenched the edges of the map, almost piercing it with his fingers. After a few minutes, the shock began to wear off and his rage began to overshadow it, causing him to shake and grow very red in the face.
She had been busy lately. Lily’s schedule had become unusually tight over the past few months, and she always looked tired. She had said it was because she was taking extra courses to prepare for next year’s NEWTs, and tutoring first and second-years. She was supposed to be in a tutoring session now as a matter of fact, not with Snape in the dungeons. Busy, indeed.

How dare she suggest that he and the guys hold off on Snape, when she was sneaking off to shag him or doing gods know whatever else that overgrown bat liked to do to with a woman! He had actually started to suspect something may be going on and had been inclined to check Lily’s neck for bite marks after she spent a moment in his company. He still wasn’t convinced the creep wasn’t a vampire, day walker or not. But he hadn’t checked, and he hadn’t followed her because he had trusted her. And what did he get for it? She had lied and betrayed him.

He couldn’t just let her go, though; Lily was his. He loved her. The creep had probably manipulated her. Lily was always too trusting, too nice—she could never see people for their worst. He would be damned if he let that slimy arsehole take her away from him. He couldn’t lose to a wanker like that. He had to put an end to this, but first he had to find Sirius.

“Mischief managed.”

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_Later that night…_

It was past ten pm and there had been no word from James or Sirius, so Lily had gone to bed, tired from a long day of classes, studying, tutoring, and an aggressive shag session with Severus. He was still waiting for an answer. Their time together had been like a weight on her heart, and Severus had taken his frustration out on her again, fucking her into the floor and issuing another threat. Lily really didn’t know how much time she had left, but she knew she didn’t have an answer yet.

She was relieved that James and Sirius had not made plans to meet up with her tonight. She needed a break. Lately, her meetings with them had gotten more aggressive as well, more intense, and she didn’t try to pretend to not understand what was going on, she knew exactly what was on their minds. Her relationship with Snape was the bane of their existence. They already hated him enough, but the mere fact that she continued to consort with him, even after being warned against it, and even being punished occasionally for it, didn’t deter her from reaching out to him.

She fell into a deep dreamless sleep and was out for a while when she woke with a start. The golden coin she kept under her pillow glowed red hot, causing her pillow to become quite warm, making her skin hot. If it had been in her hand, it would have felt almost like a hot poker. Her boys were waiting.

She carefully rose from the bed, attempting not to wake her dorm mates as she headed to the bathroom. She changed quickly into her robes from her nightgown and slipped down the stairs from the common room to the portrait hole to head to the Quidditch pitch where they always met late at night.

When she arrived, it was a good while before she could see them. They were at the farthest part of the pitch, both leaning against one of the gates to the stands. She sighed in relief as she walked up to greet them and noticed immediately that James had been watching her the entire time as she walked towards them; his eyes were piercing in the dark. Sirius seemed to be studying the ground with his arms folded across his chest, and when he noticed her, he looked up with a grimace on his face.
“Hi, Lily,” he said as he looked her up and down with distaste.

“Hi,” she said tentatively, looking between them, trying to figure out what sort of mood they were in.

Silence.

“So… um, how was your day?” Sirius asked, staring at her hard.

That was an odd question, not the usual start to their evening activities, what was even more disconcerting was that James hadn’t said a thing to her… yet.

“Um, fine. I’ve been really busy. I can’t believe how much homework I have now, and I had two tutoring sessions today, so I’m pretty exhausted.”

“Yeah, it must be very exhausting, with your classes and all of the tutoring you do,” Sirius said in a mocking tone.

Lily narrowed her eyes, trying to figure out what was going on. There’s no way he could know. How would he know? This had to be about something else.

“Yeah, especially since you have to run from the library to the dungeons to get it all done,” James said, emphasising the word dungeons and looking pointedly at her.

“The dungeons? I…” Lily paused, closed her mouth, and swallowed.

Heavy silence.

“James…”

“You’re fucking him? Tell me you’re not fucking him, Lily!” he spat as he began walking towards her.

“No. I mean, yes. Please, just let me explain,” she said pleadingly.

“I think I’m going to hurl,” Sirius groaned moving his arms from his chest to his stomach as he closed his eyes.

“Did he force himself on you?” James asked as if hopeful that that was the case.

Lily sighed and whispered as she shook her head. “No.”

James laughed in a deranged high-pitched tone that sent an echo ringing out over the field.

“So, you willingly spread your legs for him?” he asked.

“I love him, James; I love all three of you!”

“Why? I don’t get it. Why would you want to let something that greasy and creepy touch you?” Sirius asked, shaking his head and narrowing his eyes as if trying to decipher a particularly hard Runes text.

“There’s no way… no fucking way… how long has this been going on, Lily?” James demanded, his face inches from hers.

“I-it doesn’t matter; what matters is that I love all of you; you’re all special to me.”
“How long?”

“How long?” she said breaking eye contact and looking down the pitch.

Sirius opened his mouth a few times but couldn’t find any words.

James pushed his hands over his forehead, holding his head as he begin to pace. He was laughing that strange humourless laugh again.

“You know what? It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t even matter, because it ends now. It ends right fucking now! You’re ours. You’re mine. First and foremost, you’re mine!”

Lily looked up with determination when he said that.

“You can’t tell me what to do, James. We’re not playing games right now. He loves me, and he’s always been there for me,” she said in the calmest voice she could manage.

“How can he love you? He hates what you are!” Sirius said, his voice rising in anger.

She shook her head. “No, he loves me.”

“Open your fucking eyes, Lily. Don’t you see who he hangs around? What he’s into? They hate your kind,” James said as he stopped pacing and stood in front of her.

“My kind?”

“Don’t act like you don’t know what we’re talking about,” James said with that crazy smile on his face again.

“No, say it. Say it!” Lily looked between the two of them daring them.

“C’mon, Lily, you know,” Sirius said in exasperation.

“We would never,” James finished.

“He doesn’t actually believe any of that crap about pure bloods and Muggles. He can’t. He’s shagging me, isn’t he? He only hangs around those… those creeps because they don’t judge him. In case you didn’t notice, he doesn’t have many friends, thanks to you and your lot! You make it really hard for him!”

“Oh, please. Stop defending him. People don’t like him because he’s weird,” James reasoned.

“Beyond weird, he’s a weird arsehole,” Sirius offered in support.

“That’s funny. All this time, I thought you two were the arseholes, picking on him all the time the way you do.”

James and Sirius glanced at each other with a hint of guilt on their faces.

“Look… I love him, and I can’t help who I love, so we’re just going to have to figure this thing out,” Lily continued.

“There’s nothing to fucking figure out! It’s either him or us,” James commanded.

“Oh, I see, so you don’t mind sharing me with anyone else but him?”
“Don’t even try that with me. We’ve talked about this so many times. You know I don’t think of you as some sort of toy.”

“That’s exactly what I am to you! You walk around this school like you own everything, including me!”

Lily looked at Sirius, who stared back at her with a bit of apprehension.

“Lily, we talked about this; it’s whatever you want. I’ve always asked you before we do anything,” James said, trying to soften his voice.

“Except for this! You said that you wanted to make sure that I was happy. Well he makes me happy, James! This is what I want: I want you; I want Sirius; and I want him!”

“No,” James said calmly as he continued to look at her steadily.

“What?”

“No, I won’t allow it. I forbid it. You are not even allowed to talk to him anymore, starting right now,” he stated firmly, as if that was the final word on the matter.

Now Lily was laughing.

“You don’t get it, do you?” she asked as she held her hands clasped to her mouth for a few moments before continuing, “This is my fault though, isn’t it? I let you think that you owned me. Well, James Potter, you don’t own me! No one owns me! I’ll fuck who I want, when I want, and there’s nothing you can say about it.”

“Is that right?” he asked challengingly.

“Yeah, that’s right.”

There was a long pause. Sirius was visibly rigid and watching the two with considerable trepidation. If James and Lily didn’t get on, then he knew he couldn’t continue to be with her, either.

He heard James let out a small sigh as he began to nod absently, “I see, huh, okay, then, well… I guess we’re done here then, Evans.”

She stared back at him for a moment, and then looked at Sirius who stared at the ground before nodding to herself.

“Yes, Potter, I guess we are,” she said before turning to look squarely at Sirius. “We’re done here.”

And with that, she turned around and began to walk away numbly.

“You’re free to fuck the whole lot of Slytherin now if you want!” James yelled after Lily as her walk broke into a run, tears streaming from her eyes.
I want you to notice when I’m not around,
You’re so fucking special, I wish I was special.
But I’m a creep, I’m a weirdo,
What the hell am I doin’ here?
I don’t belong here...

“Creep” by Radiohead

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Two weeks later...

Lily had decided it was best to avoid James, Sirius, and Severus. She treated them as strangers over the following two weeks, and despite her best efforts, James had tried to contact her several times through owl notes and messages from Remus. He wanted to “talk.” Whatever the hell that meant. She had refused every single attempt. Staying mad at James was easy, but ignoring Sirius and Remus was painful and served to fuel her anger with James. She wasn’t just mad at James for the argument they had had and him thinking that he owned her, because in truth, she wanted to be owned, but on her own terms.

But she was mad at James for making her more keenly aware of Severus’ activities of late. She now watched him closely, observing with whom he chose to associate and where his new interests lay. None of his recent activities seemed to be any good, though.

She had argued with Severus about his friends during their fifth year before the affair had begun, but he had somehow convinced her that their affair was just as trivial as the pranks that James and Sirius’ routinely played on students. She had never fully accepted his explanation, but realising there was nothing she could have done, she let it go. It was very clear now that the activities of Severus’ friends were much more than pranks, there was something more sinister taking place, and it was growing more apparent each day. She didn’t know how she had missed it before. Whether it was due to her love for Severus, or if the pressure and time constraints of trying to please three men had blinded her to the things going on around her, but now that she had more free time, she took notice.

Severus knew how insecure she was about being a Muggle-born at Hogwarts, and she had started to wonder how he could love her, truly love her, if he hung out with people who hated who she was,
and were even talking about purging “her kind” from the wizarding world. She had heard rumours that he was even one of them, but she refused to believe it, for now.

Still, she held reservations about confronting him about it, feeling that it would follow a more difficult conversation about what she really wanted. While she, James, and Sirius were no longer together, she felt hesitant to fully commit herself to Severus openly. Her lack of surety bothered her, and she began to wonder if the only reason she was attracted to the dark wizard was the secrecy that surrounded their relationship. Or that perhaps because she only seen Severus on a limited basis she never had to confront the questions about his beliefs and what kind of future they really had. She didn’t want to deal with it yet, and so she told herself that she would keep her distance from him, observing him from afar, until she could figure out what she really wanted.

As she tutored a second year Gryffindor at the lake’s edge on the lower lawn, Lily noticed that Severus was walking alone when she noticed James, Sirius, Peter, and Remus, who was following further behind.

[“All right, Snivellus?” said James] loudly as if alerting everyone around him that there was about to be a show.

Lily watched as [Severus turned around and dropped his bag as his hand disappeared in his robe searching for his wand.] She felt her breath catch as [he raised his wand in the air when James shouted, “Expelliarmus!”]

[Severus’ wand flew into the air and fell behind him, while Sirius stood there laughing.] The git. Lily felt frozen; she didn’t want to approach them. She had been avoiding all of them and she didn’t know how much worse she would make it if she intervened. She watched on, holding her breath.

[“Impedimenta!” James said, pointing his wand at Severus, who was then knocked off his feet halfway through a dive towards his fallen wand.]

[There was a small crowd gathering], and people turned around to watch; the lake edge was beginning to grow dense with onlookers who seemed to be there either to laugh at Severus or were curious about what would happen. Lily looked around to see if she could spot a prefect or even a professor, but none were around.

[Severus was on the ground now, panting and James and Sirius moved towards him with their wands raised.] Remus had taken a seat underneath the tree near them and had oddly opened a book.

James seemed to be enjoying himself, glancing around with a smirk on his face to see who was in the crowd, while Peter seemed the most excited, clapping in excitement. Only Remus appeared to passively disapprove, remaining transfixed on the book he held in his hand. Well, that simply wouldn’t be enough. Someone had to do something.

[“How’d the exam go, Snivelly?”] she heard [James] say.

[“I was watching him, his nose was touching the parchment,” said Sirius] with particular venom. [“There’ll be great grease marks all over it; they won’t be able to read a word.”]

[Many people in the crowd laughed], and Lily saw that [Severus was attempting to recover and get up, but it was obvious that the jinx was still affecting him, and he was struggling as if he were bound by invisible ropes.]

[“You - wait,”] she heard him choke out as he looked up at James with the most hateful expression she had ever seen cross his face. [“You - wait!”]
[“Wait for what?” said Sirius asked. “What’re you going to do, Snivelly, wipe your nose on us?”]

[Severus let out the most blood-curdling scream and then he was swearing and shouting out hexes rapidly but nothing came of it because he didn’t have his wand.]

She watched in growing horror as [James told him to wash his mouth out and then proceed to point his wand at him as he shouted, “Scourgify!”]

And then [there were pink soap bubbles running from Severus’s mouth, the froth covering his mouth and it was clear he was beginning to choke on it.] The sound and sight of Severus choking caused Lily to snap out of her paralysis and break into a brisk stride to reach them.

[“Leave him alone!”]

James and Sirius looked around, and [James] had the nerve to take his free hand and [tried to fix his damn hair] as if to make sure he was in top form.

[“All right, Evans?” James said] as he looked down at her with a question in his eyes, but not the question he had just asked.

Lily ignored that, instead returning his expression with a hateful glare.

[“I said leave him alone.”]

Feeling bold, knowing that James would never publicly admit to being bested by Severus, especially in matters of girls, she asked, [“What’s he done to you?”]

James paused, knowing his tongue was tied considering the onlookers, and narrowed his eyes at her before turning back around as if to address the crowd more than her.

[“Well, I’d say it’s more the fact that he exists, if you know what I mean…”]

[Many in the crowd laughed,] including Sirius and especially Peter. Lily gave them scornful glances and turned around to see that Remus still had his mug stuck in the book he was reading as if nothing were happening.

The crowd was now watching her to see what she would say to that. So he wanted to talk did he? He wanted to have an argument without having the argument. Well, she wasn’t going to disappoint him: two could play at that.

[“You think you’re funny,’ she said coldly. “But you’re just an arrogant, bullying toerag, Potter. Leave him alone.”]

James gave her a pointed look. Speaking slowly and deliberately he said with a sly smile, [“I will if you go out with me, Evans … go out with me and I’ll never lay a wand on old Snivelly again.”]

[“I wouldn’t go out with you if it was a choice between you and the giant squid,” said Lily] daring him to push her to say more.

James set his mouth as if to stop himself from speaking.

[“Bad luck, Prongs]… don’t worry, mate, she’ll come around soon,” [Sirius] whispered softly so that only James and Lily could hear before [turning around quickly to find that Severus had recovered,] soapsuds still running from his mouth.

[“OI!” Sirius shouted.]
It was too late, though. [Severus was pointing his wand right at James and then there was a flash of light and a deep gash appeared on the side of James’s face, spattering his robes with blood.] Lily screamed, this was getting out of hand, but before she finished screaming, James had already turned around and then [there was another flash of light. Severus was now hanging upside-down in the air, his robes falling over his head revealing a pair of greying underpants] Lily had never seen before.

[Lots of people cheered] around them while James, Sirius, and Peter laughed loudly. For a brief moment, Lily felt herself secretly applauding James for his response to Severus’s unnecessarily brutal hex, but then deciding quickly that James probably deserved it, she controlled the urge to smirk.

[“Let him down!”]

[“Certainly,” said James as he moved his wand up causing Severus to fall hard to the ground. Severus began to straighten himself out, jumping to his feet, wand in hand,] but Sirius had anticipated his move and was pointing his wand at him, [‘Petrificus Totalus’], causing Severus to fall over like a piece of heavy wood.

This had gone on much too long. [“Leave him alone!” Lily shouted as she pulled out her own wand ready to hex both of them.] She saw James roll his eyes at Sirius who was watching her carefully.

[“Ah, Evans, don’t make me hex you,” said James] with a hint of the tone he usually used for his sexual punishments.

Feeling the crowd now watching them in anticipation, she wanted the show to be over with, and take Severus with her somewhere where no one could taunt or bother him.

[“Take the curse off him, then!”]

She watched as [James sighed deeply before turning toward Severus and muttering the counter-curse.]

[“There you go,” he said, as Severus struggled to his feet. “You’re lucky Evans was here, Snivellus —”]

[“I don’t need help from filthy little Mudbloods like her!” Severus] said looking at both James and Lily with rage, his eyes finally settling on her with the same disgust she recognised the night he had made his ultimatum.

[Lily blinked.] James turned and looked at her, his eyes piercing hers as if saying “Told you.”

[“Fine,” she said breaking his eye contact before turning back to Severus and looking at him plainly. “I won’t bother in the future. And I’d wash your pants if I were you, Snivellus.”]

[“Apologise to Evans!” James yelled at Severus, keeping his wand pointed threateningly at him.]

[“I don’t want you to make him apologize,” Lily shouted, getting in his face, ‘you’re as bad as he is.’] She was furious that he was right and she was furious that she had trusted Severus. She was disgusted with both of them, and most of all, she was upset she couldn’t say what she was really thinking, because it seemed as if the whole school were watching them.

[“What?” yelped James. “I’d NEVER call you a - you-know-what!” he said, trying to save face Lily supposed.]

[“Messing up your hair because you think it looks cool to look like you’ve just got off your broomstick, showing off with that stupid Snitch, walking down corridors and hexing anyone who
annoyes you just because you can - I’m surprised your broomstick can get off the ground with that fat head on it. You make me SICK.”]

[She turned on her heel and hurried away.]

[“Evans!” James shouted after her. “Hey, EVANS!”]

But she didn’t look back.

[“What is it with her?” said James, trying and failing to look as though it was not important to him.]

[“Reading between the lines, I’d say she thinks you’re a bit conceited, mate,” said Sirius.]

[“Right,” James said], narrowing his eyes at Sirius as if to tell him to shut up before huffing. He was furious; this had just the opposite effect he was hoping for; although, he was secretly relieved that Severus had shown his true colours, even if it did temporarily hurt Lily.

[“Right then –“]

[There was another flash of light, and Severus was once again hanging upside-down in the air.

“Who wants to see me take off Snivelly’s pants?”]

“Oh, me, me,” Peter said as he clapped his hands again, giggling with glee as he looked around the crowd and then back at James.

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Later that evening…

Lily had been crying all afternoon, had holed herself up in her room. She couldn’t believe she had been so blind. There had been plenty of signs, and she had ignored them. She replayed the red flags repeatedly. Severus’ anger at his abusive Muggle father, his slips of the tongue in disdain about Muggles, and the numerous times over the years that he had stopped himself in mid-syllable from saying what Lily thought was the word Muggle. Now she wasn’t so sure; he could have been censoring himself from saying Mudblood in her company. What was worse was that she would never really know.

There were footsteps and someone cleared their throat. Lily looked up and Mary Macdonald was standing hesitantly before her.

“Um, that Slytherin boy is outside, he said he’ll sleep at the entrance unless you come out. I thought you should know,” she said before turning around and descending the stairs back to the common room.

Lily, who was in her dressing gown, sighed and thought about putting on her robe but decided that it would be a very brief conversation. She descended the girls’ stairs slowly walking to the entrance of the common room, not sure what to expect but knowing this may be the last time she said a word to Severus.

When she came out, Severus was standing there looking quite ill, his skin paler than usual, his eyes were bloodshot, and he was gripping the railing to the staircase as if he needed it to keep his balance. She felt her heart sink at the sight of him like that, and she stared at him for what seemed like several minutes before he finally spoke.
I’m sorry.

She wanted to tell him she was sorry, too, but she knew she had no reason to apologise. He had hurt her, said the one thing he knew would make her feel inferior and unworthy to be at Hogwarts. He, more than anyone, knew that, and still he had called her that, humiliating her in front of everyone. There weren’t enough apologies to fix it.

I’m not interested.

I’m sorry!

Save your breath. I only came out because Mary told me you were threatening to sleep here.

I was. I would have done. I never meant to call you a Mudblood, it just—

Slipped out? It’s too late. I’ve made excuses for you for years. None of my friends can understand why I even talk to you. You and your precious little Death Eater friends…

Severus’ eyes fell briefly before looking back up at Lily.

She shook her head. You see, you don’t even deny it! You don’t even deny that’s what you’re all aiming to be! You can’t wait to join You-Know-Who, can you?

Severus opened his mouth but then closed it when he couldn’t find anything to say.

I can’t pretend anymore.] You wanted me to make a choice. Well, [it seems you’ve already chosen your way], so I guess [I’ve chosen mine.

No—listen, I didn’t mean—

To call me a Mudblood? But you call everyone of my birth Mudblood, Severus. Why should I be any different?

He was searching for the right words to say but Lily was done with talking, and ran into the common room, thankful no one was there. Instead of retiring to her bedroom, where her roommates were probably hanging out, she decided to curl up on a cushy couch in a dark corner, hoping to avoid being questioned about the confrontation.

She turned over burying her face into the cushion, wishing it could swallow her whole, when she heard the common room door open and footsteps approaching.

Lily… Lily, she turned over, surprised to see Remus standing there. She was actually glad to see his gentle face.

Can I sit down? he asked looking at the small space next to her on the couch.

Lily nodded, trying to dry her eyes.

Lily, I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.

What did they tell you? she asked with wide eyes, worried about what James and Sirius had been saying about her.

Who?

Oh… never mind,” she said with a bit of relief.
“I know how much his friendship meant to you, and you’re just so… you’re just so nice. Too nice. You didn’t deserve to be called that.”

Lily was quiet, folding her legs to her chest before looking up at Remus.

“He didn’t deserve what he got, either.”

Remus sighed. “No, I suppose he didn’t.”

“And you didn’t stop them. You never do, Remus.”

“It’s not that simple with James and Sirius. You of all people should know that. I don’t know what do when they get like that.”

They sat in silent understanding for a few moments before Remus continued, “You have to know that James just does it to show off. Mostly for you.”

Lily laughed dismissively. “For me? He knows I hate it when he’s like that.”

“Well, not to impress you. James has had a crush on you since second year, and he’s always been jealous of your relationship with Severus.”

“That’s still no excuse to treat him like that.”

“No, but it’s a reason.”

“It’s not good enough.”

“He misses you.”

Lily rolled her eyes.

“You know he loves you,” Remus said looking at her, waiting for her response. She wouldn’t look at him, instead focusing a spot on the couch beside him.

“You’re so good for him; he’s a much better person when you’re around. I think even he knows that. He needs you, Lily.”

“Yeah, well, I’d like to hear him admit that,” Lily said as a small smile crept over her face.

Remus sighed. “I think he wants to tell you that, but you’ve been avoiding him for weeks now.”

“And I want an apology, too,” she added.

“So, are you telling me to send him a message or something?”

She looked at him and raised her chin up, “Yeah, you tell him I’m ready to hear his apology.”

Remus chuckled. “All right. I’ll do that.”

Lily grabbed his hand and squeezed it. “Thank you, Remus.”

He leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. “Anything for you.”

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It was hours later, when everyone was asleep, that Lily woke to someone slipping beside her in her
bed. She awoke, eyes wide and startled, a hand gently covering her mouth, when she noticed the mess of wild black hair and a familiar set of hazel eyes.

He let his hand fall and began to stroke her cheek. She slapped it away.

“What are you doing in here?” she whispered, her voice dripping disdain.

“Remus said you wanted to see me.”

“That’s not what I said!”

James blushed and glanced down before meeting her eyes again. “He said you were willing to see me so I can explain myself and apologise.”

“That’s more like it, then,” Lily said staring at him as if waiting for him to get on with it.

“Lily, I’m sorry. I love you; I’ve been miserable for the past few weeks. But you hurt me.”

“You were being an ass.”

“You cheated!”

“Yes, and I’m sorry. I was wrong. But the only reason why you were even upset about it was because of who I did it with, not because I did it.

“I hate him.”

“There’s no excuse for what you did to him.”

“I love you! Can’t you see that?”

She closed her eyes and sighed. “Yes.”

“And now you have to see that he doesn’t.”

She shook her head and then nodded, pulling her hands to her face as the tears begin to flow again, falling against his chest.

“Shhh, it’s okay; it’s okay. I know you loved him, but everyone, and I do mean everyone but you, had bad vibes about him. We were just all worried about you.”

“It’s not that simple; he is a good person. I’ve seen it. He’s just… lost.”

“He can’t really love you, though, if he hates who you are. You must see that.”

Lily nodded while James held her for a long time. He ran his hands over her hair and down her back and she squeezed him harder, snuggling tighter against him.

James chuckled softly. “I’ve missed you terribly, Evans.”

Lily rose up to look up into his eyes, eyebrows raised. “Still Evans?”

“Well if you insist on calling me Potter…”

She smiled and shook her head. “Only when you’re being a git.”

“Well, it really doesn’t matter, does it? After all, I don’t own you… do I?” he whispered, searching
her eyes.
Lily stared back at him for a few moments before replying, “Yes, you do.”

~~~*~~~

The next day…

When Peter walked back up to the dormitory, he heard his mates talking in hushed tones until he appeared at the doorway and then their conversation stopped completely.

“Hey there, Wormtail; how’s it going?” Sirius asked with a cheerful smile.

“Fine guys; What are you up to?” Peter asked.

“Eh, nothing. Rotten luck! We all got detention tonight with Slughorn,” James said, throwing his prize Snitch in the air, not looking at Peter.

“Yeah? What for?”

“Well, apparently, he heard about the incident yesterday, some wanker probably ratted us out. You know how it goes,” James said as he looked over to Sirius with a smirk.

“Oh. Why would Remus get detention? He didn’t do anything,” Peter asked tentatively, trying to get them to trip up on their lie.

“Er, yeah, well, apparently Slughorn heard Remus was also involved, and he’s got his mind made up about it,” James said, looking at Remus as if to encourage him to confirm.

Remus just looked at the floor and then glanced back up at Peter briefly with a faint smile.

“Oh, wow, that is rotten luck. I’ll keep an ear out to figure out who ratted on you.”

“Yeah, you do that” Sirius said before snatching the Snitch from James. James pushed him and they began to wrestle.

“Um, James, can I, um, can I borrow your Invisibility Cloak tonight?”

“What??” James said pausing and snapping his head to look at Peter.

“I—I got a date with that Hufflepuff I was telling you about.”

“What!? No way!” James said with a wide grin breaking into a laugh. Sirius and Remus both raised their eyebrows and gave their congratulations, looking at Peter impressively.

Peter beamed proudly at their expressions.

“I’ll give you details, promise, but I just want to make sure I don’t get caught.”

“Anything in the name of you getting some, mate. I keep it in the bottom drawer of my wardrobe.”

“Thanks,” he said as he turned around and left the room.

Later on that night, Peter sat staring at the same page of the book he was pretending to read as one by one, his roommates slipped out of the room. He tried to restrain himself from jumping up and
following. He was careful to wait a few moments before hopping out of bed and walking over to James’ wardrobe to retrieve the Invisibility Cloak. He put it on and found himself nearly drowning in it as he walked down the steps half running to catch up to Remus to follow them.

They were heading towards the Quidditch field. He was annoyed at the thought that perhaps they had chosen a girl like Lily, who didn’t even play on any of the House teams, to include in a night game of Quidditch and not him. Was he really that bad with the Quaffle? And then he saw her. She looked different, she was made up with lipstick on, blush, and her hair was down instead of in its usual ponytail—definitely not for Quidditch.

They all greeted each other, only James and Sirius both followed their greeting with a passionate tongue filled kiss. Remus smiled awkwardly after they had finished and kissed her on the cheek.

What the bloody hell was going on?

“Where to tonight?” Sirius asked looking at James.

“I’m thinking the Forest. I’m feeling a bit wild,” said James said with a mischievous grin on his face.

“Oh, Merlin help us all when you’re feeling wild,” said Lily who grinning back at James affectionately.

Remus made an apprehensive face to which James patted him on the back. “You sure about this, mate? You look nervous. Any questions? Let’s get it all out now.”

Remus looked at Lily, who smiled back at him and gave her a small smile before shaking his head. “Nope. Let’s go.”

Sirius picked Lily up and threw her over his shoulder to carry her as she giggled, and they all walked toward the forest. Peter tried to control his breathing which had become heavy as he begin to suspect what they were about to do, but he had to see it to believe it.

When they finally made it to a clearing deep in the forest, Sirius put Lily down before bending over to catch his breath.

“Whatcha been eating, girl?”

Lily swatted him playfully.

“Oh, shush, I’ve never been in better shape,” she said as she lifted her robe over her head, revealing her voluptuous and very naked frame. Both Remus and Peter’s mouths dropped open. Remus backed up against the closest tree as if to hold himself up, while Peter moved to a spot that was the furthest away from the three where he could watch without being heard. He knew he was going have a good wank.

When Sirius ordered Lily on her hands and knees before pulling his trousers down to get behind her, Peter saw that he wasn’t the only one who was thinking about wanking. James was rubbing his erection through his trousers.

And then Sirius was fucking her, fucking her quite thoroughly. Peter was transfixed as he continued to pull on his cock, trying to control his breathing so he wouldn’t be heard. It only encouraged him more when he saw James do the same. He glanced over and saw that Remus seemed more curious than anything, but he was also clearly aroused as well.

Peter licked his lips as Sirius wound his hands through Lily’s hair, pulling her head back so that she
had to look up at James as he wanked in front her. He whispered something in her ear before slapping her arse hard, sending out an echo over the forest.

Bloody hell. Peter didn’t want to miss a thing, so he tried to control himself and listen more closely. He couldn’t make out what Sirius was saying but it was very clear what Lily saying.

“I… I need to be fucked… please.”

“Please what?” he heard Sirius growl.

Had he really just called her that? He looked up at James, half expecting him to defend her, but James was still wanking at the scene in front him.

“Please fuck me, please, please, fuck me, Sirius.”

Peter heard Sirius grunt before telling her to say it louder for James and Remus to hear, and Lily obeyed, moaning louder as she begged again to be fucked. Peter whimpered, but no one heard him over Lily’s moans.

Sirius let out a low guttural sound from the back of his throat signalling his release.

“Good girl,” he said in a choked voice before Peter saw James turn toward Remus and give him an encouraging nudge toward Lily.

What the fuck was going on? This was insane. Remus? Of all people. Surely, he would chicken out at the last minute or play the role of the rational moral voice and put an end to this. But Remus didn’t protest or leave; he walked over to Lily and reached down to bring her chin up so he could look into her eyes. Peter expected him to change his mind then, but instead he took his cock out of his trousers, grabbed her hair, and started rubbing himself over her face, while whispering something to her. Then Peter let out a gasp when he saw Remus smack his cock against her lips before pushing it into her mouth. No matter what he had expected to see, he never thought he would see that. She brought Remus to his knees and began to suck him eagerly.

Peter looked up at James who had stopped wanking and was now surveying the tree that Remus had previously been leaning against. He studied the branches for a moment before tearing off a long medium size one near the bottom. Then he began to play with it, swishing it in the air as if sword fighting or perhaps testing its durability, before turning back around towards his mates.

Remus cried out and fell back, apparently reaching his climax just as James began to walk over, his voice clear and demanding. “Now, it’s my turn. Hold her down for me.”

Remus looked up at Sirius with a puzzled expression and Sirius gave him an encouraging smirk and his trademark wink.

‘It’s okay, mate, Lily wants this, don’t you?”

Lily’s breath quickened as she nodded at Remus and smiled.

Sirius moved up onto his knees beside Lily as he pushed her softly onto her back. He stretched her left arm out, pinning it to the ground with a firm hand. Remus watched, and when Lily didn’t struggle, he grabbed her right arm and pinned it down so that it was in the same position on the opposite side. James walked over and hovered over Lily, looking down at her and waited as Sirius grabbed her left leg and pull it open by the knee. He looked up at Remus to indicate he should do the same Remus’ eyes stayed locked on Lily’s, waiting for any indication that this was non-consensual. Lily was writhing against the grips of both Remus and Sirius but not struggling to break free as she
seemed to moan in anticipation of what James was about to do, so Remus hesitantly pulled her right leg apart at the knee spreading her out for James.

Peter wanted to see what James was about to do, so he slowly got up and walked around the three, trying to keep his distance but get close enough so that he could clearly see. He walked over just in time to see James pulling his trousers off before kneeling down in front of Lily.

He ran the branch over her breasts, flicking it at each nipple before trailing it down to her shaved mound, pausing, and sliding it down her inner left thigh. Then he flicked it sharply again, which would most definitely leave a welt, before switching to the other thigh and repeating. Peter heard Lily gasp when he did, and he immediately resumed stroking himself.

“You didn’t think it would be that easy, did you? Coming back to me? You’ve been a disobedient little bitch. Haven’t you?” he said as he pushed two fingers into her wet core with his free hand.

She nodded.

“What was that?” he demanded as he struck the area right above her clit with the branch.

“Yes, yes, sir,” Lily cried out quickly.

James laughed coldly as he began to drag the branch forcibly into her skin along her thigh, drawing visible scratch marks. “I think we’re past calling me sir now…. I mean, I do own you, don’t I? Isn’t that what you told me last night?” he said staring at her as he moved the branch over her clit threateningly even as he began to finger fuck her.

“Yes, Master,” Lily said in earnest.

“I want to hear you say it. I want to hear you say it properly, Lily,” he said, flicking the branch at her clit again.

“Ah… you own me, Master,” Lily cried out.

“Again,” he said flicking the switch at her clit twice more.

“You own me, Master! You own me!”

“That’s right, and don’t you ever forget it,” he said, withdrawing his fingers and throwing the branch to the side. He leaned over her, grabbing her throat, pressing her further into the ground as he entered her roughly and let out a loud groan. Lily gasped and began to moan, pushing against her human restraints. Once again, Peter again looked at Remus, half expecting him to let go, but he held her steady, watching her face intensely while Sirius looked down at her with a strange grin.

As James began to fuck Lily passionately, while Sirius and Remus held her down, Peter found himself biting his lip hard to silence himself as his climax overcame him, causing him to blackout underneath the cloak.

When he woke, he could hear birds chirping and smelled the forest’s morning dew. He had spent the night in the forest under the cloak and had dried come all over his legs and hand. Immediately, his thoughts went to what he had witnessed the night before, and he shook his head at the surreal nature of it all. He felt a sinking feeling in his stomach and a slow burning anger at the fact that they had been lying to him, that he was not invited, and that he probably would never be invited to be included in what he saw. He did a cleaning spell and pulled the Cloak over his head. They were long gone and he was alone. He knew then that even when he returned to the castle to join them to eat breakfast in the Great Hall, he still would be.
“Coming into knowledge and truth does not make your path easier.”
-Phyllis Schlemmer

You live you learn,
You love you learn,
You cry you learn…

-“You Learn” as sung by Alanis Morrissette

Hermione nearly inhaled her dinner, not bothering to indulge in small talk; she told the boys she had some research to do and needed to head to the library straight away before it closed at eight. She had no doubt that all of the books on the types of sex she was interested in could either be found in the Muggle Studies section or in the Restricted Section. She had been thinking throughout dinner how she was going to explain to Madam Pince why she needed access to that particular area without permission from a professor.

She figured that she probably could navigate that better than most students could since she was a faithful and respectful visitor that the librarian seemed to hold in high regard. Judging from her experiences with McGonagall, who had twice given Hermione permission to go into the Restricted Section, she decided to tell Madam Pince that McGonagall had given her verbal permission to access the section in order to do some early research for a special project on the use of Dark Magic in shape shifting.

It worked; Madam Pince didn’t even glance up as she gave her approval, continuing with her work as if Hermione were no longer there. Satisfied and much more relaxed now, she decided to take her time and check the Muggle Studies section first. In that section, she found two book titles on the topic in the footnotes of a Muggle Courtship and Mating Rituals text, but not surprisingly, when she went to look for them they were not in the library. She decided to write down the titles anyway so she could look for them while on holiday.

With hesitation, she perused the books in the Psychology section, and was both surprised and disheartened to find information about the topic under disorders and abnormal psychology. In one book of psychological disorders, she found that there were a wide range of sexual “disorders”, and one type in particular, called masochism. Hermione found herself tensing a bit upon reading the definition since it sounded similar to the sort of thing that had brought her there in the first place. She was beginning to feel a bit unnerved until she saw that in order for either one to be considered an actual disorder it had to cause “marked distress or interpersonal difficulty.”

“Well, I’m not distressed…well, not really,” she told her herself, closing that book and setting it to the side as if it were a plate of her least favourite food.

The Abnormal Psychology textbook she pulled also discussed masochism and sadism, but it also had a small section on a practice known as sadomasochism or S&M. Much to her dismay, the information on the topic ended there, quickly, leaving her thirsting for more information.

It was time to go into the Restricted Section. She decided to first look under the area specifically dedicated to Dark Magic, and she did find some practices involving S&M, but the sexual acts described there were definitely not consensual and seemed designed more for real punishments: the
torture and death of enemies.

She let her fingers glide over various books, until she came to the last possible section. She was becoming quite disappointed that she wouldn’t find anything useful when she finally found a book on ancient magic rituals. She flipped through it quickly and almost put it away when she came upon a chapter on “Sexual Magic: Uses and Practices”. She skimmed it, searching for anything that hinted at S&M. She couldn’t help but smile to herself when she found a small subsection describing the type of relationship she shared with Harry and Ron: Polyamory. Apparently it was a rare, but also a very old practice.

She let out a pleased sigh when she saw that there was indeed a three page sub-section on the “Historical Uses of Bondage, Discipline, Dominance and Submission, & Sado-Masochism in Magical Rituals”. She quickly looked around to make sure she could read without interference or suspicion and found that the library was nearly empty. She settled forward, leaning her head against the shelf so that she could read with ease.

According to the book, there was more than just S&M; there were also relationships where one partner would voluntarily give up complete control to the other. Hermione could not help but notice that there wasn’t much difference between the Muggle sexual practices she had read about in the psychological texts and the practices she was now reading about in the Wizarding text. The most glaring differences were the perceptions about sexual practices in each community.

While the Muggle textbooks found the practices were “abnormal”, this text described BDSM as a common historical practice and said it was frequently used to test, push, and play with power dynamics that could alter the flow of magical energy between couples, groups, and in rituals for various uses. While BDSM was depicted as abnormal, here in the Wizarding magical text, there was a tone of scholarly reverence about those practices.

The book described a wide range of sexual practices that Hermione found herself intrigued with instantly. For the first time ever while reading a Wizarding magical text, she found herself not focusing on the actual rituals and magic involved, but the sexual positions being described. Her mind began to mentally flip through pictures of Harry and Ron doing these things to her while she measured abstractly if she would enjoy them or not. She felt herself becoming more aroused and the dampness growing between her legs.

She also felt the fatigue of trying to be perfect; of not wanting the boys to think she wasn’t some sex crazed freak begin to well inside her. Even if she couldn’t do everything she was reading about, at the very least, she needed to fulfil her most basic needs by having sex. Real sex. It was evident the boys were not going to act on their own, so she would have to take the initiative to make sure it happened, and she was going to see to it straight away.

She was startled out of her thoughts when she heard Madam Pince yell out, “You’ve got about ten minutes before close”. Hermione called out to acknowledge she heard her, thinking she was the only person left in the library. She had just folded the very edges of the sections she wanted to return to at another time so that it would be barely noticeable to Pince’s inspecting eye, when she heard, or rather felt, someone in her personal space and she smelled… soap.

“What are you doing over here?” she heard a familiar drawl.

She turned around quickly, almost colliding with the shelf, clasping the book close to her chest. Draco’s eyes were perusing her again like before, only this time it was obvious he was just doing it to affect her.

“I should ask you the same thing. What are you doing sneaking up on me like that?”
You’re not the only person who’s allowed to be here; I have shit to do as well.

Professor Snape requested my assistance and gave me permission to be here on his behalf,” he said proudly, looking at her defiantly.

Hermione couldn’t help the flush that crept up her face. Malfoy had a legitimate reason to be here, and she didn’t, and if pressed, she would have to tell that stupid lie again which could easily be picked apart. She rolled her eyes and quickly put the book back in its place before turning around and looking at him with wariness.

“More like he sent you on an errand. Let me guess, you’re here to find a book on hexes you can use on Muggle-borns and blood traitors?”

“Something like that,” he said softly, watching her with a poker face.

At that moment, she would have welcomed his usual derogatory retort or some sort of defensiveness because his calm demeanour and stare was becoming quite unsettling. Hermione felt herself growing nervous, and she suddenly wanted to get as far away from him as possible.

“Well good luck with that. The library closes in five minutes,” she snapped and stepped forward to move past him to leave. He stepped back in exaggeration as if touching her may burn him, looking down at her in disgust. She huffed in an effort to protest, anticipating another insult, but it didn’t come, instead his eyes followed her until she rounded the shelf’s corner.

Her body temperature had risen a few degrees, and her heart was beating hard in her chest as she half ran out of the library and back to the common room. Malfoy had almost caught her reading about deviant sexual practices. She knew that had been close and that if he ever found out, she would never hear the end of it from him. When she finally reached the common room door, she exhaled a breath she didn’t realise she had been holding before saying the password to gain entry.

Once Hermione made it around the corner, Draco let out a small sigh, thinking to himself how lovely her tits may have felt sliding across his chest if he hadn’t moved. He quickly patted himself on the back for not indulging that part of his curiosity and allowing the Mudblood to touch him.

He surmised that she wasn’t very crafty and would make a poor Slytherin. If she had been here for academic reasons, she wouldn’t have been acting so jumpy, closing the book and holding it to her chest before quickly putting it away the way she did when he arrived. Typical Gryffindors, all courage and no finesse.

He had planned to see what could possibly be so intriguing to make Granger that jumpy, but first he needed to retrieve the book that Professor Snape had sent him to get. Draco read the note Snape had given him and then looked up and shook his head to himself when he realised it was the same book that Granger had been reading.

Ever the bookworm, trying to stay ahead of lessons before professors can even plan them.

Stepping closer to the shelf, Draco pulled the book Hermione had hastily put away. He combed through the book, flipping through the chapter titles. The book was on ancient magical rituals, some of it was Dark, but most of it was just boring as hell. He rolled his eyes at her predictable and mundane reading habits.

“Seriously, sneaking into the Restricted Section to read things most students try to put off reading, can she get any more—”

Draco paused when he noticed a page had been bookmarked by a folded piece of parchment as if not
to draw attention. It was in the chapter on “Sexual Magic: Uses and Practices”. He raised his eyebrows at that, but when he saw that another page had also been folded within that same chapter on a subsection entitled “Historical Uses of Bondage, Discipline, Dominance and Submission, & Sado-Masochism in Magical Rituals” he swallowed hard. He flipped through a few pages and found that she had also folded the page on the role and uses of masochism and submission in rites and rituals of ancient wizarding societies.

He felt his eyes almost popping out of his head and had to tell himself to close his mouth. His mind began to swim with a hundred thoughts. The only subject in school that this was even remotely related to this book was History and Defence Against the Dark Arts, and he knew for a fact that this text was not on the reading list of either one of those classes. This book also had nothing to do with Potions, so why did Snape want it? That was simple, he told himself, considering the company he kept and his known ties to the Dark Lord; it was hardly surprising that he would want a freaky book like this. Okay, so then, what about Granger? She could be studying for her NEWTs next year. No, but it wouldn’t explain why she marked off those particular pages. And why would she go through the trouble of lying and risking getting into trouble by sneaking into the Restricted Section to research the topic?

Was Granger a dominant? Or a submissive or a masochist? Oh what a waste it would be if that were true! Perhaps she had an itch that wasn’t being scratched? He was certain that the Weasel couldn’t handle such a tall order.

*But I can’t touch her. Not that I want to…well, I would, but it doesn’t matter. I can’t…why would you want to? She’s a Mudblood. Gross! Right, a filthy disgusting Mudblood… with great tits!*

He shook his head trying to focus his thoughts.

“Mr. Malfoy, you need to hurry up and check out or leave. I’m closing up now,” Madam Pince called out firmly from behind her desk as the lights around the library begin to go out one by one.

Just because he couldn’t touch her, didn’t mean that he couldn’t fuck with her a little bit; after all, it had never stopped him before.

A devilish smile spread across his face, as he closed the book and began to make his way towards Pince’s desk.

“Coming…”

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When she entered the common room, Ron and Harry were sitting across from each other playing Muggle checkers. She came over to Ron’s side and sat down on the arm of the chair.

“Hi, guys.”

“Hey,” they both said absently as they stared at the board.

Once Ron made his move, Harry glanced up at him and smiled smugly as he moved his piece. “King me.” Signalling that he had won the game.

Ron looked disgruntled and started pouting. He hated losing, especially to Harry, who he could count on to defeat at least in chess most of the time. But Muggle checkers was still new to him, and he was growing weary of losing. He moved to put his piece on Harry’s chip. When Hermione took notice of his mood, she reached down to run her hands through his hair as she leaned down to give him a kiss. Ron looked up at her and lifted his face so that he could meet her lips. Hermione’s kiss
was slow and sensual, and she ran her tongue along his lips before slipping it into his mouth. Ron moaned slightly, which caused a few people to look up and whisper. Harry rolled his eyes.

“Get a room, guys.”

Ron broke the kiss and looked at Harry with a smirk. “Maybe we will.”

Harry hated it when Ron would pull this crap in public, because he knew Harry couldn’t do or say anything and had to sit there and watch him and Hermione carry on as though she wasn’t Harry’s girl as well. Ron was a sore loser, and Harry recognised that this was his way of soothing his ego after defeat.

Harry clenched his teeth and looked at Ron before looking around and yawning. “I think I’m going to turn in.”

“Kay,” said Ron smiling back at him. Harry narrowed his eyes at him.

Sensing the elevated testosterone level and tension between the two, Hermione felt obligated to smooth things over.

“Harry, stay,” Hermione said looking at him with a seductive smile. Ron slid his arm around Hermione’s waist, sighed, and sat back, relaxing into the chair as he kept his eyes on Harry.

“So, did you get your research or whatever done?” Harry asked, trying not to look at Ron and focusing on Hermione.

“Mostly, still need to finish up a bit.” She sighed, still smiling at him warmly. He couldn’t help but smile back and began to relax a bit.

“I’m surprised you haven’t read everything in the library by now; it’s like you live there,” said Ron, who seemed to be getting over his loss and returning back to his normal self now.

“Well, I haven’t been able to go as often as I would like lately.”

Ron smiled at that. “Oh yeah? And why is that?”

Hermione giggled, “I’ve been busy.”

Harry smiled. “Yea, extracurricular activities can take up quite a bit of time.”

Then Hermione’s eyes went big as she leaned over to whisper to the two, “Guess who was in the Restricted Section?”

They both looked at her with questioning stares.

“Malfoy.”

“What? How did he even get access?” Harry asked intensely.

“He said Professor Snape sent him there.”

“What? He told you that?” Harry asked surprised Hermione and Malfoy had spoken about the matter.

“Er, yea, we had a run in when I was leaving,” she said quickly, hoping Harry wouldn’t probe her any further about it.
“I wonder why Snape would send Malfoy to the Restricted Section?” Harry asked himself quietly.

“Can’t be good,” Hermione said firmly.

“Well, it’s not like he’s going announce what he’s up to, is he?” Ron asked trying to put an end to the speculation before it began. Sometimes, it annoyed Ron how much his two lovers speculated about things they had little information about. Over the years, he had developed ways of curtailing it a bit.

“Yea,” Harry and Hermione both conceded in disappointment.

“You smell good, Hermione,” Ron said, trying to change the topic from Malfoy to something more pleasant as he nuzzled his nose against her hair.

“Yea, you do,” Harry agreed.

Hermione blushed.” Thanks.”

Harry was trying to inhale as much of her scent as possible while she was leaned over without being obvious. She could tell that she was affecting him, and the kiss from Ron earlier had her feeling very moist. She looked around the room quickly, before whispering, “I want to get into something.”

“Yeah? Got something in particular in mind?” Ron asked looking up at her.

“As a matter of fact, I do, but first, Ronald, did you do your Transfiguration assignment?”

“Um, yea,” Ron said looking very dodgy about it.

Hermione scowled. “Well, don’t come crying to me when McGonagall embarrasses you again in front of the class.”

Harry was trying to hide his smile at that and looked down to cover it.

“I’ll get it done. Promise. So what did you have in mind?” he asked trying to skip the subject of Transfiguration, which always gave him trouble.

She smiled to herself before looking back up at the boys to speak, “Harry, go get your cloak.”

Harry looked around to see who was looking: everyone was basically talking, reading, or playing games; no one was paying attention to them. “Er, all right.”

Harry ran up the stairs and brought down the cloak before Hermione went over to Ginny and told her to let them know if anyone was looking for them. “We’re going to see Hagrid.”

“All right, but you know that curfew is at ten o’clock.”

“Yea, thanks,” she said before turning to the boys with a wink and leading them out.

Once they were outside the common room door, Harry looked at Hermione. “Where to?”

“The Room of Requirement.”

Harry and Ron and looked at each other quizzically before following Hermione’s lead.

Once inside the room, Hermione thought about why she came there, focusing on it particularly hard. A bed appeared in the centre with candles all around it. She inhaled, trying to calm her nerves and
build up her courage before turning around.

Harry and Ron both stood frozen for a moment before Ron finally spoke, “Feeling a bit randy, are we?”

Hermione exhaled and slowly turned around to look at both of them.

“More than randy; I’m ready,” she said grinning as she took off her robe, shoes, and slid her skirt down before stepping out it. She stood before them in a long dress shirt and tie, which she started to untie slowly as if she were strip teasing.

Harry’s eyebrows furrowed. “Ready for what?”

Ron let out a small nervous laugh.

Hermione wiggled her eyebrows and smiled as she took off the tie and stretched it out before her.

Speaking very slowly, Harry asked. “You mean you want to make love?”

“No, Harry, I want to fuck.”

“Hermione, your first time should be…special,” Harry said as if trying to talk to a child.

Ron looked at Harry in disbelief before turning back to Hermione, “Yeah, Hermione, you’re a virgin, and—“

“And I’m tired of being one, Ron!”

“What about birth control? I don’t think you’ve thought this through yet,” Harry offered trying to appeal to her logical side.

“I’ve been taking a contraceptive potion since our fifth year.”

“What?!” they both replied in shock, looking at each other in wide eyed confusion before Hermione took the tie and wrapped it around Ron’s neck so that she could pull him towards the bed, and Harry stood glued to his spot watching.

Letting the tie go, she wrapped her arms around Ron, pulling him into a searing kiss, licking his lips and plunging her tongue deep into his mouth, while grabbing his arse. Ron moaned into her mouth, and Hermione opened her eyes to look at Harry as she unbuttoned Ron’s shirt, pulling it off and helping him out of his trousers before pulling down his underwear. She looked up at him playfully as his hard cock jutted out, touching her face. She slid her tongue out teasingly, letting it glide across the head before rising up on her knees to draw him into another kiss.

As they continued to kiss, she pulled him down onto the bed and wrapped her legs around him. Harry couldn’t move; he didn’t know what had gotten into Hermione, and he wasn’t sure he could trust himself enough to do the right thing, whatever that was, right now. He had never pictured their first time with Hermione like this, candles and dim lights yes, her asking to be fucked and not be made love to, no. It seemed to be a lot more about getting off than any romantic sentiment.

Ron was feeling the same way; he didn’t want to do anything that would ruin Hermione’s first experience, so he was trying to slow it down a bit. For every hot passionate kiss Hermione would initiate, he would return it with a lighter softer kiss, when she would pull and push, he would caress and pull back. When she saw that Ron was being painstakingly careful and slow, resisting her efforts, she pushed him onto his back before straddling him, and grinding her hips again into him,
rubbing herself against his hardness suggestively.

“Mione, slow down, maybe we should talk about this,” he said, sounding a little concerned, straining to control himself.

Hermione gave him a wicked smile before pulling her shirt over her head and reaching back to unhook her bra, when Ron rose up on his elbows and grabbed the locket around her throat.

“What’s this?”

She smiled, holding her head up higher. “A gift.”

“From whom?” he asked, jealousy creeping into his voice.

“Don’t know. ‘An admirer’ it said.”

Harry moved onto the bed, falling on his side to study the locket, and then pulled back as if in contemplation.

“What?” Hermione asked looking up at him.

“I don’t know. It looks familiar. I’ve seen something like that before, just not sure where.”

“I doubt it. It was made by Lord Custos,” Hermione said with pride, flipping her hair so he could have a better look at it against her skin.

Ron’s scoffed at that. “Right. He doesn’t make jewellery.”

“Oh, yes he does. Look!” she said, turning it over to show him the signature.

“Merlin, Hermione, who the hell gave you that?” Ron exclaimed looking up at her when he saw the signature.

“I told you, I don’t know.”

“I’m sure,” Ron said suspiciously.

“What are you trying to say?”

“I’m not trying to say anything; nobody gives fancy trinkets like that to strangers is all, “Ron said accusingly.

Hermione rolled her eyes and let out a frustrated sigh as she moved off of Ron’s lap.

“You know what? I think you’re right, Ronald. I may be rushing things a bit,” she said folding her arms across her chest and settling onto her back. She was furious; Ron always seemed to ruin everything! She scolded herself for not anticipating Ron’s jealousy at the idea that she had a secret admirer, and of course the fact that the bloke obviously had quite a bit of money would be a particularly sore spot with Ron. But, the nerve of him to accuse her of whatever the hell he was trying to imply!

“Just realised that, did you?” Ron said throwing her an icy stare.

Hermione focused her eyes ahead at the door to show she was now ignoring him, while Harry sat on the bed watching the two, ready for Ron to blow up and storm out of the room like he would normally do. Instead, Ron rolled over on top of Hermione, pinning her down as he began to straddle
“Get off of me!” she said pushing at him.

“Make up your damn’ mind, Hermione. You want it or not?” he asked, catching her wrists and pushing them back against the bed hard.

As Ron brought her arms above her head, and held them by the wrists with one hand, Hermione found herself suddenly out of breath, and getting wetter. His other hand reached down and pulled at her knickers until they began to rip at the seams. The waistband cut into her skin painfully, and then with one quick jerk they finally tore completely and he flung them aside.

Harry had sat up, rigid, and was torn about whether he should stop Ron, who looked like he was about to rape Hermione. He wondered if this is what she had wanted. She did bring them in here, after all, to lose her virginity, but also appeared to be fighting Ron, struggling against him as he held her down. Judging from his past observations of Hermione in dangerous situations, her attempts looked quite feeble and half-hearted. It didn’t help clarify things that she also appeared to be squirming like she usually did when she was really turned on.

“Ron!” Harry called to him.

Ron turned his head and looked at Harry and knew immediately what he was thinking. He let out a frustrated groan and looked back down at Hermione who was still struggling in his grip.

“Tell me you don’t want it, Hermione.”

Harry watched Hermione closely as she looked up at Ron and resumed struggling against him in silence. What the hell did that mean? She seemed to be half struggling, half egging him on, and now she wasn’t talking.

“That’s what I thought,” Ron said as he raised himself slightly still holding her wrists and using his knee to open her legs before settling back between them. Taking his free hand, he began to grope her breasts roughly before sliding his hand down between her legs. When he found her to be extremely wet, he snorted, and slid two fingers into her roughly, and began to finger fuck her even as he brought his head down to kiss along her neck. Hermione began to buck her hips against his fingers and let out a sigh when he began kissing along her neck. When Ron’s mouth brushed against the chain of the locket, he pulled back and stared down at her briefly before leaning back down and sinking his teeth into her neck, causing her to gasp in pain. He continued to move his mouth down to her right breast, teasing the nipple with his tongue before taking it between his teeth.

Ron withdrew his fingers and pushed them against Hermione’s mouth until she opened her lips. He groaned when she begin to suck her juices off of them and raised himself up so that he could position his cock at her entrance. He placed the head in slightly before withdrawing, and began to tease her by sliding it back and forth over her clit before stopping despite her whimper of disappointment.

“Just to be sure, I need to hear you say that you want it.”

Hermione nodded, looking up at him.

“No, ask me for it,” he said looking down into her eyes.

Hermione paused. To see Ron like this was extremely arousing, but she was also very aware of the fact that she was usually the one who told Ron to do and this was quite a role reversal. She suddenly was hesitant and unsure. Her normally independent and strong nature was at odds with her desire to be dominated. She wasn’t sure what would change between them if she allowed him to carry on like
this, and she wasn’t sure she wanted to find out, so instead of answering him, she pursed her lips and turned her head.

“Fine,” he said beginning to rise.

“No,” she said gripping him between her legs as if to hold onto him.

“Then do what I asked you to do.”

Ron could tell Hermione was having an inner battle with herself. He knew that he was asking for the moon by hoping that she would follow his orders and ask; no, he wanted her to beg him for sex of all things. She had always called the shots between them, and he could tell she was worried about what may happen if she let him take this much control, but he willed himself to wait for her reply in hopes that she would cave. If he suddenly gave up, apologising and fawning all over her like he usually did, he knew he would wind up kicking himself about it for weeks.

“Please,” Hermione finally whispered after several moments of contemplation.

“Please what, ‘Mione?”

“Please fuck me,” she whispered again shamefully, trying to make sure that Harry couldn’t hear her beg.

“Speak up,” Ron said louder as if he was doing just the opposite and wanted to make sure that Harry heard her.

“Please fuck me, Ron.”

“You sure? ‘Cause I thought I heard you say that you had changed your mind,” he asked with a blank expression.

Harry had already come to the conclusion that this was more of the same territorial rivalry that he had seen from Ron just moments earlier in the common room. Instead of losing a game of checkers, he was worried that he was losing to some rich wanker who could afford to give Hermione expensive gifts. Harry shook his head at the very real possibility that Ron was doing this to Hermione to once again boost his fragile ego.

Hermione closed her eyes before opening them again as if resigned to the humiliation of having to ask once more.

“Yes, please, Ron. Please fuck me.”

Ron smirked a little then and pushed down into her, thrusting forward even as he watched her face. Hermione stared back up at Ron, her mouth opening into a silent scream as she felt the sensation of herself being stretched while something seemed to be break inside of her. It hurt.

Harry couldn’t help that he had grown aroused as he watched Ron make Hermione beg to be fucked, but he was also bothered about Ron’s treatment of her, knowing this was her first time. His eyes grew concerned when he saw that Hermione appeared to be in pain and he inched closer putting his hand on her forehead.

“Hermione, are you okay? Ron, stop, you’re hurting her!”

Ron turned his head away from Harry and buried it into crook of Hermione’s neck as he began to pull out and then push back into her again. Hermione lay frozen trying not to cry as she felt Ron
She was about to reassure him and tell him she was all right when Ron began driving into her harder, causing her to let out a loud gasp. She began to moan as she wrapped her legs tighter around him while pushing against the constraint of his grip. Ron was breathing heavily as he began to fuck her steadily; his head buried into her neck as he ground his hands into her wrists harder against the bed. He grunted as he took his free hand and reached back to grab her right ankle, pushing her leg up before he changed the angle of his body so that he could go deeper.

“Oh, Gods!” Hermione cried out as Ron hit a place deep within her that caused her vaginal walls to clench around him.

Harry had pulled back to watch them and found himself breathing heavy as he watched the couple in confusion. While he couldn’t help his arousal, he also felt his anger growing. A part of him felt that Ron had been lucky that Hermione was enjoying this or he would have surely been on the receiving end of Harry’s fist. He continued to watch them in silence as Ron began to speed up his thrusts, grunting with each one as he approached his release.

“Argh!” Ron growled, as he slowed his thrusts, finally letting go of Hermione’s wrists and leg before moving off of Hermione and falling onto his back.

Harry sat up fully, looking over at the two of them trying to catch their breath before turning his head back to look at the door. “We should be getting back.”

Ron looked over at Harry who seemed to be concentrating on not looking at either him or Hermione. He reached down to the floor to retrieve his wand to do a cleaning charm on him and Hermione and then began dressing.

“I wonder who gave it to you,” Ron murmured more himself than Hermione as he began to button his shirt.

Harry snorted “Does it matter? Hermione’s still your girl; you’ve made that clear haven’t you?”

Ron shot Harry an angry glare before Harry rose and began walking towards the door. After Ron was dressed, they both waited in an uncomfortable and tense silence as Hermione got up and finished dressing.

“It’s only a little after nine guys,” said Hermione indicating that they didn’t need the cloak, when she saw they weren’t looking at her or each other she made haste to finish so that they could leave.

They all walked back to the common room in silence. The room was filled with students talking and reading.

“Goodnight,” Harry said curtly, looking forward as he walked toward the stairs. Avoiding eye contact, Ron muttered something that sounded like “I love you” before giving her a quick chaste kiss on the cheek. Instead of taking the stairs, he strode over to Dean and Seamus who were playing a game of cards. Hermione saw Ginny looking up at her with a question on her face to which she gave a small smile before turning around to walk slowly up the stairs.

When she got into the room, she went to examine the locket again in the mirror before taking it off
and putting it in her jewellery box. It seemed to have caused enough trouble for one night and she wasn’t sure if or when she would put it back on again.

Even though it seemed incredibly early to her, she took a shower and got dressed for bed. It was supposed to be one of the best experiences of her life. Wasn’t she just taken the way she always wanted to be? So why was she feeling guilty and perplexed? She couldn’t shake the voice in her head that was saying Harry had been right, her first time should have been “special”; she should have wanted them to make love to her. But what was the difference was between fucking and lovemaking when you’re doing it with someone you love? Did making love always have to be all “lovey dovey” with soft caresses and gentleness?

She knew that she not only wanted to be taken hard and forcibly, but she also wanted to explore most of the things she had read in the book she had found in the Restricted Section. Maybe she was mental just like those people she just read about in the Muggle psychological disorders book who just couldn’t enjoy simple sexual interactions.

Ron had taken her in jealous anger, and she had loved it; she had even loved the shame and humiliation of having to ask him for it, just as much as she had enjoyed Harry forcing her mouth onto Ron. But Harry had been apologetic and embarrassed about doing that to her, and now not only was Ron ashamed of what he had done, but Harry was mad at him. If they were ashamed and upset about having rough sex with her, she had no doubt that they would feel even worse if she told them some of the other things she wanted to them to do to her. Even though she really wanted it and knew it would feel really good to her, it made the people she cared about feel bad.

Her thoughts went back to the Muggle psychology book she had put to the side. It said that the type of sex she liked qualified as a disorder when it was “distressing and disrupting to interpersonal relationships”.

Maybe that’s why Harry had avoided looking at her, or why Ron had walked away unable to look her in the eye; maybe they had finally seen her for what she really was…

“I’m mental,” Hermione whispered to herself, feeling her eyes beginning to fill with tears as she rolled over, pulling the covers over her head.
New Beginnings

The whole world’s broke and it ain’t worth fixing
It’s time to start all over, make a new beginning.

-“New Beginning” by Tracy Chapman

There is nothin' fair in this world,
There is nothin' safe in this world,
And there's nothin' sure in this world,
And there's nothin' pure in this world,
Look for something left in this world,
To start again…

-“White Wedding” by Billy Idol

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As Snape stepped out of the fireplace of his private study, he felt his body relax considerably. He went to the cabinet and poured a glass of the cognac he saved for his tattered nerves. He was angry, tense, anxious – why had he let it slip that he had knowledge of the power and uses of polyamory in magic? His drive to expose naiveté and ignorance sometimes hurt him, and this time had not been any different. No matter, though; what was done was done.

He had no doubt that the Dark Lord would just keep a closer eye on him now. Not that it mattered, he was used to being watched. He never went anywhere without feeling scrutinised, second guessed, and distrusted. That was his burden to bare for the foolish mistake of pledging allegiance to that maniac over twenty years ago.

He had had a long time to think about that mistake, and think about what he had done, what could have been if he hadn’t made it, what his life would be like now.

For a long time he hated her. He had convinced himself that she had driven him to it; drove him further into interest of the Dark Arts and Dark Magic; drove him further into the circles of those who pledged loyalty to the Dark Lord, and finally drove him to pledging his allegiance to the Dark Lord and taking the Dark Mark.

He had watched over Lily forever. And she had betrayed him, just like everyone else. Her betrayal was different, though. It had actually hurt. He hadn’t seen that one coming. He couldn’t believe he had actually run to apologise, begging for her forgiveness for his slip of tongue. And if asked today, he would still swear that was all it was.

And once he saw how she had truly betrayed him, he had punished himself, hated himself even, for running to beg for the forgiveness of a whore. It was as though Merlin himself had pointed out what a fool he had been when he had caught them on the edge of the Forbidden Forest. He had been sent there to gather ingredients to re-stock the Potions cabinet by Filch as a detention for returning to the dorms past curfew weeks prior when he had heard the sound of moaning. He remembered sliding alongside the back of the tree that had hid him from view to see a beautiful red-headed witch on her hands and knees, begging to be fucked harder by her violator. Her violator was none other than that mangy dog Sirius Black.

He remembered the brief, albeit fleeting, feeling of vindication that she had been cheating on Potter
with his best mate, until he saw Potter, and the other one, Lupin. He remembered experiencing a range of emotions then, from shock, to confusion, to outrage as he watched Potter getting off to the sight of his mate using her on the bare ground. For so long he had blamed that image for his final decision to commit to the Dark Lord. If those who claimed to be virtuous, those who were the picture and embodiment of Light were just shadows, illusions and facades masquerading their own dark intentions, then why not pledge allegiance to the Dark Lord? At least the Dark Lord and those who followed him were forthcoming and clear about their nature and intentions. He would rather own up to his darkness than consort with those who pretended it didn’t exist in spite of their actions.

He knew now that he had been foolish, that when he had finally committed to the Dark Lord and had the Mark burned into his flesh, it was just a final act of spite. Back in those days, he had lived to spite those who had hurt him. His abusive Muggle father, the blood traitors who bullied him, and her, the Muggle-born beauty who he had thought had chosen not to be with him.

When he had called her that awful name on that fateful day, he had been suffering the heartache of her rejection for nearly two weeks. He had given her an ultimatum, and suddenly, she had stopped meeting up with him and had been avoiding him. He thought she had already made up her mind and had chosen Potter over him. So when she had come rushing to his aid, the anger, the hurt, and the humiliation of her rejection, especially in that moment when he had been the most vulnerable and exposed at the hands of his bullies, he had lashed out in the only way he had known how. He had never meant it, how could he? He had loved her. But of course to her it was much more than that; he knew it as soon as it had left his mouth.

Taking the Mark had been a distraction. He had needed anything that would bring him comfort of company, of belonging, of an opportunity to vent and spill his hate and pain onto whomever would cross his path. The Dark Lord had offered that and so much more.

But it had all been a lie.

Revenge and hurting others had never brought him the comfort and feeling of control and power he had longed for, only more pain. Especially when he discovered that in his eagerness to please the Dark Lord he had placed her in mortal danger. When he had realised that, the promise of power, control, and vengeance upon those who had caused his suffering seemed meaninglessness.

She had been all that mattered, she had always been the only thing that had mattered, and it hadn’t been until she had been killed that he had realized how much. When he had learned that she had been killed, he had wanted to kill himself. He had known that he had to make it right if not to her in life, for the memory of her.

And so he had come back, begging for forgiveness and an opportunity to reconcile his misdeeds to the old Headmaster who he had known long favoured those who had tormented him. He had never liked Dumbledore; he had always felt there was something slippery and dark behind the kind hearted façade of neutrality the older wizard presented. Whether if it was because he had been a Slytherin or had formerly consorted with those who pledged loyalty to the Dark Lord, he would never know, but the man had offered him a second chance to redeem himself. And he had worked hard for him to do that; he had worked hard for Lily so he could live with himself.

But he hated his job as a double spy. The constant vigilance of guarding his mind against attack from the Dark Lord, the scrutiny from his old comrades who thought he had betrayed them and the Dark Lord, the constant lying, and careful planning, coming and going was dreadfully tiring. There were times when he wanted to tell Dumbledore where to stick his debt, which sometimes he felt he had paid twofold. Other times, when he would see Harry, see Lily’s eyes, he would be shamed into admitting that he hadn’t done nearly enough to repay the debt.
There were times when he would wake up in the middle of the night screaming his apologies, his repentance for what he had done, for what he had said, for what had happened…to her. She haunted him, not just in his dreams, but in his waking hours, throughout his mundane existence as a Potions teacher who had been indefinitely denied the Defence of the Dark Arts position because of his sin against her, against them. He was haunted every time he saw her son. He hated Harry, not because of who he was but who Harry reminded him of— the past he conjured up every time he saw those brilliant green eyes. He didn’t need a Pensieve to relive the memory of her, when he would cross Harry’s path it would come back to him fiercely, every misstep, every wrong step that he wished he could take back.

Where ever he turned, he felt controlled, monitored, and scrutinised. There wasn’t a moment when he wasn’t with the Dark Lord and the other Death Eaters that he wasn’t reminded that his loyalty was in doubt. He felt as if every word, every action, was a test. And he couldn’t much blame them, because he was neither loyal nor trustworthy as far as they were concerned.

But what wore him down, what was bringing him to fatigue was the same treatment in his own home at Hogwarts. Despite the risk and information he brought back to Dumbledore, despite showing time and time again that he was able and willing to protect and watch over Lily’s son, he felt the same scrutiny, the same obligation to prove himself to the Dumbledore. He was growing weary of constantly being reminded of his apologetic oath to redeem himself for turning his back and becoming a Death Eater. He made a fucking mistake, only his was public, and it had cost lives. He didn’t feel that he owed anyone anything, but her. The one person that wasn’t even alive to see the repentance and regret he lived with everyday for taking the Mark.

He was growing tired of proving himself, tired of the scrutiny, and tired of the games. Running his hand over the prophecy he kept hidden in the cabinet of his study, he decided that it was time to put the past to rest once and for all. The Dark Lord’s desire to use Draco presented an excellent opportunity to help fulfil the promise of a fate that could free him from the debt to Lily once and for all. He had already set the wheels in motion the previous night by sending the boy to help him recover the only accessible book on sexual magical rituals at Hogwarts in hopes that he would be nosy enough to at least take a peek. It could be enough to spark an interesting and much needed conversation later. But that was a conversation he had to plan strategically. If he revealed too much too soon it could backfire and put more than his life in danger.

Closing his closet and casting a locking charm, he turned and down the last of the cognac before leaving his study to prepare for class. Today he would try something new; instead of entering in his usual grand and foreboding manner; he would take a seat in the chair and wait for them to enter. He wanted to get things in motion straight away — as soon as the students arrived.

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At breakfast, the Trio ate in silence, avoiding each other’s eyes and making small talk with other Gryffindors. They had isolated themselves so much over the past few months that they found reconnecting with other housemates somewhat awkward and unfulfilling. Harry was secretly blaming both Ron and Hermione for the uncomfortable silence, but little did he know that Hermione felt as if it was her fault, and Ron was confused about what had happened and was feeling guilty about what he had done.

By the time lunch rolled around, Harry had had enough. He looked at both them as they ate once again in silence, watching their food intensely. He decided it was time to get everything out in the open. “We need to talk.”

Ron looked up at him and huffed, “Fine.”
Hermione simply nodded with an anxious look on her face. “Well, we don’t have much time; our free period is about to start and then we have to get to Potions promptly. You know how Snape gets; maybe we should save it for tonight.”

“No, I want to talk now,” Harry insisted.

“Well, where?”

“How about the dungeons?”

“I don’t want to go down there; what if someone comes along.”

“Well, that’s why we have the map.”

“Okay, whatever,” Ron mumbled.

They walked in the same awkward silence they had eaten in as they made their way down to the next to lowest level of the dungeons.

As they walked, Harry felt himself growing angrier. Neither one of them had even acknowledged what had happened, bothered to explain, or even apologise, and what was worse, they seemed oblivious to what was wrong. How could they not know?

Once they reached an area that seemed fairly secluded, they stood there for what seemed like several minutes looking at their feet, the wall and any and everywhere but at each other. Harry folded his arms over his chest and finally let out a frustrated sigh.

“What’s your problem, then?” Ron asked looking up at him hard.

“Like you don’t know,” Harry said returning his stare.

“No, maybe I don’t; why don’t you say it?”

Harry raised his eyebrows at Ron’s challenge. “How ‘bout I just show you?”

Harry grabbed Ron’s arm and twisted it behind his back uncomfortably, turning him around and then pulled it up, forcing Ron to double over at Harry’s mercy.

“Oi! What the hell, Harry?”

Harry took his free hand and ran it over Ron’s hair, and then pulling it roughly back as he bent over.

“How does it feel watching me do this to Ron?” Harry continued waiting for Hermione to get his point.

Hermione looked back at him and shook her head. “Harry…”

Harry bent over to whisper into Ron’s ear, “Ask me to fuck you Ron; I know you want it.”
“Get the hell off of me, Harry. Stop it! It wasn’t like that and you know it. Tell him, Hermione!”

“Harry, it’s true; Ron didn’t rape me or anything like that.”

“And exactly at what point was I supposed to figure that out,” Harry asked as he pulled Ron’s arm harder.

“Dammit, Harry!” Ron yelled.

“Harry, I liked it. Okay? I liked it from the very start. It’s not Ron’s fault; I should have told you that I was enjoying it and that everything was all right!” Hermione said, her voice cracking as she fought, once again, to hold back the tears she told herself she would not shed again today.

Harry hated to see Hermione upset, it always undid him. He scrunched his face briefly before letting Ron go. Ron caught his breath and adjusted himself, straightening up to his full height and looking at Harry like he wanted to hit him.

Harry returned his stare unflinchingly. “And I suppose that you knew she was fine with it all when you did what you did?”

“Well, no, but I figured it out when her twat was wet enough to soak through the mattress.”

Harry rolled his eyes.

“Look, Harry, I-I think that…Well, I just really like rough sex, and I’m sorry! I’m sorry I’m not the perfect princess everyone wants me to be. I’m sorry I’m such a freak, and I’m sorry that it’s causing such a problem!” She let the tears fall this time and focusing on the wall behind Harry.

Harry and Ron exchanged worried looks before Harry turned back to look at her.

“You’re not causing problems, Hermione; I was just confused. I thought Ron was raping you at one point, and then I wasn’t sure. I just didn’t know what to make of any of it. All I knew was that you deserved to be treated better.”

Ron stuffed his hands in his pocket and looked down. “I’m sorry, Hermione.”

“You don’t have to apologise, Ron! I enjoyed it, and you know I did.”

“Yea, but, I don’t know; it’s was kind of weird afterwards. I felt bad about what I did.”

“Did you enjoy it?” She looked at him searching his face.

Harry turned and looked at Ron. Ron looked up at Harry and then back at Hermione.

“Yea, I guess. Yea, I did.”

“Then what’s wrong with it? If we both enjoyed it, why is it wrong?”

“I guess it’s not. I just don’t want you to think that I don’t respect you or care about you or anything like that,” Ron said as if trying to work it all out for himself as well as for her.

“That’s why I was so angry, you were treating her like she was your property and not a person,” Harry explained to Ron.

“Maybe sometimes I want to be treated like that,” Hermione said looking back and forth between the both of them.
“I guess I never thought about you like that; you’re special Hermione,” Harry replied softly.

“You’re both special to me, but I think I’m mature enough to know what I want, and its more than just making love, whatever the hell that means. I can’t help that my body responds to certain things. I know you guys probably think I’m mental, but that’s just what I like,” she said looking at both of them with a hopeful question of their acceptance in her eyes.

Harry looked at her for a long moment before speaking, “I really do want to make love to you, Hermione, I meant that. But that doesn’t mean I don’t want to…do other stuff too. We love you no matter what,” he said the last in a matter of fact manner.

Ron nodded in agreement. “Yeah, Hermione, what you like is what you like; you shouldn’t feel ashamed to be yourself around us.”

Hermione let out a relieved sigh, and gave them both a big smile.

“So, let’s make a new pact,” Harry proposed.

They both looked at him expectantly.

“That we’ll be honest about what we want and not judge each other for it no matter what it is.”

“Are we just talking about sex?” Ron asked.

“No!” Harry and Hermione answered together before laughing.

“Agreed,” Hermione said.

“Yea, okay, you can count me in on that,” Ron said.

“And me as well,” Harry said smiling. He was happy they had gotten that out; it felt like a new start to a different place in their relationship.

Hermione walked over to give Harry a big hug and pulled Ron into the hug.

She pulled back to look up in Harry’s eyes. “I’m sorry. I was so wrapped up in myself; I didn’t really realise what you may have been going through watching us last night.”

She began to kiss him on the cheek, moving up to his forehead, and back down to his cheek and then to his lips softly. When she stopped, he looked up at Ron who was looking pitifully guilty.

“Yea, I’m sorry too, mate. I didn’t know you were feeling that way.”

“Why else would I be upset?” Harry asked incredulously.

“Well…I thought you were mad that I got to be Hermione's first or something like that.”

Harry shook his head and with small smile. “I’m not like you, Ron.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Ron asked, suddenly serious and tense.

“See, there you go again! Everything is a competition or battle with you.”

Ron put his hands in his pockets looking down. “Yea, well, you’re not perfect,” he mumbled.

“I know, and I have you to remind me of that,” Harry said with a smile, reaching up to ruffle Ron’s
hair with his hand.

“Seriously, I’m sorry.”

“Well, you guys could always make it up to me,” he said arching his eyebrow looking at both of them.

“Yeah?” Hermione said running her hands over his chest and gripping his belt buckle through his robes.

“Yeah,” Harry said with a smirk.

Ron leaned in and whispered, “How’d you like that apology exactly?”

Ron’s hot breath was on his ear as the redhead began to kiss along his neck, sliding his hand from his back to his arse. Harry let out a small moan and then grabbed the back of Ron’s head, pulling him back so that he could look into his eyes. “You can start by taking a seat.”

Ron looked at him confused as Harry pushed Ron hard towards an iron arm chair propped against the dungeon wall a few feet away.

“Sit down, Ron,” Harry ordered, looking at him firmly. Ron finally lowered his gaze and looked back at the chair and sat down before looking back up at Harry.

Harry pointed his wand at Ron in the chair, to which the redhead inhaled nervously in anticipation.

“Incarcerous.”

Ropes appeared from the wood back of the chair and from the legs and wrapped around Ron tightly.

“Harry, what are you doing?” Hermione asked nervously.

“You said you wanted to make it up to me, right, mate?”

Ron nodded slowly, looking up at Harry with a worried question on his face.

“Well, now it’s your turn to watch.”

Ron’s eyes darted to Hermione who looked at him sympathetically before Harry grabbed her around the waist pulling her closer to him to kiss. He leaned into her sliding his tongue into her mouth. Hermione pushed herself on her tiptoes to meet his kiss, running her tongue over his lips before slipping it under his lip to suck it.

She began to moan into his mouth and grind her hips against his hardening erection. Harry responded by pulling her tighter to him as he returned her gyration with his own. She broke the kiss and began slowly run her mouth down his chin, neck, upper chest, Ron’s eyebrows went up, and he began to squirm in the chair as Hermione pulled off her robe, undid her tie and unbuttoned her shirt before pulling it off. Harry reached down and pulled off his robe, unbuttoning his shirt.

With each button he undid, Hermione would follow with her mouth, kissing newly exposed flesh as she went. By the time Harry had slid off his underwear, Hermione had slid down to her knees in front of his cock and was about to give it the same treatment she had given the rest of his body when he interrupted her by pulling her head back harshly by the hair.

“I want to see those beautiful tits of yours while you’re sucking my cock.”
Ron looked at Harry in surprise, and Hermione’s mouth dropped open. Harry had never been blunt about what he wanted before, and it was like he had flipped on a switch in her cunt, which she could feel growing needy with wetness. He let her hair go, and she nodded her understanding of his wish. She was about to take off her bra, when Harry reached down and slapped her hand away. He reached down into her bra and pulled out her tits, pinching one of her nipples harshly, causing her to hiss.

“Want it rough, right?” Harry said, not letting go of her nipple as he took his free hand and grabbed the top of her head again. He pulled her hair toward him, guiding her mouth onto his cock as he thrust it as far into her mouth as it could go.

Hermione coughed a little as she tried to adjust to the length and girth of his cock in her mouth. She gripped his thighs and allowed him to fuck her mouth as his hand pulled her head forward. She could feel tears starting to form as his cock continued to hit the back of her throat.

“You like that, Hermione? Huh?” He asked in a low tone that he barely recognised himself. Hermione nodded as much as she could with Harry holding a fist full of her hair by the root in his hand, looking up at him. He heard Ron let out a low moan.

The sight of a topless Hermione on her knees, beginning to cry from nearly choking on his cock, as she looked up at him to show him she was enjoying it, was too much for Harry. He let go of her hair, pushing her back hard; he opened his mouth to ask her something but he stopped himself.

Hermione nodded in response anyway and lay on her back, opening her legs, running her hands along her breasts and down to her pussy as she began to finger herself in preparation for him. Ron groaned and Harry paused, totally enthralled with the sight of her playing with herself in preparation for him.

“I thought you wanted to give Ron a good show?”

Hermione looked up at Ron, with a teasing smile and licked her lips seductively before Harry dropped to his knees in front of her.Grabbing her legs, he pulled her closer to him even as he spread them farther apart until their centres met.

He pushed into her hard and let out a satisfied groan as he began to pump his hips into her as if trying to see how hard she could take him.

Harry grunted. “So fucking tight.”

Hermione moaned and whimpered in response, wrapping her legs around his waist and then higher around the middle of his back as if trying to pull him into her deeper.

“Harder, Harry, please!”

Harry began to slam into her relentlessly, grabbing her arse, trying to hold onto her, and keep her steady, while making sure he was burying himself into her completely each time.

“Mmm, yes, Harry, fuck me; fuck me good.” Hermione moaned before Harry moved in for a sloppy kiss that ended with her sucking on his tongue.

When he pulled back and looked at her writhing underneath him, her tits bouncing with every harsh thrust he gave, it took all his control not to lose it right then.

“Is this what you want, Hermione? Want me to fuck the shit out of you?”

“Ooooh…oooh gods yes, Harry, yes!” Hermione began to whimper as she met each of his thrusts
with her own.

Harry was losing control fast, but he wanted to make sure that she came first. He needed to hear her come to make it good.

“Fuck,” he heard Ron groan.

“Come for me, Hermione. Come all over my cock,” he grunted in her ear as he dug his nails into her arse harder. He wasn’t going to make it much longer, and when Hermione began to grip his back tighter with her legs and squeeze his arm painfully as she cried out her release.

Harry lost it then and paused in mid thrust as he came hard, making an unintelligible sound as before falling on top of her.

“Wow,” Hermione said, smiling up at the ceiling.

“Yea, wow,” Harry said in agreement, rolling off of her and onto his back and then looking up at Ron who was looking quite uncomfortable in his arousal within the confines of the ropes in the iron chair.

Ron looked down at him with pleading look on his face.

“Harry, please, I can’t go into Potions class like this.”

Harry looked back over at Hermione who was grinning from ear to ear. “Don’t be cruel, Harry.”

Harry rolled his eyes and smirked before crawling over to Ron and rising onto his knees to relieve him before they hurried off to class.

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He watched them as they began to file into his classroom. They began to file in the usual House cliques, talking excitedly about random shit that often annoyed him to tears. No matter what the year, the students who attended Hogwarts hadn’t changed: Same gossip, same immature turf wars, and the same cliques. Yes, it was definitely time for a change.

While the students were chattering in a carefree manner as they entered, their voices became hushed whispers, and eventually died when they saw that their Potions Professor was already seated in his chair. Everyone went to their seats promptly, opening their books and looking around as if waiting for something to happen. It was unusual for Snape to be waiting for them. It usually was the other way around.

Once the last student had entered, he closed the door sharply with his wand and studied their faces for a moment. There was a palpable anticipation in the air as they waited for him to speak. He stood up slowly and began to walk around.

“For the next several weeks you will be working on a protective shielding potion.” Hermione’s hand shot up. Despite staring at her directly, Snape continued ignoring her completely.

“In addition to working on this potion, I expect a report on its properties, uses, and ways it can be nullified at the end of your project. The report is to be no less than two feet long.”

Hermione’s hand remained in the air. Snape clicked his teeth and stared at her with contempt. “Ms. Granger?”
“Professor, protective shielding potions aren’t covered in our textbook, and they aren’t even on the reading list for seventh-years.”

“Your point, Ms. Granger?”

“Well, they are particularly involved, and there isn’t enough time to complete the work that would be required to produce such a potion within the time allotted for class. Is there a particular reason why we’re doing this project?”

“Yes.”

The students looked up at him, waiting for him to answer as Snape rounded on Hermione’s desk and leaned forward in her face.

“10 points from Gryffindor. Because I said so.”

Hermione couldn’t stand Snape staring at her as if she were some sort of disgusting parasite that wouldn’t die; she looked away and privately cursed herself for expecting a real answer to her question.

“Now as Ms. Granger has just so annoyingly pointed out, in addition to using class time, you will also be required to work on your own outside of class in order to complete this project on time. Also, your textbook is absolutely useless for this particular project. Therefore, I will give you a list of ingredients and enough information on how to begin this potion, but you are expected to conduct your own independent research about how to make sure it progresses properly. There are several books that have been placed on reserve in the library for your use, and I suggest you do so.”

There was general grumbling throughout as people rolled their eyes when Snape continued, “I have also decided that a change in collaboration is in order for the duration of this project.”

The class groaned in unison at the announcement. Naturally, they would not be left up to their own devices to choose who they worked with; this was Snape after all and he seemed hell-bent in making the class as unpleasant as possible, unless it was a Slytherin, of course.

“Silence. Another sound out of any of you and not only will you get new partners, but I’ll extend the report by five feet.”

Dead silence hovered in the classroom as the students stared up quietly at him, waiting for the worst.

Snape began to walk slowly around the room, looking down menacingly at various faces. He stopped in front of Neville, who was visibly trembling, and smirked. “Longbottom, you will work with Nott.”

Nott turned around to look at Neville and gave an exaggerated eye roll. Neville gulped.

“Ms. Clark, yes, you’ll work with Ms. Parkinson.”

Pansy shook her head and began making hand signs that conveyed she was about to be sick to her friends, who giggled before Snape threw her a threatening glance that ended it.

“Ms. Granger, although it was hard to imagine who would be able to bear your insufferable disposition, I believe Mr. Malfoy may be up to the task.”

Hermione’s face flushed, and she tried to think of a rational argument for why such collaboration would not be in the best interest of anyone.
“I…I…well…”

Draco was appalled; he thought that Snape liked him. Why would he do this?

“But, Sir, surely when you say collaboration you were hoping to see a finished product. I assure you that if—”

“If you and Ms. Granger cannot work together, I assure you that you both will receive T’s for this assignment.”

Draco’s jaw went tight as he ground his teeth together like he always did when he didn’t get his way. Poking fun at her here and there upon chance meeting was one thing, actually being forced to be in her company for what could amount to several hours a week was an entirely different matter. He turned and gave her his most hateful glare. Hermione looked back at him in disbelief at her luck before turning back around to find Harry and Ron both trying to offer supportive frowns.

“Weasley and Potter, you two can continue to work together. I wouldn’t want to inflict either one of you on the rest of the class.”

He continued to make seemingly random assignments and then instructed everyone to move to sit next to their new partners. Neither Hermione nor Draco budge out of their chairs.

Hermione let out a huff when she saw that Draco wasn’t going to get up to move next to her. Draco folded his arms and leaned back in his chair.

Snape handed each pair the list of ingredients and directions for starting the potion. When he saw that neither one of them had moved toward each other, he handed Draco the list and looked back at Hermione challengingly before taking a seat in his chair to look over the class. Draco turned and looked at Hermione smugly before she finally begrudgingly got up and walked over to sit next to him.

“I can’t believe we have to work together,” she said more to herself than him.

“Don’t act as if you’re not excited, Granger. I’d say working with me is an improvement over your current company,” he said, glancing over at Ron and Harry.

Hermione was determined to nip this in the bud before it even started. “Think you’re funny, do you? Let’s get something straight, I expect you to pull your weight; I won’t tolerate disrespect, and if we can get as much done as soon as possible, we won’t have to work together as long or as hard, so pay attention to what I say.”

“Granger, if you think you’re going to call the shots on this assignment, then you’re in serious need of a reality check; in fact, I’d wager, you’d like it if I’d called the shots.”

“Excuse me?”

“That’s right. I think you want someone to tell you what to do, which I don’t have any problem doing.”

Hermione could feel herself becoming fidgety and self-conscious, and began to glance around to avoid looking at him.

“Now, we need a few ingredients, which I’m sure you won’t mind getting for us, will you?”

“I’m not your ‘fetch it girl’, Malfoy! If you want ingredients, you’ll get it yourself!”
“Funny, I thought you just said if we work together, we can get this done quickly,” he said loudly as if he wanted Snape to hear him try to reason with her to be cooperative.

Snape looked over at Hermione with one eyebrow raised.

Hermione looked back at Draco and exhaled loudly. “Fine. What do we need?”

Draco smiled, “Right, then, let’s see…a bottle of sage, a bezoar, a leaf from a belladonna, daisy buds, two tubeworms, and vial of pomegranate should be a good start.”

“Let me see the sheet,” she demanded.

Draco gave her a look of mock hurt. “You don’t trust me?”

“Hardly.”

He handed her the list of ingredients airily.

She quickly looked it over, becoming more agitated as she skimmed the list. “You realise we’ll probably have to go to the forest to get the rest as the potion progresses, right?”

“We’ve yet to even start, and it looks like we won’t anytime soon as long as you insist on talking.”

Hermione let out a low groan and rose to walk to the storage closet. Once inside, Harry and Ron quickly joined her.

“You okay?” Ron asked.

“NO! You see who I have to work with, don’t you?”

“Yea, sorry ‘bout that,” Harry mumbled, looking at her with pity.

“It’s okay, Harry; I just want to get this over with as soon as possible.”

“Yea, well, let us know if he gives you any trouble,” Ron said, placing his hand on her back.

“Thanks,” she said and smiled warmly.

When she returned to the table with the ingredients, Draco was twirling his writing quill in his hand as he watched her walk towards the table.

“That was the quickest ménage a trios I’ve ever seen; then again, I shouldn’t be surprised considering who you did it with.”

“You’re disgusting. Here,” she said as she pushed the ingredients towards him and took her seat.

“Good girl,” he said with a slow drawl, staring at her.

Hermione could feel her cheeks flush again, and looked around, unsure of why she was suddenly feeling exposed.

“How about we split up tasks? Since you seem to be the most…anal—” He smirked, “—I’ll read the directions, and you mix the ingredients.

“Fine, whatever.”

“You like taking direction don’t you, Granger?”
“What?”

“What the hell are you talking about, Malfoy? I think more on my own in one day than you do in an entire week.”

“I doubt that, Granger, but you need to learn to listen better. I didn’t say you weren’t capable of thinking. I was simply pointing out that there’s a difference between doing and being.”

“Do you always talk this strangely?”

He didn’t respond; he simply sat looking back at her with a faint smile on his face. Hermione felt herself growing warm, and once again broke eye contact, glancing around to avoid his stare.

“Right. Just trying to make conversation,” he said with fake innocence.

“Well, spare me.”

“Sure, Mudblood, now we need two drops of—”

“You will refrain from calling me that as long as we’re working together!”

Draco drew his face near hers, glancing over at the table and picking up a vial as if he were studying its contents before quickly leaning over to whisper in her ear.

“I’ll call you whatever I like, Mudblood, and you’ll be a good girl and sit there as if it’s your name so you can get your precious O,” he said the last breathing on her neck before pulling back and clearing his throat loudly as if interrupted.

“Really Granger, get your ears checked; I’m not in the habit of repeating myself. I said we need two drops of pomegranate.”

Hermione froze and felt her breath hitch as she looked up at Professor Snape only to see him watching her as if waiting for her to do something to give him an excuse to take points from her. Normally, she would have told Draco where he could stick his wand and threatened to hex his bollocks off, but here, in Snape’s classroom, where she was in constant danger of being humiliated and treated unfairly, Draco indeed had the upper hand.

But it was much more than that; it was the third time in the few minutes she had been paired with Malfoy that she had felt vulnerable and exposed like an open book. It was the way he had said Mudblood as if it were a pet name, the way he had breathed on her neck, and the way he had just pointed out, as if he knew her, that he could say whatever he wanted and she would adjust in order to get the “O” that she had come to rely on to prove her worthiness as a witch. All of it had affected her in a way that made her feel… aroused.

Whether or not she was actually a masochist, she wasn’t sure, but she was sure that becoming aroused by Draco Malfoy calling her a Mudblood was beyond mental: it was just flat out wrong. She suddenly felt dirty, and couldn’t breathe.

With a shaky hand, she reached down and picked up her bag before suddenly standing up, looking at a Snape determinedly, and turning quickly and running out the door.

“Ms. Granger! Get back here!” Snape called after her.
But Hermione was gone, and Harry and Ron were both throwing death stares and scowls at Draco, who was wearing his usual smug smirk.

“I can’t say that I’m surprised, Professor; it’s obvious that Granger has trouble working with others.”

“What did you do to her, Malfoy?” Ron barked, rising out of his seat.

“Fifty points from Gryffindor! Mr. Weasley, I suggest you sit down this minute.”

Ron slowly sat down, never taking his eyes from Draco’s until the blond turned around in his seat, keeping his back to Ron for the duration of class.

Snape finally dismissed the class and waited for it to empty out until he saw Draco rising.

“Malfoy, a word with you, if you please,” Snape called before the boy could leave the classroom.

Harry looked back and gave a suspicious glance at Snape asking Draco to stay after class after the incident with Hermione. Snape looked at Potter blankly.

“Taken one Bludger too many to the head, Mr. Potter? I clearly said Malfoy’s name, not yours.”

Harry gave a quick glance at Malfoy and back at Snape before turning around to catch up to Ron.

When the students had cleared out, he turned his back to Draco as he spoke.

“You’re going home this weekend, am I correct?”

“I- yes,” Draco replied, a little surprised Snape knew and now curious about what was going on.

“I’ll be there as well.”

“Oh?”

“Draco, when we return, we’ll have a separate conversation about what was said. The most important thing you should know at this time is that everything isn’t always what it seems.”

Draco looked back at him with slight puzzlement.

“Now I need your word that whatever is said between us, stays between us. Can I count on you for that?”

“Yes, sir, of course.”

“All right then, well, I’ll see you at the Manor this weekend. In the meantime, take your new partnership with Granger… seriously,”

Draco nodded with the same puzzled look on his face before Snape dismissed him. Once Draco had left, Snape sank back into his chair staring at the door, with the awareness that this was going to be a difficult and trying year, and in many ways it had only just begun.
Draco was baffled about what was going on. Why would Professor Snape be coming to his home? He had cringed at the foreboding tone the professor had used and the cryptic way he had said that things weren’t always what they seemed. What in the world could he be talking about? Whatever it was, it sounded serious. It had to be, considering that his home was no longer his; it had become headquarters for the maniac. He blamed his father for no longer having a home. Lucius placed far too much faith in the Dark Lord’s beliefs and goals, which to Draco’s mind, were more a romantic theory than feasible practice.

And what was this business Snape had said about taking his new partnership with Granger seriously? She had nothing to do with his world. Somewhere in the dark corners of his mind, he was terrified by what Snape had meant by that. He feared the possibility that he would be asked to do something that he hadn’t given serious contemplation to since his father had told him he’d have to take the Dark Mark. He couldn’t wrap his head around the thought of killing or seriously hurting someone to prove his loyalty to something he wasn’t even sure he believed in, even if that someone was a Mudblood like Granger.

His mind pushed the thought away quickly, instead settling on the memory of the brief, but strangely intriguing, interaction he had had with Granger. Although he had anticipated feeling a sense of satisfaction from making her feel uncomfortable with his new-found knowledge of her sexual proclivities, he had been surprised to find her response to the teasing so intoxicating. While her reactions had been barely noticeable to anyone who may have been observing her, to him, they had seemed amplified and extremely sexy. He replayed how she had tried in vain to challenge his stare only to have repeatedly lowered her gaze self-consciously. She had quietly squirmed in her seat when he had spoken to her, and the blush that had crept onto her face every time he had hit an unexpected nerve had been exciting to him. The way she had held her breath and had trembled ever so slightly when he had whispered in her ear had been his favourite.
When Draco reached his room, he began packing immediately and shrunk his trunk before lying down for a quick nap. An hour later, he woke up and washed up before taking the stairs with his trunk and cloak to the common room. He scanned the room for Crabbe and Goyle, expecting them to amuse him while he waited for his father, but they were entertaining themselves; the raunchy odour of flatulence fogged the room as they held a first-year in place, tormenting him. He rolled his eyes at their routine; they really needed a new hobby. He noticed that Blaise Zabini was sitting across from them, apparently ignoring the cries of the tortured boy in front of him as he read a book. They weren’t exactly friends, but Draco found that the dark-skinned boy provided more stimulating company than Crabbe and Goyle. Zabini didn’t look up when he took a seat, so Draco, irritated with the lack of attention, spoke, demanding the other Slytherin’s attention.

“How goes it, Zabini?”

Zabini didn’t look up from his book as he replied, “It doesn’t. I’m absolutely bored, as usual.”

Draco smirked, masking his irritation with Zabini’s refusal to even look at him. “Yes, well, at least I get to get out of this prison for a bit; I’m going home this weekend,” he said proudly, as if he were actually looking forward to it.

“Oh? What for?” Zabini asked as he put his book down into his lap, looking curiously at Draco. They locked eyes for several moments. Zabini’s probing and questioning. Draco’s were neutral and defensive. He was searching for an attractive lie to make Zabini jealous, but he hesitated at the challenge and looked away when Zabini’s lips curled at the edges.

“Give your father my regards, then,” he said casually, and his lips pursed tightly as he picked up his book to resume reading.

Draco ground his teeth and turned to watch Crabbe and Goyle continue their torture of the first-year on the couch. Once they finally noticed that Draco had taken a seat across from them, they released the boy and greeted him with enthusiasm. Draco listened with mild interest as they bumbled through the latest rumours, recounting their meaningless adventures. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed Pansy sitting nearby with her friends, talking. He glanced over at her, and she promptly looked up at him as if waiting for his acknowledgement. Draco smirked and nodded, giving her permission to join him, which she quickly did, squeezing herself between an annoyed Zabini and himself on the couch.

“Hi, Draco, how was your day?” she asked excitedly as she moved into his personal space, snaking her arm around his shoulder and running her hand up through his hair.

Draco exhaled, allowing her to pet him; it felt good. He turned his head, studying her; she looked so eager, so desperate to be noticed by him. His thoughts went to back to Granger, who he seemed to have the opposite effect upon, and who would probably remain disgusted by his company, no matter how many of her submissive buttons he managed to push. Not that it mattered anyway; he couldn’t… no, he wouldn’t touch her. But he did want to see her squirm again, and the fact that she would probably always struggle against the desire to give in to it made him want it even more. As he looked back at Pansy with both pity and amusement, an incredibly terrible and wonderful idea occurred to him. Pansy looked back at Draco in puzzlement as a strange smile crossed his face.

His thoughts were interrupted when a small third-year came running into the common room. “Draco, your father is here.”

Draco nodded his leave to his company as he stood, flicking his wand to Summon his trunk before pulling on his cloak. He let out a small sigh as he strode out the common room door and continued to walk down what suddenly seemed like an incredibly long corridor toward the entrance of the castle.
When he got there, Lucius was standing stiffly, looking around as if they were in a cesspool instead of a castle before turning his nose down to meet his son’s eyes.

“I told you to be ready when I arrived,” he said with an eyebrow raised.

“You didn’t say what time you would be arriving, Father.”

Lucius narrowed his eyes before giving one last look over the castle. “I wonder what they could possibly be doing with our donations? It looks exactly the same, if not worse, than it did twenty years ago.”

Draco stood quietly, waiting for his father to motion for them to leave. He followed in his father’s shadow, thinking that he looked like a living statue, someone to emulate. Knowing that one day he would be expected to act the same way, Draco still loved the man. He was his father, after all. But he didn’t want to be like that.

The callous manner in which his father conducted himself extended to how he related to those closest to him, even his mother, who was devoted to Lucius no matter how cold and distant he treated her. Sometimes, Draco saw a lot of Pansy in her, and he didn’t like it. But that was also his father’s way of teaching Draco how women should be properly handled.

As a result, Draco held a cynicism and wariness about the workings of the world, which belied his age, all for the sake of becoming a proper pure-blood who should hold the responsibility of not only carrying on the Malfoy name but fighting for the preservation of pure-blood culture in a war he didn’t fully believe in or even entirely understand.

And while he felt a sense of pride when his classmates referred to him as the “Slytherin Prince,” he had to admit to himself that there were times when he didn’t really live up to that title because he never seemed to be able to live up to the expectations of the one man who he wanted to please.

Once they had Apparated to the end of the Manor’s driveway, they began a slow walk up the path.

At first, Draco was confused about why they had Apparated at the edge of the Manor and not within the Manor, but then he remembered the special wards that were now up on his home and figured his father wanted to talk to him before they entered.

They walked in silence for a few moments before Lucius broke it.

“How is school?”

“It’s fine, Father; I’ve spoken to all of my professors, and I should be getting O’s in nearly everything this term.”

“Nearly?”

Draco clenched his fist at his side and kept his face neutral, focusing instead on the path in front of them.

“Well, I may get an E in Care of Magical Creatures, but as you know, that great oaf Hagrid has it in for me.”

“Yes, I remember. We’ll just have to make sure that the Governors remind Dumbledore that favouritism will not be tolerated.”

The irony of this statement was not lost on Draco, who inwardly groaned at the thought that his
father once again would intervene on his behalf to secure his advantage at Hogwarts. Whether he got an “O” or not, Draco wanted to earn his grades to show he was just as smart as Granger or anyone else who received high marks. It was another way of Lucius controlling him and his future, reminding him that he was expected to “win,” whatever that meant, that he had to play by certain rules while breaking others.

Draco nodded.

“The reason why I brought you home is because there is a matter of great importance to the Dark Lord that you must attend to. He has asked me to discuss it with you in his presence.”

Lucius allowed a few moments to lapse as if waiting for Draco to respond. When he didn’t, he continued, “Draco, it is absolutely essential that you show the utmost level of respect and eagerness to do what I ask you to do when he arrives, is that clear?”

“Yes, Father.”

~~~~*~~~~

They dedicate their lives
To running all of his
He tries to please them all
This bitter man he is
Throughout his life the same
He’s battled constantly
This fight he cannot win
A tired man they see no longer cares…
What I’ve felt, what I’ve known,
Never shined through in what I’ve shown…

~~~~*~~~~

Ron ran out of Potions once it had been dismissed and headed straight to the common room, looking for Hermione. When he didn’t find her there, he called up to her from the bottom of the stairs. Hermione came down looking very troubled.

“Hermione, what happened?”

“Ron, please just go; I need to be alone right now.”

“You sure you don’t want to talk about it?”

“Ron, please, I’ll come and look for you and Harry when I’m feeling a bit better, promise, ‘k?”

Ron shook his head helplessly before turning around to fall onto the couch, boiling with anger and frustration at both Malfoy and Hermione. He knew that Malfoy had done something to hurt her once again, and it bothered him that she didn’t feel comfortable enough to talk about it with him. She said that she would talk to him about it when she was ready, but what that really meant was that when she came up with a way to tell him—so that she could control how he would react—she would tell him. He wasn’t stupid, despite what some would believe. He knew people manipulated what and how they presented things to him so that they could control his response.

Ron was smart enough to know that no matter how much he tried, he would always live with the reputation of being a Weasley, of always being compared to his older brothers. It was enough to make him rise to the challenge of proving people wrong or feign apathy to get the pressure off his
back.

He loved his family very much and would die for each and every one of them, but that didn’t stop him from resenting them, from wishing sometimes that he had been born into a different family. Bill was the handsome one, Charlie was the brave one, Percy was the smart one, Fred and George were the funny and inventive ones, and Ginny was the much anticipated beautiful little girl they had all been grateful for after a long line of boys. Where did that leave Ron?

Harry’s comment about him always being ready to battle and compete had hit a nerve. Ron knew one of his most annoying traits was his constant need to prove himself. His fantasies of the whole school singing his praises by calling him their king for his Quidditch skills was really about everyone acknowledging him being his own man. In those fantasies he was the one in control and something more than just another Weasley.

And there were also those brief moments he shared alone with Harry when didn’t have to worry about being chastised or lectured. When they were alone Harry treated him like royalty, affirming just how special Ron was with every kiss and caress.

It excited him that Hermione was willing to let him have that same type of control. She had always overpowered every conversation they had had about a topic, and even when he knew better than she did about a subject, he would never try to show off or humiliate her. He admired her intelligence and strength, which made her giving him control even more special.

For this reason he still felt guilty about how he had taken her virginity. He knew that what he had done had been driven by his insecurity, but he couldn’t pretend that it hadn’t turned him on to see her do what he told her to do. Controlling her like that could get addictive, easily.

Harry plopped down beside him on the couch, startling Ron out of his thoughts.

“What’s wrong? Did you talk to her?”

“Yea, she said she needs some time alone; she’ll come and find us when she’s ready.”

“Oh. What do you think happened?”

“Who knows. You know Malfoy, he probably called her a Mud—You know, the M word or something like that,” Ron said, blushing at almost saying the word out loud.

“What if he threatened her?”

“You think he would?”

Harry shrugged.

“I swear, Harry, I’m goin’ to pound his face in one day.”

Harry watched Ron closely before smiling slightly at him. “You want to get a little extra practice in before Quidditch practice?”

Ron looked up and saw the look in Harry’s eyes.

“Yeah,” he said with a soft smile.

~~~~*~~~~

The old man then prepares
To die regretfully
That old man here is me…
… Never be, never see
Won't see what might have been

Never free, never me
So I dub thee unforgiven.

~~~~~~~~*~~~~~~~~

After Harry and Ron got suited up, they headed out to the pitch to throw the Quaffle around a few times. They had done this a few times before in an effort to make their time alone together look less suspicious before sneaking off to a dark area that they had scouted out behind the stands.

Once behind the stands, they immediately moved in for a heated kiss. It quickly became more intense as Ron pushed his tongue deeper into Harry’s mouth, probing it, moaning as Harry’s tongue pressed against his equally demanding, his hands grabbing at Ron’s rapidly hardening cock through his robes. Harry kissed him back fiercely while grabbing Ron’s cock through his robe to communicate his own need.

Ron moved his mouth to Harry’s neck where he sucked for a moment before undoing his belt buckle to free his erection. He moved his mouth to Harry’s throat, his tongue tracing abstract lines before he bit the taut flesh, sucking as he pushed the other wizard’s Quidditch robe aside. A lust-laden grunt of pleasure vibrated from Harry’s throat, and Ron nipped the edge of his jaw. He had to get to Harry’s erection. The sounds coming from the other’s lips told Ron that Harry needed him to touch him just as much as he needed to touch.

“I want to taste you,” Ron said in a throaty whisper and guided Harry to the ground, settling between his legs.

Harry ran his hand through the redhead’s hair, pushing his face down to his crotch before helping him take his cock out, canting his hips toward Ron’s eager lips. He reached out to grab Ron’s hand and held onto it tightly as Ron began to suck eagerly.

Ron moved his mouth over the length of the shaft, tasting the salty fluid that gathered at the tip, faster with each moan and whimper, encouraged by the sound of Harry’s contentment.

“Need you inside of me …now,” Harry moaned, his words drawn out with the tightening in his lower abdomen.

Ron continued to suck for a few more moments before lifting his head up and nodding as he pulled Harry’s pants down to his boots.

“How do you want it?” Ron asked him, his voice husky and raw with the same need as Harry’s.

“Whatever way you want it,” Harry replied back, biting his lip. He let out a soft moan when Ron smiled.

Harry rose to his knees and fell forward on his hands as Ron picked up his wand and positioned himself behind him before whispering, “Umorio.”

Harry let out a small moan as he felt his passage being lubricated with a warm, slick wetness that left his cock even harder in anticipation of what was to follow. Ron put his hands on Harry’s shoulders and pulled him back gently as he pushed forward slowly. Harry closed his eyes and let his head fall as Ron entered him.
He set a painfully fast pace, and Harry rode him hard, letting his body succumb to the pleasure of Ron’s touch, matching each thrust by rocking his hips backward. His body tingled, and he moaned as Ron grazed his prostate, making him weak-kneed.

Ron reached around to help quicken Harry’s release so that it would be close to his own as he continued to thrust into him, breathing heavy and pulling Harry harder toward him as he neared his climax. Harry exploded over Ron’s hand, arching with a loud moan, and he felt himself being spread even wider as Ron pushed into him harder and faster. And then Ron grunted deeply as he emptied himself into Harry, falling over his back as he tried to catch his breath. They remained like that for a few moments before Ron pulled out and did a cleaning charm on them both.

Harry turned around for him to do his front and then fell back against the metal leg of the stand they were under. Ron looked at him lovingly for a moment before kissing him softly on the lips and pulling him close. Harry smiled and let himself be held as he curled into Ron’s body closer.

He enjoyed it when Ron was inside of him. It didn’t bother him that Ron rarely offered himself because he knew that Ron had never become comfortable with taking it. Although he never actually verbalised it to Ron, they both knew that it pleased Harry to be under Ron like that. Harry understood what Hermione wanted because there were times when he, too, wanted to be taken. The wizarding world had mistakenly assigned too much power and control to him over the things that had happened to him. Sometimes all he wanted to do was to give it all back.

The only time he felt as if he were really a hero was when he caught the Snitch, and even then he had a team behind him. The burden of being regarded as a hero when he didn’t even feel as if he could really even save himself, let alone those around him, was too heavy. In those times he was grateful for Ron, who would give him permission to be powerless and vulnerable. Even if it was brief and sporadic, there was a peaceful relief in giving up control to his best friend.

He enjoyed both of his lovers equally, and if he ever had to choose between the two, he didn’t think that he could. While Ron brought out his longing to be looked after and protected, Hermione offered the opposite. She brought out his protective nature, and there were times when she made him feel like he could be the saviour that everyone already thought he was. She was encouraging, and the fact that she was brilliant only made it that much more meaningful when she placed faith in his ability to do something. Taking control over her the way he had earlier that day had felt better than he had thought it should, and he still had mixed feelings about treating her the way he had, but he couldn’t deny that he wanted to do it again.

Experiencing pleasure, laughing, being surrounded by people who loved him, and having a good time was very important. Death was a constant cloud hanging over his head. Dumbledore had become like a father he never got a chance to know. Then there was Sirius, the older brother he longed Dudley could have been, but he had been more than that; he was family, the only real family Harry really had left. And he, too, had been snuffed out, just like his parents. He blamed himself many times for all of their deaths. If he had never been born, they would probably all still be alive. There were other times when he would grow tired of his self-loathing, and turn his anger outward, wishing that those who had killed them would suffer excruciating pain before dropping dead in front of him.

He hated them; but most of all he hated him. He hated him with every fibre of his being. In Harry’s eyes, all that Voldemort was, all that he stood for, and all of those who followed him and sympathised with his crusade were culpable for the fate of his loved ones.

But in Ron’s arms, he could forget about all of that briefly. It felt good to be held, to be loved, and to have the physical proof of that love surrounded him. All Harry really wanted more than anything
was to know that he would always be loved, that he wasn’t inadequate because he had grown up
without it and to know that those who loved him would love him as fiercely and unconditionally as
he loved them.

He was suddenly shaken out of his content daze after unconsciously smacking his forehead as a
familiar and uncomfortable burning began to grow across his scar.

Ron flinched and worry crossed his face. “What’s wrong, Harry?”

Friday and Saturday had passed without much event, and Draco was becoming anxious to get the
meeting with the Dark Lord over with and be back at Hogwarts. If anything, his visit home had
confirmed that being a Death Eater seemed more like voluntary slavery than a noble call to duty. He
was able to enjoy a few small quiet moments with his mother and for that he was grateful.

A house-elf appeared in his room early Sunday morning and requested that he go down to the dining
room promptly. When Draco entered the room, he found Professor Snape, his father, his aunt
Bellatrix, Pettigrew, and the rest of the Death Eater crew seated at the long dining room table. His
father and Snape were seated side by side near the head of the table.

“Have a seat, Draco,” his father said, motioning for him to sit across from him.

There was no conversation, only silence, which indicated to Draco that they were all waiting for the
loon to arrive. He had to tell himself not to roll his eyes or look at his father or Snape for fear he
would break his mask and begin to ask the many questions he had thought of over the past few days.

The air became noticeably thick as everyone at the table looked up at the door and then began
standing. The Dark Lord entered the room, gliding past each one of its occupants, pausing to look
over their faces as he inched closer to the head of the table. Everyone stood there, waiting for him to
take his seat before they sat down. Draco was seated next to the head on the left; his father was
across from him on the Dark Lord’s right. Lucius bowed his head when the Dark Lord looked at
him, then kept his eyes fixed on his son’s for the remainder of the meeting.

Draco felt himself trembling slightly and fought to maintain his usual composure. No matter how
cool he wanted to appear, he didn’t dare delude himself that at this moment he was okay. He
couldn’t stand the presence of this man, this thing, this maniac, in his home. His mind screamed a
thousand obscenities at the stupidity of his father for allowing his beliefs and adherence to his vow to
the man even though it placed him and his family at risk.

His eyes remained focused on his father’s face.

“Look at me, boy; I don’t bite,” the monster hissed.

Draco turned his eyes slowly from his father to meet the eyes of the Dark Lord. It was all he could
do not to throw up as he looked him straight in the face, his red eyes glaring and piercing as if intent
upon reading his very soul. When he bowed his head slightly in deference, the Dark Lord chuckled
before turning to Lucius, giving him permission to speak.

“Draco, the Dark Lord has given you a very important assignment. I understand that Severus has
paired you to work with the Mudblood, Hermione Granger, in Potions?”

Draco nodded, glancing quickly from Professor Snape to his father and the Dark Lord before settling
on his father’s face once more.
“You are to use this to your advantage in your assignment. Draco, the Dark Lord would like you to discover as much as possible about the day-to-day activities of the Mudblood, Potter, and the Weasley boy. It is crucial that you find out if they are planning anything, any retaliation against him.”

Draco let out a small sigh of relief. Was that it? He hardly doubted that Granger, Potter, and the Weasel would dare try anything on their own, and even if they were up to anything, it couldn’t be very serious; the odds against them were impossible. He felt foolish for previously fearing the worst.

“Now you see, Lucius, this is exactly why I wanted you to give him instructions in my presence; you seem to have let a few details slip,” the Dark Lord sneered at Lucius before turning toward Draco, drawing his face closer so that the blond could smell and feel his hot, putrid breath on his face.

Draco tried to remain composed and not take in the foul stench that was coming from his mouth or run from the table screaming. He looked back at the Dark Lord stoically, trying to control the growing tremble taking hold over him.

“Young Malfoy,” the Dark Lord said, smiling nastily, “I want more than information. I want you to watch her closely, and tell me any- and everything you can about what she and her friends think, say, and do. In order for you to do that, you’ll have to befriend her. And I see no other way to do that other than for you to befriend all of them,” he said in a threatening tone, the soft timbre hardly fooling Draco.

Draco’s eyes went wide momentarily as he looked up at his father, who looked rather nauseous, and then to Professor Snape who looked back at him impassively.

Once Draco’s eyes met Professor Snape’s, he quickly resolved to pull his face together and look back at the red slits waiting for his reply. There was only one answer that would do; only one answer that would free him from the presence of the grotesque nut job staring back at him. Once again, he would have to play by the rules until he could figure out how to break them.

He gritted his teeth briefly before nodding. “As you wish, my Lord.”
Sunday evening Draco floo’ed back with Professor Snape into the Potions master’s private study. There was a good deal of silence until Snape spoke.

“So, do you have any idea how you plan to go about doing what you were assigned to do?”

“Yes, Sir, I have a few ideas. Is there any way I could use your classroom tomorrow night?”

Snape paused, studying Draco’s face. “What for?”

“Well, I’m trying to make new friends, right? There’s nothing like a party with a little liquor to break the ice.”

Snape immediately gave Draco an “are you kidding me” look before shaking his head.

“Let me get this straight. You expect for me to allow you to have a party in my Potions classroom, provide you and your little friends with liquor, and—”

“Sir, I already have the liquor, I just need the space.”

Snape closed his mouth and arched his eyebrow.

“And how do you plan to get them to come? Who else will be there?”

“Not that many people; a few from my house, and, of course, the guests of honour. Let me handle the details. I just need you to let me use the classroom, and if you don’t mind, keep Filch and prefects away.”

Snape looked up over Draco’s head, thinking before looking back down and staring him squarely in the eyes. “Mr. Malfoy, just because I’m sympathetic to your assignment, doesn’t mean I’m going to jeopardise my position as a professor or allow you free reign to do whatever you want.”

“I understand, Professor, please just trust me on this. I’ll keep it discrete, and if it works it will go a long way towards accomplishing my goal.”

Snape stood staring at Draco for what felt like a long time before saying “Very well. I’ll allow it, but you’re on a very short leash; I’ll be keeping watch, and I expect a full report afterwards.”

“Yes, Sir, of course.”

Draco stood waiting for Snape to dismiss him.

“Draco, you need to take the Dark Lord’s assignment very seriously, but not necessarily for the
reasons that you think.”

Draco wrinkled his forehead.

“Before you take any action, no matter what you are told, you need to think about what you want.”

“What I want?”

“Yes, what you want. Because ultimately, Draco, you’ll have to live with whatever you do.”

They looked at each other for a few more moments before Snape dismissed him.

Once Draco left, Snape had a small sip of cognac before strolling down to Dumbledore’s office.

When he arrived, he found the Headmaster studying a picture behind him situated between two pictures of former Headmasters who appeared to be getting ready for their night’s rest.

“Headmaster.”

“Severus, how are you?”

“You wanted to see me when I returned?”

“Yes, just wanted an update; how was it?”

Snape gave a slight shrug, looking over Dumbledore’s head. “Nothing of consequence, really.”

“Oh? I’m surprised to hear that, since Lucius came all the way down here to pick up his son,” he said quietly with his chin resting on his hands looking back at Snape.

Snape’s mouth twitched a bit. “Well, there was some discussion about the possibility of Malfoy keeping an eye on Potter but nothing unusual. The Dark Lord has been asking him to keep an eye on Potter since he returned.”

“It is rather curious that Draco had to go home to be reminded of that.”

“Yes, well, I think it was more for Lucius’ own reassurance than anything related to the Dark Lord.”

“Yes, perhaps, but you don’t know what Voldemort is up to entirely; he wouldn’t be so forthcoming with any one.”

“No, he would not.”

“And there is nothing else you wish to tell me?”

Snape stood looking at Dumbledore before shaking his head. “That is all I know for now, Headmaster.”

“Very well, then, Severus, thank you. It’s probably best you keep an eye on Draco over the next few weeks just in case.”

“Of course, Headmaster. Oh, and, the Dark Lord gives his regards.” Snape said humourlessly before turning to leave, to which Dumbledore gave a small sad head nod.

Once Snape left, Dumbledore went inside his drawer to retrieve his pipe and the cinnamon tobacco he kept in his box of safe keepings, pausing to brush his fingers over a picture that lay at the bottom. He quickly closed the box and then the drawer as he thought of the silent spell to light the pipe. He
leaned back and took the first deep drag, before turning his chair around to look at the mirror mounted on the adjacent wall.

By Sunday, Hermione had recovered from the shock of Friday’s class and had figured out what she wanted to tell the boys so not to cause any trouble or a scene in the next Potions class. She knew if Harry and Ron found out that Draco had been disrespectful to her that it could lead to a fight and ultimately result in a more awkward partnership or even worse, a failing grade. She wasn’t about to let Draco Malfoy get in the way of her keeping perfect marks, especially in Potions, where she worked twice as hard as necessary to earn her marks.

She couldn’t deny that the way he had affected her was rather troubling, and the fact that she had been turned on by his use of the crass and offensive M-word may have been a symptom of her “disorder”. But she didn’t really believe that. He had leaned over rather close, almost touching her, breathing on her neck like a lover; the clean soapy scent of his body, mixed with something distinctly male, had been incredibly appealing. But that had nothing to do with Draco; it couldn’t. She had dismissed it as a possible side effect of the post-coital bliss she had experienced after having Harry shag her into the floor just the way she always wanted him to do. Yes, that had to be it.

Ginny came up to Hermione as she was reading on her bed. “Hi,” she said sheepishly as she sat down at the edge of the bed.

“Oh, hi, Ginny; how’s it going?”

“Pretty good,” Ginny replied, watching Hermione.

Hermione glanced around and then back at Ginny, wondering why the girl was just sitting there not saying anything.

“Everything okay?” Hermione asked concerned.

“I was going to ask you the same thing.”

Hermione shook her head. “I’m fine, why?”

“It’s nothing really; it’s just that…oh, I don’t know.”

“What is it?”

“You want me to be honest?”

“Of course, Ginny.”

“Well, you don’t really hang out with the girls anymore, or with anyone really except for Harry and Ron, and then when you all get back from hanging out, I mean…it looks like…”

“What?”

“Well, I don’t know, Hermione…” Ginny said looking down as if she were struggling with something on the edge of her tongue.

“Just say it. What?”

“People are talking.”
“What do you mean? Talking about what?”

“Some are saying that you three are all...together.”

Hermione gave Ginny a convincingly naïve and confused look.

“Together? What do you mean? They’re my friends, of course we’re together.”

“No, Hermione, like together together.”

Hermione’s eyes went big, and she began to chuckle, and then outright laugh as if it were the most ridiculous idea.

Ginny gave a small smile and shrugged her shoulders. “I’m glad you think it’s funny; I think it sounds ridiculous, too, but, still, a lot of people are saying stuff, and you do look rather put out when you come back from hanging with those two.”

“Well, I didn’t want anyone to know this but Harry and Ron have been trying to teach me how to fly with little success.”

“You? Flying?” Ginny asked, smiling at the idea.

“Yeah, and people are always going to gossip. What can you really do about that?”

“I suppose that’s true. I mean, I know my brother really cares a lot about you, and there’s no way he would share you with Harry. I mean, not that you would ever even go out with Harry anyway…that’s mental,” Ginny said, still studying Hermione, waiting for her reaction.

“It absolutely is!”

Ginny stared at her for a few more moments before leaning in and looking around.

“What is it?” Hermione asked, wondering what Ginny was about to say.

“Well...I know Harry’s not your type, but I sort of fancy him. I think he’s really cute.”

Hermione’s eyes went wide again and then she grimaced. “I suppose. I mean, I’ve never looked at Harry like that.”

“I was wondering, well, do you think he might fancy me a bit?” she asked with a hopeful expression on her face.

“What? No!”

Ginny’s face fell quickly, and she looked down at the mattress, a red flush appearing on her ears.

Hermione reached out and touched her as she corrected herself.

“What I mean is, I don’t know. Harry doesn’t really talk about girls with me. That’s more of a Ron thing.”

“Oh, I see,” Ginny said with a bit of relief. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable or anything.”

“It’s fine, Ginny, just afraid I can’t help you much there.”
“Well, please don’t say anything.”

“Of course not!”

Before Hermione could think of a way to change the subject, Parvati came running up the stairs.

“’Hermione, Draco is here to see you,” Parvati said excitedly, waiting for Hermione’s reaction.

“What?”

“He’s outside; do you want me to bring him into the common room?”

“No, no, I’ll be right out.”

“All right,” she said, looking slightly disappointed.

Hermione was in sweats with her hair pulled up in a haphazard ponytail; she quickly disrobed, putting on some jeans and a snug t-shirt before running into the bathroom to splash some water on her face.

Ginny frowned while Parvati raised her eyebrows and smirked as Hermione quickly took down her ponytail running her hands through her hair before checking the mirror one last time before descending the stairs.

As soon as she reached the other side of the door, she found Draco casually leaning against the door frame. He straightened up when she appeared and smiled a little. Hermione’s eyebrows immediately furrowed.

“Yes?”

Draco looked her over slowly, letting his eyes glide over the figure that was usually hidden by her robes. He had guessed right; her hips had filled out in proportion to her chest; she had a gorgeous shape that begged to be groped. Finally, he let his eyes move back up to her face, which was scowling in indignation.

“Hello?” Hermione said folding her arms across her chest as if to cover her breasts from his appraisal.

Draco smirked at the failed attempt. “Hello, Granger. How’s it going?” he said in his in a not so convincing effort to sound friendly.

Hermione looked around as if she were expecting an ambush from all sides. Was this a joke? Malfoy asking her how she was doing? Right.

When she didn’t respond, Draco pressed on, “All right, then, well so much for pleasantries. I just wanted to come by to schedule time this week for tending to the project.”

“Well, I’m very busy; I’m taking a few extra classes. I also tutor, and I’m working on the elves liberation group, so I’m not sure how I’m going to fit you in. I was thinking we could work independently, and then compare each other’s notes before class.”

“Granger, how ’bout you cut the shit, and tell me when you’re free.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Fine, I usually have time during free period around one.”

“That’s the only time you’re available?”
Hermione stiffened and raised her chin. "Pretty much."

"What about the evenings?"

"Absolutely not. I eat around six, and after that I have a tight study schedule that I stick to."

Draco nodded. "Perfect, that will give us about two hours before the library closes at eight."

"Did you just hear what I said? I’m not available."

"Oh, but you are. You seem to have forgotten I saw you in the Restricted Section less than a week ago at the same time."

Hermione huffed.

"I would have thought you’d preferred working in the library since you practically live there."

"Exactly, I’m not going to let you ruin it."

He chuckled. "Too bad. I like working in the library as well, so that’s where we’ll work. Six o’clock, twice a week. I have Quidditch practice on Mondays and Thursdays, so Tuesdays and Wednesdays should do for now. I suggest you start going down for dinner a bit earlier so you’re not late."

"Malfy, you can’t just dictate what we’re going to do and when!"

"Funny you say that, because I actually thought you’d like that very much."

Hermione narrowed her eyes. That settled it; he knew. Somehow he knew, but for some reason he hadn’t chosen to broadcast it--yet. She’d worry about that later, but for now, she wouldn’t let the git get to her, and she most definitely wouldn’t allow him to crack her like he had on Friday.

"We’ll stick to Tuesdays for now. At seven," she said, waiting for his rebuttal.

But there was no rebuttal, instead, Draco smiled—again. Hermione wrinkled her face at that. This time, the smile appeared to be genuine and pleasant. It was strange to see it on his face.

"Seven it is. Looking forward to working with you," he said smiling even wider, which was now definitely creeping Hermione out. Instead of waiting for her reply, he turned and walked on toward the stairway, leaving a very confused Hermione staring at the place where he had been standing.

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As Draco began to walk back to his room, his thoughts went to Hermione in her Muggle clothing. The words **incredibly sexy** came to mind. He mentally slapped himself and pushed the thought of her very womanly frame out of his head as he began to think on what Snape had said to him.

What was it that he wanted most? That was easy. He wanted to be free of this assignment; he wanted the Dark Lord out of his life. He wanted his own identity, to charter his own path, but that none of that concerned the task at hand.

But why was Snape talking in code? From the sounds of it, Snape wasn’t completely committed to the same cause as his father. But neither was Draco, and for the first time in a long time, he felt like there may be someone who he could talk to about it all. But perhaps he was being premature about that. Anyone shifty enough to betray the Dark Lord was shifty enough to betray anyone and couldn’t be trusted. He would watch and wait to see what Snape did and said before he brought up his doubts and concerns about the Dark Lord.
His thoughts wandered to what he wanted to say to his housemates to ensure that things were set in
motion properly with little disruption.

When he returned to the common room, he called Crabbe, Goyle, Zabini, and Nott up to the
dormitories, kicking everyone else out.

After about an hour, everyone came down the stairs, except for Draco.

Blaise came over to Pansy, smirking down at her. “Draco wants to see you.”

Pansy jumped up and walked briskly up the boys’ dormitory stairs.

When she got to the door, she found Draco sitting on his bed, sulking, biting his lip in contemplation.

“Draco? You wanted to see me?”

Draco looked up as if shaken out of his thoughts.

“Yes, Pansy. I do,” he sighed.

Pansy looked at him confused, going to his side. “What is it, Draco?”

“Remember when you said you wanted to be my girlfriend?”

“Yes?” Pansy said with nervous excitement.

“Well, I was talking with the lads. And they think I should have a talk with you, but, I don’t know…

“It’s okay, Draco, what is it?”

“I really like you…a lot, but I’ve been hurt before; I don’t know if I could ever trust anyone again…
to give my heart to. I couldn’t stand to have it broken again.”

“Draco, I’d never hurt you!”

“I want to believe that, I do. I just need time, you know. I have to know that you’re loyal, that you’re
just as committed to me as I want to be to you. I need to know that before I can trust you with my

“Oh, Draco,” she said throwing her arms around his neck. “I’d do anything for you. You’ll see; you
can trust me.”

As Draco held her, the most wicked smile beamed from his face.

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The following morning, as the trio ate breakfast in the Great Hall, Harry and Ron chatted excitedly
about the upcoming Quidditch match. Hermione was more subdued, though, self-conscious of other
people at the table in light of her conversation with Ginny. She noticed that Lavender and her friends
were indeed sneaking looks at them and whispering. She shook her head slightly and looked at the
boys.

“You two, I think we need to start hanging out with other people a bit more.”

“Why?” Harry asked.
“Ron, your sister said that people are starting to talk about us. I mean really talk,” she said raising her eyebrows as if letting him know the kind of talk that was going around.

“Seriously? Who?” Ron asked concerned as he looked over at Ginny quickly before looking back at Hermione.

“I don’t know, but I don’t want that sort of talk going around.”

“Well, actually, that sort of talk has been going around since our second year,” Harry offered in defence.

Hermione and Ron slowly nodded in agreement at that.

“So what’s so different now?” Harry asked.

Hermione began to think about why it was bothering her more than it had before, when she noticed a patch of blond hair over Harry’s head as Draco made his way down the aisle with Blaise and Nott, with Crabbe and Goyle following closely behind. But while the others made their way over to the Slytherin table, Draco didn’t deter and seemed to be walking straight towards them.

Harry turned around to look behind him once he saw the expression on Hermione’s face, while Ron looked the other way to see if there was more toast left.

Draco stopped and stood right in front of Harry, looking down with what was increasingly becoming an irritating smile for Hermione.

“How goes it Potter, Weasley…Granger?”

Ron paused in mid-bite with his mouth open, looking up with an angry, bothered expression.

Harry looked at Hermione before looking back at Malfoy. “What do you want, Malfoy?”

“Nothing, just wanted to say hi; you know, trying to be friendly.”

Ron had put down his toast and was grabbing his wand ready to hex Malfoy at the slightest sign he was going to attack either Hermione or Harry.

“Since when, you tosspot?!”

Draco drew back with a look of mock shock. “Weasley, I’m offended; here I am trying to be cordial and make nice, and instead I get insulted.”

“What are you playing at, Malfoy?” Harry asked sternly.

“Not playing. Just figured since me and Granger have to work together, I’d use it as an opportunity to start a clean slate with you three.”

They all looked up at him dumbfounded, until Harry scoffed. “Yeah, well, whatever you’re trying to sell, we’re not interested, so you can go back and tell your friends you failed miserably at whatever you were attempting to do,” he said before turning around.

“Oh, surprise, surprise. Dumbledore’s Golden Boy is too good to talk to someone not asking for an autograph, is that it?”

Harry made a face that said he was about to get up and get into Malfoy’s when Hermione put her hand on his arm, “Harry…”
She held onto Harry’s arm to calm him as she looked up at Draco, “Whatever you’re up to, it won’t work, so just leave us alone!”

“So much for trying to make peace,” he said shaking his head slightly, beginning to walk away.

“Malfoy, seriously, what do you want?” Harry called.

Draco strolled back up to them and bent over. “Actually I was going to invite you to a party I’m having, but if you’re going to act like a bunch of wankers, I’d rather not. Might dampen the mood.”

“A party?” Ron repeated as if he didn’t get the punch line of a poorly told joke.

“Yea, but never mind that, bad idea. See you around,” Draco said as he began to turn around.

“Let’s hear it, then,” Harry said.

“What?” Draco asked, slowly turning around.

Harry rolled his eyes. “The party. When, where? What’s it for?”

“Tonight, nine o’clock, Potions classroom. What’s it for? It was Snape’s suggestion. He asked me to help him make a go at trying to get students in the class better acquainted with each other.”

“That doesn’t even sound remotely believable; c’mon, Malfoy, you can do better than that.”

“Seriously, he said he’d like to see all of us working towards inter-house unity, making new friends, that sort of thing.”

“Inter-house unity?” Ron and Harry repeated together.

“Yeah.”

Ron and Harry looked at each and burst out laughing, while Hermione covered her mouth to keep her food from flying from it, looking at Draco as if a bit disappointed by his poor lying skills, before turning around to ignore him.

“Did you hear ’em? Snape…wants Malfoy to help with…inter hou— oh, Harry…help, my sides hurt!” Ron was almost purple in the face and was beginning to cry from laughing so hard, while Harry couldn’t help but laugh harder at Ron’s pained expression.

Draco stood there and allowed them to finish before he shrugged.

“Probably for the best, I reckon’ you three are too goody goody to be up to the sort of fun we like to get into,” he said with a sly smile as he walked back over to the Slytherin table where he was greeted by several people. As he sat down between Blaise and Pansy, across from Crabbe and Goyle, the trio settled down and sat in silence watching him suspiciously.

Draco leaned over and whispered something in Pansy’s ear, to which she nodded before sliding under the table. The trio all looked at each other in puzzlement before Crabbe and Goyle both rose from their seats, and walked off, giving them a clear view of what she was doing under the table. Both Harry and Ron’s mouth dropped open and Hermione gasped when they got a clear view.

After a few moments, Ron cleared his throat, and spoke absently without looking away “Well, I guess we could drop in for a bit, and check it out. You know, just to see what the git is up to.”

“Ron?!” Hermione said not believing what he was suggesting.
“Well, didn’t you just say we need to get out more and be around other people?” he offered, not looking back at Hermione as he addressed her.

“He’s right, Hermione; we should check it out, see what Snape and Malfoy are up to,” Harry said in the same far away voice that Ron had just used.

Hermione shook her head at Harry and Ron who were staring as if in a trance at the same spot at the Slytherin table. She crossed her arms and tried to fight the blush that had crept into her face as familiar wetness grew between her legs. This time, Hermione tried but failed to break eye contact with Draco, who was staring back at her as he ran his hands through Pansy’s hair while she sucked his cock like it was her favourite breakfast dish.
Show & Tell

Skeletons in your closet,
Itchin’ to come outside,
Messin’ with your conscience,
In a way your face can’t hide…

It’s gettin’ ready to blow,
It’s gettin’ ready to show,
Somebody shot off at the mouth and
We’re gettin’ ready to know.

“Skeletons” by Stevie Wonder

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Hermione showered, washing her hair with the strawberry scented shampoo that Ron and Harry liked so much. She did a drying spell on her hair before going to her wardrobe to retrieve a V-neck shirt that would hint at her assets but not make it too obvious she was trying to look sexy, before slipping into some comfortable snug denims and flats. She put on a hint of eyeliner, mascara, a smidgen of blush, and lip gloss before turning around to get Parvati’s opinion.

Parvati was preoccupied with her own appearance, trying on several shirts and shoes before finally deciding on a rather eye-catching colored blouse and a mini-skirt that would go with a pair of sling backs with a short heel she had picked out.

“You’re getting all dressed up?” Hermione asked Parvati.

“Well, it’s not like we party a lot around here; I just want to look nice.”

Hermione thought about that before going back to her closet, looking for a skirt that would match her top. After finding one, she hesitantly went over to her drawer and pulled out the locket, pausing to study it. She figured Ron should be over it by now and decided to put it on.

When she and Parvati came down to the common room together, they noticed Ginny sitting on the couch, and made their way over to her.


“Ah, well, we have a…social function to attend, so we’d thought it would be nice to make a good impression,” Hermione said, looking at Parvati who smiled back in agreement.

“So I heard,” Ginny said with a frown.

“You did? Who else is going?” Parvati asked.

“From the sounds of it, everyone in your Potions class. I wonder how Malfoy is pulling this off?” Ginny asked.

“Yes, I thought about that,” Hermione said a little nervously. “You would think that McGonagall or even Dumbledore would have put a stop to this. I’m not even sure we should go.”

“Well, if he’s using the Potions classroom, he must have gone through Snape. One Head of a House
is enough approval, I suppose,” Parvati offered.

“Yes, I suppose, anything in the name of Inter-House Unity,” Hermione said sarcastically.

All of them sniggered at that.

A few of the Gryffindor boys in their Potions class walked past them, apparently on their way to the party; opening the common room door, they allowed Padma to come in. She and Parvati left shortly after, leaving Hermione with Ginny.

When Harry and Ron came down from their dormitory, Ginny’s face lit up at the appearance of Harry, who seemed not to notice. Harry seemed preoccupied with admiring Hermione. Ron cleared his throat and elbowed Harry.

“Oh, hi, Ginny,” Harry said.

“Hi, Harry,” she smiled shyly.

There was an awkward silence as Ron and Hermione looked back between the two of them before Ron finally said, “Well, we really should be going.”

Harry turned to look at Hermione in concern as they exited the common room.

“What was that all about?” he asked once they were on the other side.

“I'll tell you later,” Hermione said, hooking her arm through both of theirs. Harry smiled.

“You know you're going to get us all in trouble,” Ron said, glancing around.

Hermione sighed and unhooked her arms from theirs, making sure to walk the rest of the way with the appropriate amount of space between them.

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When the trio finally arrived, they were amazed at the transformation of Snape’s classroom. It looked completely different from the dark and downright scary room they were used to. The room was still dark, but instead of gloomy, it had a sultry ambiance about it. Someone had bewitched the ceiling so that sparkly crackles of light popped in and out giving the appearance of silent firecrackers. Most of the desks had been cleared out or at least pushed to the far corners, leaving a huge space in the middle, giving it a much more spacious appearance. The Weird Sisters’ song “You Put a Hex on Me” was playing and there were a few people bobbing their head in time to the beat.

Most of the Potions class was already there, with almost an even number from each house. Harry winced slightly when he saw Cho, who was not in even in their class. She was dressed quite provocatively in a very short skirt and tight top. Sitting next to her was Luna who was dressed rather oddly in a bright canary jumper and faded overalls with sparkly patterns that ran along the left side. Ron purposefully avoided looking over at Lavender, who seemed to be making an attempt at eyeing him and Hermione discretely, but failing.

They moved to a dark corner on the far side of the classroom, away from everyone else. Everyone was in their usual clique, practically scattered by house in a corner, not talking but looking around at each other cautiously except for the Slytherins. Most of them were talking carefree, not really looking up at people as they came in, with the exception of Pansy, who was apparently acting as the server for the evening.
She was dressed in a French maid’s uniform complete with stockings that had a long seam on the back and a pair of high heels. It was apparent that she had already had quite a bit to drink as she did a sloppy switch over to Harry, bending over slightly to reveal her cleavage as she offered him a bottle of Firewhisky.

“Courtesy of the house,” she half slurred and half purred, flipping her hair at Hermione as she batted her eyes at Harry and Ron.

“Bloody hell,” Ron whispered, staring fixedly at Pansy’s cleavage.


“Is that liquor?” Hermione asked, taking a bottle and smelling it before looking at Harry and Ron in disbelief to confirm that it was.

“No way!” Ron said, snatching a bottle from Pansy and taking a sip.

“Don’t drink that!” Harry said to Ron, pulling his arm down so that the drink spilled a little on his shirt.

Draco glanced up from his conversation with Crabbe as he rose from his seat and called out to Harry from across the room, “What’s the matter, Potter? Is the Saviour too good to drink?”

Harry stiffened as if ready for a confrontation but then reluctantly sat back, feeling rather silly when Draco casually turned his head and walked over to a few eager Hufflepuff girls in the opposite corner of the room.

Pansy gave Harry a sad smile and put the bottle on a desk behind him, leaning very close, as her hair fell over him, and her cleavage sunk to the level of his eyes. Harry held his breath and sat very still until she straightened up and switched over to the corner where a group of Ravenclaws were sitting.

Hermione gawped at Pansy as she walked away before turning back to look at Harry and Ron, who were watching her backside with interest. “Why is she dressed like a slutty waitress?”

Neither Harry nor Ron responded to that, looking around as if Hermione hadn’t said anything. They all sat in awkward silence, waiting as if they expected a bomb to go off or at least Malfoy to pull a stunt that would reveal his true intentions.

Over the next half hour, more and more people began to drink, and there were small efforts at small talk here and there. After a while, people began drifting away from their house cliques and corners, moving to other parts of the room, until eventually there were no definitive corners, only people scattered across the room, the conversations growing more robust and louder.

The only obvious clique that remained intact was the trio who sat not talking or drinking as they watched their classmates talk and start in on their third, fourth, and fifth drinks of the evening. Hermione began to feel the self-consciousness she had felt at breakfast beginning to creep back. She looked at her bottle, picked it up and took a drink.

“Hermione!” Harry said with panic in his voice.

“It’s all right, Harry; think about it: Malfoy wouldn’t poison the whole class. He’d be expelled or worse! Besides, we’re sitting off in a corner, brooding like a bunch of goblins. We could at least try to blend in a bit.”

Harry looked around and noticed nearly everyone had a bottle in their hand, including Malfoy, and
there was even laughter coming from people he had never really seen interact before. Susan Bones was flirting with Theodore Nott, while the annoying Zacharias Smith was chatting it up with Michael Corner who normally would have hexed Smith by this point, and Neville had actually ventured over to a group of Ravenclaw girls and seemed to be doing quite well.

Harry looked over at Malfoy and was surprised to see him still smiling that same impossible smile he gave when he had invited them here, and talking to Seamus and Ernie Macmillan before moving to talk to Luna of all people.

“What’s Luna doing here? She’s not in our class,” Hermione asked.

“Don’t know, perhaps someone invited her,” Ron answered. “Looks like she’s enjoying herself.”

He and Harry looked at each other and shrugged, picking up their bottles, and taking their first sips, when Dean started walking towards them.

“Hey, guys,” he said with a slight slur to his speech.

“Hey,” they all replied.

“Why are you sitting in the corner?” he asked looking at Harry.

Harry shrugged.

“’mkay,” Dean said before turning to Ron. “Where’s Ginny?”

Ron gave Dean a funny look before shaking his head. “I don’t know. She’s not in our Potions class.”

“Right, right, too bad. I wish she was; she sure is one hot piece!”

Ron jumped up and Dean jumped back with a look of shock on his face, but it appeared as if he was in more shock at his outburst than at Ron’s response.

“I think you better go back over there, Dean,” Harry said in half disbelief and half amusement at Dean’s nerve.

“I knew that son of a bitch was just trying to get in her knickers!” Ron said, looking as if he were about to follow Dean across the room.

“Ron, calm down; he’s probably drunk,” Hermione said, concerned.

“I don’t care! He’s not going near Ginny after tonight!”

“Okay, sounds good. Just sit down, all right?” Harry said with a firm gentleness that made Ron drop his angry scowl and sit back down, while continuing to stare at the back of Dean’s head warily.

They continued to watch people around the room as they drank, and observed a number of people engaging in disturbingly frank and loud conversations.

Parvati was telling Seamus exactly what she thought of his motor mouth and why he would never stand a chance at dating her sister, while Crabbe and Goyle were alternating between telling each other just how much they got on each other’s nerves to telling each other how much they cared about each other. Nott had boldly invited Susan Bones to sit on his lap, and she had surprisingly accepted, telling him that she had always wanted to take a ride on the “Nott Express” before straddling him obscenely in his chair.
Harry’s eyes wandered over to Cho.

“Why is she here anyway?” Harry asked, frowning as he watched her flirt with Blaise.

Apparently Blaise had said something quite offensive causing Cho to push him back quite harshly, but instead of deterring him, that seemed to have amused him. He pushed himself back against her, causing her to giggle in response.

Ron and Hermione cautiously looked over at Harry.

“Tart,” Harry said loudly, with a tinge of venom in his voice. He stifled a burp and then expression quickly changed to one of shame and he looked down at the floor as if she may have heard him.

“Where the hell did that come from?” he asked.

“I don’t know, mate, but you might want to slow down,” Ron said, looking at Harry’s drink.

Hermione was almost finished with her bottle when she noticed that Lavender was pointing in her direction and laughing rather loudly.

“What the hell is she pointing at?” Ron asked.

“I don’t know, but she better put her finger down before I hex it off,” Hermione said through clenched teeth.

Hermione couldn’t believe that Lavender was being so bold. She had always been a gossip and sort of catty towards Hermione because she was bitter that Hermione had snagged Ron, but this was just outright rude. She was about to rise and go tell her where to stick her finger when Neville yelled out “I love this song!” and immediately took to the middle of the room, dancing quite impressively to Wicked Troll’s new song “Work Your Magic, Baby.”

Luna gave a loud birdcall and immediately got up to join him.

“Neville, you’re so hot! Shake it like a Tackerdaisel!”

The trio stifled laughter at that. Apparently, Neville had a bit of a fan base, with a few Ravenclaws grabbing each other and moving to the centre to dance.

“Why is everyone acting all loopy?” Ron asked, watching in disbelief as the girls in the middle of the room surrounded Neville.

“Not really loopy, just really… odd,” Hermione said.

“They’re drunk,” Harry responded.

“I suppose,” Hermione said as if she wasn’t quite convinced. She studied the remainder of her drink and then lifted it to her nose, smelling it.

Draco walked over and took a seat beside Hermione. The trio all turned their heads and looked at him with suspicion. He seemed oblivious to it, though. Ron opened his mouth to say something when Draco called across the room to Pansy.

“Pansy, come here.”

Pansy turned from her conversation with Katie Bell and began to walk over when Draco put up his hand.
“No, crawl.”

Katie and a few of the other girls gasped and giggled as Pansy sank down to her knees and began to crawl. Only a few people seemed to care enough to watch her curiously before returning to their conversation.

But Harry’s interest was particularly piqued, and he sat up attentively to watch her slow crawl over to Draco.

“That’s a good girl,” Draco said once she reached him. He then pulled a red ball from his pocket and dropped it so that it rolled out.

“Now fetch,” he said, winking at Hermione. Pansy crawled back over to retrieve the ball with her mouth.

Hermione groaned.

“Thatta girl, now bring it back,” Draco said smiling down at Pansy before leaning over to whisper in Hermione’s ear, “Watch this, Granger.”

Pulling back and looking down at Pansy. “Would you like a drink, love?”

There was no shame in Pansy’s eyes when she looked up at Draco eagerly. “Yes, please.”

Draco reached behind him and grabbed a tray used for carrying ingredients and dropped it in front of Pansy. He poured some of his drink into it and pulled her hair from her face, holding it up in his hand.

“There you go,” Draco said softly, as Harry and Ron both leaned as far over as they could to watch Pansy on her hands and knees lapping up the Firewhisky from the tray.

“You’re disgusting, Malfoy!” Hermione said with a look of mixed disgust and awe. “Gods, Pansy, do you have any self-respect!?”

Pansy didn’t look up at Hermione, but kept slurping the liquor from the tray.

“Don’t knock it until you try it, Granger,” he said, smirking back at her.

“I think it’s rather hot, actually. I mean if she likes it, I don’t have a problem with it,” Ron said in half-puzzlement at what he had just said and the fact that he had just offered Malfoy support.

“I bet you’d like it,” Harry said, glancing up at Hermione, causing Ron to snigger.

“Perhaps,” Hermione said before gasping in surprise at her response and turning to look at Draco to see if he had heard her.

If he had, he didn’t act like it, petting Pansy as if she were a pet instead of a person. Pansy straightened up to adjust her skirt, which had risen so that the rest of the room had a full view of her arse.

“No, nuh-uh, did I say you could fix your clothing?”

“No, Draco.”

“Stand up.”
Pansy stood up slowly and carefully as if anticipating some sort of punishment. The trio watched with intense captivation, waiting to see what Draco was about to do.

He called Blaise over and explained with a fake tone of concern that Pansy wasn’t behaving. Blaise snorted, pulling up a chair behind Pansy and smacking her quite hard on the arse.

Draco looked up at Pansy, who nodded slightly before stretching herself over Blaise’s lap. Zabini raised her skirt and proceeded to deliver several harsh smacks to her arse. Pansy began to grind herself into Blaise’s lap even as she whimpered with each slap. Harry and Ron were both glued to the scene in front of them, steadily becoming aroused, but Draco wasn’t watching any of that, his eyes were fixed on Hermione, who was visibly affected, squirming, and biting her lip with every slap.

“My, my, my, would you look at that,” drawled Draco as he continued to stare at Hermione. She forced herself to regain some semblance of control and looked back at him.

“Stop fucking with me, Malfoy!”

Draco leaned into her, talking so low that no one else could hear. “Would you rather I start fucking you instead?”

Hermione bit her lip hard to stop from speaking, but she couldn’t stop herself from nodding in response. Draco hummed to himself, pulling back, and turning his attention to Pansy. When Blaise paused to rest his hand, Draco reached out and ran his hands over Pansy’s arse, before delivering a particularly hard blow, causing both Pansy and Hermione to whimper together.

Blaise looked up at Hermione with new interest, while Draco chuckled.

“You like that, Granger?” Draco asked.

“You know I do!” Hermione said, clapping her hands to her mouth.

A smug smirk crossed Draco’s face before he turned his eyes to Ron who was clearly aroused and staring at Pansy’s arse.

“What about you, Weasley?”

“Oh, god, yeah.”

“Mm, Potter, you, too?”

“Only if it’s you, Malfoy,” Harry said dreamily.

Ron, Hermione, Blaise, and Pansy all turned their heads towards Harry, staring at him in surprise before Draco rose from his chair walking towards Harry.

“What did you just say, Potter?”

Harry shook his head and covered his mouth as if trying to figure out how that statement had just left his mouth.

“I expected that response from Granger, but not from… you,” he said with slight bewilderment in his voice as he moved closer to Harry.

“Malfoy, get away from me,” Harry whispered half-heartedly.
“You sure that’s what you really want, Potter?”

“Of course not,” Harry said shamefully, not looking up at Draco.

Draco smirked, while Harry cursed himself under his breath.

Harry was now leaning forward as if waiting for Draco to inch in closer.

Draco paused, catching himself, and narrowed his eyes at Harry. “Sorry Potter, you may have pretty
eyes, but I don’t swing that way.”

“Don’t knock it until you try it.”

Draco couldn’t help but grin at Harry’s use of his own words to Hermione earlier, while Ron looked at Harry with a scowl.

“Don’t worry ‘bout that; he has, more than a few times, eh, Draco?” Blaise said suggestively with a mischievous smile on his face.

Draco snapped his head back to glare at Blaise, jerking his head sharply to the side as if giving him a
cue to leave. Blaise rolled his eyes, and told Pansy to get off of him, rising, and grabbing her by the
arm, pulling her to the other side of the room before walking back over to resume flirting with Cho.

Draco looked around the room, taking note that everyone seemed to be preoccupied in their own
debauchery. He let out a small sigh before walking back to his chair and pulling it around to face the
trio’s chairs, forming a closed circle that was clearly set apart from the rest of the room.

Draco looked at Ron before looking back at Harry, “If I ever decide turn into a pouf, you’ll be the
first I call.”

“I’m not a fucking pouf, Malfoy.”

“Sounds like you fancy blokes.”

“I like it all.”

“Yeah, Harry’s a slag,” Ron said looking around confused as if that comment must have came from
someone else’s mouth.

“Well, frankly, I’m not surprised that he would fancy me;” he said smugly.

“I don’t fancy you, Malfoy; I hate you! I can’t help that you’re gorgeous,” he said the last in a
whisper looking down.

“Harry!” Ron protested.

“Oh, Ron, hush, you know he’s gorgeous; he knows he’s gorgeous, hell, everyone knows!”
Hermione said before biting her lip once more in an effort to keep from talking.

“Well, now that’s interesting. I’m glad we’re all being so open with each other, because I have a few
questions I need answered,” Draco said, casting seductive glances at both Harry and Hermione,
before noticing that Ron was balling his fists at his side.

“Get away from them, you slimy git!”

“Weasley, calm down; there’s no need to get all dramatic. Quite protective aren’t you, or is that
jealousy? If I didn’t know better, I’d say that you were doing both of them.”

Ron looked away quickly, to which Draco drew back slightly and raised his eyebrows, before glancing at Harry and Hermione who seemed to be both avoiding his eyes.

As the realisation of what they were conveying without saying dawned on him, Draco sat in shock. “So it’s true?”

He looked at all three of them, waiting for denial, but instead heard a soft but unmistakable unified “Yeah.”

Draco silently mouthed “oh, shit” before shaking his head, staring at them. He opened his mouth and then closed it quickly, frustrated to find that he was so stunned by their confession that he couldn’t think of a quick or witty remark. They sat in awkward silence for a few minutes until Draco’s face returned to its normal cool, collected expression.

“Well, Weasley, I’m sorry, didn’t mean to disrespect your… lovers. How about a peace offering? Would you like to play with my pet?”

Ron shook his head. “I don’t like snakes.”

Draco genuinely laughed at that. “Weasley, you really are a thick one; I was talking about Pansy.”

Harry and Hermione looked at Ron, who seemed to be holding his breath and debating about what he should say when Draco turned his head and called Pansy back over. This time she crawled without being prompted, looking up at Draco, ignoring the trio in front of her.

“Stand up and bend over love, let Weasley see that beautiful arse of yours.”

Hermione grew red in the face and stared at Ron, expecting him to put an end to this quickly.

Draco ran his hand up Pansy’s skirt, revealing her thigh highs, garters, and thong. Ron moaned softly, reaching out to grab a cheek, when Hermione reached over Harry and smacked his hand away.

“What?” Ron asked stunned.

“Ronald Weasley, how dare you?”

“It’s not sexual or anything. Just a bit of fun; don’t be such a party pooper, Hermione.”

Draco chuckled. “Weasley, you have so much to learn. It’s all sexual, isn’t it, Granger?”

Draco tilted his head looking at her before turning his attention back to Pansy’s arse. Hermione shook her head and gave Ron an angry glare. Ron looked at Harry, who shrugged and took another sip of his drink.

“Go on,” Draco said to Ron.

Ron decidedly didn’t look over at Hermione as he put his drink down before taking his right hand and lightly tapping one of Pansy’s arse cheeks.

“Oh, you can do better than that. Perhaps if she were in your lap it would be easier.”

Ron gulped and looked at Harry who was nodding now eagerly at Draco’s urging.
“Pansy, help him out.”

Pansy stood up and lay across Ron’s lap, sticking her arse up, waiting for him to strike it.

Ron swallowed before raising his hand to strike it when Draco stopped him.

“Wait, let’s make this interesting,” he said smiling back at Hermione before taking the ball he had thrown to Pansy earlier and stuffing it in her mouth.

“There, now you can do it as hard as you like.”

The red ball in her mouth seemed to pique Ron’s interest, and he absently nodded in response to Draco before delivering his first real strike to her arse. He proceeded to strike her several times as Draco egged him on, sometimes stopping him to correct him and give him tips on techniques that would make the most impact. Harry and Hermione watched, transfixed, too wrapped up in their own arousal to think about the surreal nature of the situation.

Draco was about to make the suggestion that Ron switch from use of his hands to something else when there was a loud bang and the room shook violently as if the earth itself were moving.

Everyone stopped what they were doing or who they were doing, and looked up, stunned, the music the only sound in the room as Snape came through the door.

“Go back to your rooms, immediately,” he said in his most contemptuous voice, which was really saying something.

Several students literally ran out, while others carefully watched the Potions professor as they slunk out of the room. Pansy jumped up, pushing her skirt down, and the trio looked at Snape and Malfoy curiously before hastily moving out the door.

Finally, Draco was left alone with Snape, who was staring at him with a snarl on his face.

“How dare you! Do you know the headmaster called me to his office to explain why I was allowing you to have a party with liquor with my entire sixth year Potions class?”

“How did he—”

“I don’t know how he knew, but let’s just say discretion is not your forte, Mr. Malfoy.”

Snape looked around his classroom in disapproval. “Change it back. NOW!” he said as he went to his ingredients cupboard to take stock.

As Draco began to clean up the liquor bottles, cutting off the music, and changing the ceiling back before moving the desks back to their proper places, Snape came out with several empty vials.

“I had enough Veritaserum to last through next winter, now it seems I only have one vial left.”

Draco didn’t answer him, only stared at the floor.

“You stole from my supplies? “

“Sir, I—”

“Never mind. I don’t want to hear it, Mr. Malfoy. Not only did you invite the entire Potions class after specifically telling me that you were only inviting a few people, but you slipped Veritaserum in their liquor, undoubtedly creating all sorts of chaos that will have to be dealt with later. I’d be well
within my rights to expel you for what you did.”

Draco nodded shamefully. “Yes, sir. I’m sorry, sir.”

“That will not do, Mr. Malfoy. Do I have to remind you why you gave the party in the first place, or are you intent on getting us both killed?”

Draco fought to control himself from screaming that he didn’t want the assignment in the first place, but instead kept his eyes fixed on the floor.

“You are to serve detention with me at the end of each Potions class for the remainder of the school year.”

Draco nodded in relief, realising that he had been expecting much worse.

“Did you even manage to learn anything of significance for your trouble?”

“Sort of.”

“Well, we’ll see if any of it is of any use. For now, finish cleaning up and return to your room immediately.”

“Yes, sir.”

The trio walked very slowly back as their classmates rushed back to their rooms. When they were sure everyone had made it back, they stood outside of the common room door, looking at each other.

Finally Ron spoke in a low, angry whisper looking at both Harry and Hermione, “What the hell was that all about? You fancy Malfoy?”

“I didn’t say I fancied him, Ron… I said he was good looking, and I don’t even know why I said that!” Harry said waving his hands wildly as if trying to make it go away.

“You’re no better, Ron, drooling over Pansy and spanking her like that,” Hermione said in an angry, hushed tone that threatened to grow louder.

“Well you saw her, she wanted it! And so did you if you recall; you said as much!”

“Thank you! I remember quite well what I said, or did either of you bother to notice that everyone was being painfully truthful?”

Harry and Ron groaned. Hermione nodded. “That’s right.”

“Veritaserum,” they all said together.

“And everyone was too sloshed to really notice,” Harry reasoned.

“No, they thought they were sloshed. I’m not really drunk, just a bit tipsy,” Hermione said defensively.

“Well, you were tipsy enough not to think about why you were saying what you were saying,” Ron said looking at her, still slightly annoyed.

“Yeah,” Hermione reluctantly agreed.
“So, he knows… about us,” Ron said hesitantly.

They all looked at each other, feeling something like panic ebb and flow between them before it dissipated into reluctant acceptance of what may come as a result of what they had revealed.

Finally, Harry spoke, “That settles it, then; he is up to something.”

“I wonder what he wants,” Ron said.

“I don’t know; he’s probably trying to get to me,” Harry said with an edge of both anger and weariness in his voice.

“Whatever he’s doing he’s trying to do it by acting like our friend,” Hermione said.

“Fine. He wants to be friends; we can be friendly. More than one can play at that,” Harry said with determination.

They all looked at each other in silent agreement before saying the password, then their goodnights to each other.

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As he settled in his bed, Draco didn’t think about his conversation with Snape, or even the craziness of the party and all of the revelations that came from it, except for one.

So the trio really was shagging each other. Did the Dark Lord know that? Why would he even need to know that? How would he even bring that sort of thing up? That couldn’t have anything to do with what he was supposed to find out.

But it was interesting to say the least. He had often teased them about them having a ménage à trois, but the thought of them doing it was actually quite impressive. He had to admit that it changed how he looked at them.

He could tell that Weasley was going to be a problem, and he would have to concentrate on especially gaining favour with the redhead while talking to the other two when he wasn’t around if he were going to try to get closer to any of them.

All this time, he thought that Potter would be the problem, but Potter had called him ‘gorgeous.’ If he had expected to learn anything from using Veritaserum, it wasn’t that. It was strangely empowering, yet at the same time humbling to know that Harry fucking Potter thought he was hot. He would have to use that bit of information to his advantage at some point, but then leave it at that. So what that he had let Zabini blow him a few times; who would turn down a willing mouth, no matter whom it was attached to? And it was common knowledge that Potter had girly eyes that were nice to look at, but that didn’t make him a pouf!

Draco shook his head, trying to push back the rising urge to picture kissing Potter out of his mind. He forced himself to concentrate on something more comfortable, and his thoughts drifted to Granger. Her facial expressions, the way she squirmed and whimpered watching Pansy being punished. He licked his lips as he imagined that it was Granger’s arse instead of Pansy’s that was flushed with fresh red handprints. He could hear Granger’s moans replacing those of Pansy’s as his hand wandered down to his cock, and for the first time in a good while, he began to wank.
Hermione awoke the following morning and noticed that Parvati, who was usually pretty gabby in the morning, was dressing quickly in silence. When Hermione asked her about meeting up later perhaps after Herbology, Parvati said that she was busy and probably couldn’t before rushing down the stairs. Hermione shrugged as she continued to get ready, putting on her robes and grabbing all of the books she needed for the day and stuffing it into her schoolbag. When she finally came down to the common room to meet up with Harry and Ron to walk down to breakfast, she immediately noticed that Parvati and a group of girls in the corner whispering; one of them was Ginny.

Ginny glanced up, noticing Hermione, and gave her a fake smile before turning back to Parvati. Hermione walked over with a neutral expression on her face, and with an effort to appear as though she wasn’t concerned, she used an overly chipper voice to greet everyone. Several of the girls looked up at Hermione simultaneously to say hi quickly before glancing at each other and saying hurried goodbyes and excusing themselves to breakfast. Parvati and Ginny remained with weird smiles on their faces, as if they were trying to appear casual but not doing a very good job at it.

There were several moments of silence before Hermione decided to break it.

“So, what’s everyone talking about?”

“Nothing,” they said together.

There was an awkward silence and then Parvati spoke, “So, um, that was an interesting party.”

Hermione gave a light laugh and shook her head. “Yes. It was pretty wild, actually.”

“I’ll say. Looks like you and Pansy were having quite a time with the boys.”
“Pardon? You mean Pansy had quite a time with the boys!”

“Well, from the sounds of it, you were all right with whatever was going on,” Ginny said stiffly.

Hermione glanced at Ginny before addressing Parvati, “I didn’t even move out of my seat; you saw me.”

“Yes, I saw you; it’s fine Hermione, everyone was acting pretty crazy.”

“I wasn’t acting crazy,” Hermione protested. “I wasn’t doing anything!”

“Exactly,” Parvati said. “You were just sitting there while Ron spanked Pansy. It was all a bit strange, Pansy dressed like that, crawling around and letting guys spank her while you sat watching over in the corner with Ron, Harry, Zabini, and Malfoy. I mean, it just looked rather…odd.”

“Well, I know it may have looked strange, but it wasn’t a big deal really,” Hermione rushed to say. “Pansy’s a slag; everyone knows that. Malfoy was talking to loads of people at the party, not just us, and Zabini is a big flirt, you know that. Anyway, Ron was drunk, and so was everyone else!”

“You don’t have to explain, Hermione! It just looked like you and Pansy were really enjoying yourselves over there; it’s no big deal, really,” Parvati said, glancing at Ginny, who was gave Hermione a measuring look.

“Well I’m very hungry. I’m going to go down to eat. I suppose I’ll talk to you two later,” Hermione said with a shaky voice as she rose and walked out of the common room.

She was furious. She and Pansy weren’t even friends! She was nothing like Pansy. She was smarter; more dignified, and had self-respect. She would never let anyone treat her like a pet. She cursed herself for letting Ron spank Pansy while she watched, not wanting to admit that maybe she had enjoyed it a little. But, of course, others would have noticed, even if they pretended not to at the time. But it didn’t mean that she was anything like Pansy.

And I suppose they missed Susan and Nott going at it? Or Cho and Blaise? Hell even Luna was throwing herself at Neville, but somehow I end up being the topic of conversation?!

She tried to calm down as she made her way to her usual spot in the Great Hall; she immediately noticed that she was not the only one dealing with the aftermath of the party.

Susan looked extremely self-conscious and nervous, while Nott looked smug and proud as he leered at her across the aisle. Meanwhile, Seamus was sitting away from everyone, eating silently, which was unheard of for him, and Dean had moved a few seats further down putting considerable distance between himself and Ron. Crabbe and Goyle weren’t sitting together at all and Blaise was staring at Cho, who was stealing looks at him across the room. Pansy seemed to be focused on her food and not looking at anyone, not even Draco. As Hermione made her way over to the Gryffindor table, Draco glanced up at her and gave her his trademark smirk.

Hermione turned her gaze quickly from him as she walked up to her usual spot across from Ron and next to Harry. She immediately felt the tension between the two, and noticed that they weren’t talking to each other.

Hermione sighed and sat down. “Hi.”

“Hi,” they both replied as if it took some effort.

“Oh, come off of it!” she said in a frustrated hushed voice. “I’m having a hard enough time without
having to deal with this today.”

“Well, it’s not me; talk to Ron, he’s the one with the problem,” Harry said, shooting Ron an angry glare.

“I don’t have any problem, well, besides the fact that you fancy Malfoy! I wonder how long you’ve been hiding that one,” Ron said through gritted teeth.

“I’m not going to say this again; I do not fancy Malfoy!”

“Whatever you want to call it, you called him ‘gorgeous’, Harry, ’gorgeous’. What am I supposed to think?”

“You have some nerve, Ronald,” Hermione whispered harshly. “I’m the new tart of the school because of what you did last night!”

“What are you on about?”

“Because you put your horny hands on Pansy’s bum and I was stupid enough to sit there and watch, people are talking about me! Get it now?”

Ron threw up his hands. “What do you want me to do? I can’t take it back. I’m sorry, all right?”

“Fine, you’re sorry, Harry’s sorry, we’re all sorry. Let’s just drop it, all right?

“Yeah, all right.”

Harry nodded slowly.

“Now, what’s the plan?” Hermione asked looking at Harry.

Harry glanced over at Draco. “The plan is that we just do what he’s trying to do, be nice to him, get him to start talking, and see if he slips up.”

“That’s the plan?” Ron asked as if a huge chunk was missing.

“Yeah.”

“Isn’t that what he wants?” Hermione asked.

“Yeah, but now that we know he’s up to something, we can be on guard and maybe even beat him at his own game and find out what he wants.”

“Well, he’s not going to just tell us,” Ron said as if he was growing tired of reminding Harry of that.

“Maybe not, but he might tell us enough for us to figure it out on our own.”

Ron shrugged. “Okay.”

Hermione looked at Harry a moment before nodding cautiously.

They all watched Draco for the remainder of breakfast, waiting for him to make his way over and began the charade once more, but he didn’t look at them, and instead, he seemed occupied by conversation.

Once breakfast was over, Hermione headed out for Advanced Herbology, while Harry and Ron
went to Muggle Studies, where they had class with Draco. To Harry’s disappointment, he didn’t look in their direction and seemed particularly focused on the lesson.

By the time they lunch rolled around, there had been at least three other opportunities for Draco to interact with them that he hadn’t taken advantage of. As Harry and Ron walked down the hall towards study hall, Harry found himself frustrated and wondering if Draco had gotten whatever he had been after; when he heard the drawl he had been waiting for all morning behind him.

“Weasley…Potter, how’s it going?”

Ron turned around with a look he’d normally wear when gearing up for a fight, when he remembered their plan and softened his expression.

“Oh, er, hiya Malfoy,” Ron said almost casually.

To Harry’s annoyance, Draco walked up to stand beside Ron. He smiled at him anyway, though because he was pleased that they were finally getting a chance to enact their plan. “Hi, Malfoy.”

Draco smirked and looked Harry over once quickly before moving even closer to Ron and addressing him as though Harry wasn’t there.

“Weasley, I hear that you are a fan of the Chudley Cannons.”

“Yeah, so?”

“Well, it just so happens that my father and I have special box seats at their games, courtesy of the Minister, of course. There’s a match this weekend against the Kenmare Kestrels, and my father can’t go…”

“No way!”

“Well, none of my friends really likes them much, and it’d be a shame to waste tickets to such a good match. So, you’re interested?”

“Are you kidding? I love the Cannons, they’re the best!”

“They’re all right, I guess,” Harry said in an effort to join the conversation.

Draco continued to talk to Ron as if Harry hadn’t said anything. “Yes, they are pretty good, but we’ll see if they can go eight and zero; Kenmore is having a really good season.”

“Yeah, but they don’t have Lionel Strasburg as a Seeker, do they?” Ron asked excitedly.

“No, I suppose that’s true; he is something else, isn’t he?” Draco grinned back.

“Oh yea, I have all of his cards; did you know that last season alone he caught-”

“We probably can’t go, we have our own Quidditch match coming up, you know,” Harry said cutting Ron off before he began his usual rant about Strasburg’s record.

“Relax, Potter, the Cannons’ match is on Sunday, and you play Hufflepuff on Saturday… not that I was even inviting you, but if you insist on joining us, I’ll see what arrangements can be made.

Harry felt his face flush with embarrassment. Ron had an odd look on his face that was mixed with excitement and something that looked like pride that he had received an invitation over Harry.
“That’s all right; I’m not a big fan anyway.”

Draco smirked again at Harry before turning back to Ron. “Well, Weasley, work on getting permission to leave school grounds, and I’ll talk to you later about the details of where and when to meet…see you around.”

“Yea, sure,” Ron said a little too gleefully for Harry’s liking.

As Draco walked away, Harry looked at Ron in annoyance.

“What?”

“Going a bit overboard aren’t you?”

“I thought we were supposed to be friendly; there’s no reason we can’t have some fun while we’re trying to figure out what he’s up to,” Ron said defensively.

“Right,” Harry said quickly.

“You’re just mad because he invited me and not you.”

“Sure, Ron, that’s it; I’m so jealous Malfoy invited you to a stupid Chudley match,” Harry said as he began to walk away from Ron.

“…and I didn’t even have to tell him that he was gorgeous,” Ron said after him with a sneer.

Harry bit his tongue to hold back from responding as he continued to walk down the hall alone.

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The trio went down to dinner together, and Hermione discovered that the tension she had noticed previously between Harry and Ron was back. She shook her head in frustration, drawing them into reluctant conversation with each other, before finally giving up and talking to each of them one at a time. Tired of playing the diplomat, she was almost thankful that she had to excuse herself to head out for her first Potions project meeting with Malfoy in the library.

Ron told her to stay vigilant and be careful, while Harry encouraged her to take Ron’s lead from earlier that day and get as much fun out of it as possible, which prompted Ron to stab his baked potato as if it were a Skrewt. Sick of their bickering, Hermione rose quickly and started the slow dreaded walk to the library.

Going to the library usually excited her, but today, it was the last place she wanted to be. Malfoy would be there waiting for her with more of his taunts, only now it would be worse, because everything he would say about her would be something she had revealed to be true.

She took a deep breath and entered, looking around for him. She was relieved when she saw that he wasn’t there, and put her bag down so she find the books that had been placed on reserve for the assignment.

When she came back to her table, Malfoy was there with that stupid smile on his face.

“You are a good girl, aren’t you? I don’t even have to tell you to get started without me.”

“Knock it off, Malfoy. If I had a choice, I would start and finish this project without you.”

“I doubt that. It’s rare to get an opportunity to work with someone you find ‘gorgeous,’” he teased.
“You think you’re clever, but you’re not. We know you slipped everyone Veritaserum.”

Malfoy shrugged. “Thought it would spice things up a bit.”

“And, of course, because your Snape’s favourite, you got away with it, but we know. So cut the crap, what do you really want?”

“I told you, I’m just trying to make peace; you’re the ones who insist on holding grudges.”

Remembering the trio’s agreement to play his friendly game, Hermione decided to change her tone and approach.

“You’re right; we should start anew.”

Malfoy narrowed his eyes.

“Great, well, let’s get to work, shall we?” Hermione said as she smiled the tightest fakest smile that she could muster before pushing a book towards him and opening her own.

“Do you ever just relax, Granger?”

“I’m usually relaxed,” Hermione said stiffly.

“Would never know it, the way you act, despite having not one, but two boy toys to help loosen you up.”

Hermione looked around before scowling. “Leave off on that!”

“No, I can’t; you see, it’s downright scandalous and too damn interesting to leave alone. How does that work exactly? I think I’ve counted up to seventeen different ways you three can shag, and I can’t help but wonder which ones you’ve tried.”

“None of your bloody business!”

“You didn’t seem to mind sharing your business last night. Speaking of which, did you enjoy it? I hope Pansy and I gave you some new ideas.”

“I can’t believe you treat her like that; it’s horrible!”

Malfoy smirked. “She wouldn’t do it if she didn’t enjoy it.”

“Perhaps she has ‘low self-esteem’, and you’re just taking advantage of her, did you ever think about that?”

“Perhaps…” Malfoy conceded. “Or maybe she’s trying to control me by using her body, did you ever think of that?”

Hermione eyebrows furrowed.

“Of course not;” Malfoy continued. “It’s easier to concentrate on her ‘low self-esteem’ instead of your own.”

“That’s rich coming from you. I don’t have low self-esteem; I would never let anyone treat me like a dog!”

“Only because you care so much about what everyone at this school thinks of you.”
“No, because I have self-respect!” Hermione declared.

Malfoy smirked. “Is that why you need perfect marks to feel like a witch?”

“I am a witch!”

“Whatever you say, Mudblood,” Malfoy sneered.

Hermione’s face grew quite hot. “Call me that again and you’ll see how much of a witch I really am!”

Malfoy leaned over closer to her. “Oh, yes, you’d probably like it better if I said it in your ear while I had you bent over my knee.”

“I would never—”

“That’s not what you said last night.”

“It doesn’t matter what I said last night; I would never. What you do to her is sick. There are plenty of books that say so.”


“It doesn’t matter. Books are books.”

“Granger, if you’re going to live your life according to some stupid Muggle book or what other people think then you’re not half as smart as people say you are.”

“It’s not just what books or other people say, I think it’s abnormal as well.”

“And tell me, what’s normal? You act as if we get to choose who we are.”

“We do!”

“You’d love that wouldn’t you? You think if you pretend to be something you aren’t long enough, it will come true. But there’s a difference between doing and being.”

“There is nothing natural about acting like that, and you know it.”

“You sound just like a Muggle, condemning anyone who is magical, labelling them as abnormal or evil just because they can’t do it.”

“It’s not the same thing.”

“Isn’t it? But I shouldn’t be surprised that you think that way; you are, unfortunately, Muggle-born after all.”

“It’s not unfortunate to be Muggle-born, Malfoy! It doesn’t matter anyway as far as that’s concerned; whether you are a Muggle or witch, it’s just not a healthy way to engage in relationships. It’s degrading, and it’s just… wrong!”

Malfoy shook his head. “Granger, you really are a masochist. Do you beat yourself up like this every time you get yourself off?”

“I don’t beat myself up,” Hermione protested.

“Sounds like you do.”
“And I don’t get myself off!”

Malfoy chuckled at that. “Now you’re lying.”

Hermione looked down at the book before her and picked up as if trying to read.

Malfoy let out a sympathetic sigh before he picked up his book and began reading. They sat reading in silence for several minutes before Malfoy looked up at Hermione.

“Do your lovers know how much you crave it?”

Hermione continued to fix her eyes on the page before her as if in deep concentration.

“Let me see,” Malfoy continued. “They think that you just like rough sex, maybe a bit of dirty talk and some hair pulling. Am I correct?”

Hermione refused to look up.

“They really have no idea how deep it goes, do they? What it is that you really want.”

She finally tore her eyes away from the book and forced herself to look at him. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, and it doesn’t matter because my sex life isn’t up for discussion. We’re here for a Potions project, so unless you’re going to talk about the assignment, I’m not answering any more of your questions.”

“Suit yourself; keep denying what you are, I’m not going to stand in your way. I find do it rather amusing, though.”

Hermione looked back down and started reading again. Minutes later she looked up at him curiously, and then pushed her book towards him, pointing at a spot on the page. “See there, this part is sort of confusing, it says that you’re supposed to wait two weeks before the potion coagulates until you add anything else to it, but then down here, there’s an asterisk that says that coagulations can be sped up under special conditions.”

Malfoy nodded. “Yes, I saw that. I think that it may have something to do with temperature.”

Hermione shook her head. “No, it couldn’t be that; the temperature has to stay the same so that the ingredients don’t interact adversely to each other.”

“True. It might also have something to do with air density, too; perhaps it has just as much to do with where you make the potion as what you put in it.”

“Possibly. That’s rather clever actually,” Hermione said looking at Malfoy impressed.

“Don’t act surprised; I get consistent high marks in Potions as well as everything else.”

“Oh?” Hermione said, quirking an eyebrow. “Is that because you have self-esteem issues?”

Malfoy looked at her in amusement.

Hermione shook her head and smiled. “Right, what am I’m saying?”

“I have no idea,” he said in a mock incredulity as he smiled back at her.

Hermione giggled at that, which made Malfoy chuckle in turn.
There was a brief awkward silence as they looked at each other, and then Malfoy opened his mouth to say something when an alarm went off, sending Madam Pince into a frenzy and doing sonorous on her voice to order the students to leave because there was a possible fire.

As everyone filed out of the library, Hermione began to walk back towards Gryffindor, and heard Malfoy catching up behind her before finally falling in step with her.

“Well, I guess that’s the end of our session Granger, did you learn anything?”

“No, can’t say that I did; I already knew that you were a prat,” she said half-jokingly with a small smile on her face.

Malfoy seemed pleased. “You love it, though, don’t you? When you’re lying in your bed dreaming about this Slytherin prat spanking your arse.”

“You wish,” she said, her smile falling away.

“Maybe I do,” Malfoy said, giving her a dead-pan stare.

“Goodnight, Malfoy,” Hermione said, walking faster to break away from him.

Malfoy stopped walking. “Night, Granger, oh, and you have my permission.”

Hermione paused and turned around slowly. “Permission for what?”

Malfoy walked up to her crossing into her personal space to lean down and speak softly. “Since you seem to have a problem allowing yourself to do it, I’m going to help you out. You have my permission to get off tonight, as many times as you like.”

“I don’t need your permission! If I wanted to get off, which I don’t, I would,” Hermione said slightly unnerved.

“And why don’t you?”

“I’m not having this conversation with you!”

“All right, for now, but when you’re getting yourself off tonight, I want you to think about what you really want, and I want you to thank me for it when you’re finished. It’ll be our little secret.”

“Sick bastard,” Hermione said as she tore her eyes away from his and looked around self-consciously.

Malfoy smiled, “You’re welcome. Good night, Granger,” he said as he turned to walk away.

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Draco walked down to the lower levels to Snape’s classroom, where he entered and then knocked on the Potions master’s private study.

“Come in.”

“You wanted to see me, sir?”

“Yes, you had a session with Granger today, am I correct?”

“Yes, sir.”
“Well?”

Draco gave a half-hearted shrug. “Well, there’s really nothing to report. I’m not even really sure what I’m supposed to be looking for.”

Snape frowned. “How about you just look for now and report what you see, and we’ll see if you can handle your real assignment as time progresses.”

“My real assignment? You mean the Dark Lord has other intentions for me befriending Granger and the other two?”

“Yes and no.”

“Why do you keep speaking to me like one of those nutty old Seers? Say what you have to say,” Draco said his voice cracking slightly, betraying his boldness.

Snape stood regarding him for a few moments.

“Did you think about what I said to you the last time we spoke?”

“Yes, I understand that you’re angry about me breaking into your supplies, and I’m sorry, I really am.”

“No, not that.”

“Oh. That, yeah.”

“And?”

“And what? What do you want me to say?”

“I want you to start thinking about what you want for your future.”

“Does it matter what I want? Since when has it ever mattered? It’s not like I have a choice.”

“You don’t have to do everything your father tells you to do, Draco.”

Draco stilled at hearing Snape address him by his first name.

“Yes, I do,” he said softly.

“Eventually, maybe sooner than you think, you’ll have an opportunity to make a decision about what you want for yourself.”

“Yes, you said that before, but it doesn’t really seem I have many options at this point, does it?”

“There are always options, Draco, but with options come risk. You have to decide whether the risk is worth it.”

“Nothing is worth the risk of dying.”

“Nothing?” Snape said as he pushed up his the sleeve of his robe, revealing the faded but apparent Dark Mark. Draco stared at it as Snape ran his hand over it once before combing his nails over it as if to emphasise its permanence.

“What could possibly be worth dying for?” Draco asked hopeful as if wanting Snape to give him a
reason to confide all of his fears.

“Draco, I’m not going to sit here and tell you what’s worth dying for. You’ll need to come to that conclusion for yourself. Perhaps when you’re ready, we can discuss what it is you want out of life… why you would fight to live, and then, perhaps, you’ll be able to figure out what’s worth dying for.”

Draco tore his eyes from Snape’s arm to look up into the cold black eyes regarding him with a new emotion in them that he couldn’t quite place.

“Sir, I-I really should be going; I have a lot of homework.”

Snape looked at Draco one last time before looking towards the door. “Very well. You are dismissed.”

Once Draco left, Snape pulled out the book on Ancient Magic Rituals and flipped to the book marked section on sexual magic. He was beginning to doubt his plan, doubt the prophecy. Was it wise to place faith in a prophecy? It was after all, only a forecast, and they sometimes were wrong or at least, not right. After all, nothing had come of it twenty years ago. He was placing faith in the promise, a promise that required a sexual union among four very different people three of which held great animosity towards the fourth.

And even if he did manage to get them together, who said that they were even compatible in that regards. He knew that Draco’s tastes ran a bit sadistic, like his own. But he couldn’t even begin to picture the insufferable know-it-all Hermione Granger her knight in shining armour Potter and their guard dog Weasley to allow someone like Malfoy to treat her like anything less than a princess. Sexual compatibility was a necessary component for the ritual to be successful. That and love. Maybe Draco had been right after all, the cost of the risk might be too high.

He got up to pour himself another glass of cognac before sitting back to ponder how he could confirm whether he really had anything to work with at all.

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Much later that night…

Draco spent the last moments before sleep in considerable contemplation on his interaction Snape. What was he trying to get him to do? Did he want him to betray his father, the Dark Lord? Risk his life? Maybe it was a test, to see how loyal he was…but Draco didn’t believe that. He saw the look in Snape’s eyes when he spoke of things worth dying for. So, he was a traitor, perhaps even a spy. It all made Draco very nervous. Despite what Snape said, he didn’t feel he had any viable options and had to do what he was told, to keep himself alive, to keep his family alive.

He told himself he would find out exactly what Snape had planned, but he couldn’t worry about it now. He willed himself not to think about it and thought briefly about Potter and how he had made the boy flush when he made it clear that he was inviting Weasley instead of him to the Cannons match. He had no doubt that it frustrated and increased Potter’s interest in him. The more you ignore them, the more they want you.

If there was one thing Draco knew how to do, it was play hard to get, and he would treat Potter just like he treated any witch he intended to bed, except, of course, he had no intentions of doing anything of the sort. As for bedding Granger, that was no longer so clear. She was different, and it was beginning to peak his interest. He sighed deeply and finally let himself relax.

When he finally drifted off to the sleep, he found himself in a dungeon stocked with every possible
toy and contraption he could ever hope to use on a woman. He wasn’t alone; there was a naked and
beautiful witch bend over in front of him. Her arms were tied behind her back just above her arse,
which was red with fresh stripes from the cat o’ nine tails he held in his hand.

He raised the whip again and smiled as her body shook in anticipation for the next lash. When it
didn’t come and she relaxed, he brought it down upon her left cheek quickly, leaving a particularly
bright mark. His cock jumped at hearing her shocked and pained gasp.

“Count them out for me, Granger.”

“One…”

Draco clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth three times in disapproval and let out a long
exaggerated sigh.

“That’s not the way we count, slut, now is it?” as he brought down the whip over the same spot
swiftly. Hermione squealed and shook her head.

“N-no.”

“No what?” he whispered firmly as he brought the whip down against on the same spot, leaving a
dark red welt in its wake.

Hermione yelped and jumped, her body quivering in fear and excitement. She was very wet, and
hearing her scream had him so close to coming it seemed unbearable. But here in his dream, he could
take his time, he wouldn’t come until she was almost broken, and there was a long ways go before
that happened; it was, after all, Granger he was dealing with.

“No… Master.”

Draco smiled at that, feeling the dream version of him basking in the satisfaction of getting the
fiercely independent and brilliant Hermione Granger to call him Master.

“That’s a good girl. Now, let’s start over.”

Bringing the whip down so that most of its length landed firmly across both cheeks while speaking
plainly over Hermione’s pained gasp, he reminded her once again. “Mind your manners, Granger.”

“Ughhh, one…Thank you, Master, may I have another?”

Draco chuckled darkly to himself, “Of course.”

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Ron tossed and turned for a good amount of time in his bed, trying to calm his nerves so he could
sleep. He always had trouble sleeping when he and Harry weren’t on good terms. And now that they
were also lovers, it was worse.

He had to admit, there was a good deal of satisfaction in having Malfoy invite him first because
Harry always got invited to everything first with Ron as the tagalong. But Harry had some nerve to
be angry at Ron because he had been invited to the Cannons match after calling Malfoy ‘gorgeous’
like that. He couldn’t tell him that he was jealous because he had never heard Harry talk about his
looks at all. Hermione often called him cute and adorable, but Harry never did. And whether or not
Harry actually fancied Malfoy or not, apparently he had no problem with the thought of being bent
over while Malfoy spanked him. He had said ‘only you, Malfoy’, as if Ron didn’t exist.
He tried to slow his breathing and push down the anger he felt about that revelation, concentrating instead on something more pleasant. His thoughts drifted to spanking Pansy, he had really enjoyed that -- more than he thought he should have -- and seeing her gagged while he did it had stirred something in him he didn’t know had existed.

He had always wanted to spank Hermione but didn’t think she would go for it. Even when she said she liked rough sex, it just didn’t ever seem like the right time to ask or even bring it up. How would he feel if she said no? But she did want it; she had said it. She didn’t even protest and walk off as he spanked Pansy, and he found that to be the sexiest part of it all of it.

Ron drifted into a hypnotic waking dream as he held his cock, not really wanking, but stroking it as if trying to soothe himself. He didn’t want to come; the tension he felt was stirring, and wanted to let it hold him captive while he thought about Hermione. He watched as a dream version of himself circled the bed to which Hermione was tied to, her arms bound by soft rope, one tied to each bedpost, while her legs were tied with longer more flexible rope that would give her just enough movement in her legs to allow her to struggle. And she did struggle, but not to break free, she was struggling to communicate to him what she wanted. She couldn’t tell him what she wanted, what she needed because she was gagged with the same red ball he had watched Draco stuff in Pansy’s mouth. She was helpless and desperate in her need for him, her eyes pleading him to take her.

And eventually he would, after he watched her for a while. He played with her nipples, twisting them, covering them with his mouth before pulling away as he trailed his fingers down to her hot wet centre and brushed over her clit. He pulled away again, and watched her writhe as she tried to fight the restraints.

She was finally giving him all of the control she had denied him for so long, and now here, in his fantasy, he would deny her what she wanted until he could stand to no longer.

After holding onto that image and his cock for what seemed like forever, Ron finally began to wank, coming quickly before slipping into restless sleep.

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Harry was turned over on his side, facing the window and staring out. He heard Ron wanking and climaxing, and before long, snoring.

Git. The nerve of him acting all smug about Malfoy inviting him to a stupid Quidditch match. Harry didn’t know what made him angrier, the fact that Ron thought that it was something to be proud of, or that Malfoy didn’t invite him.

He had meant it when he said he didn’t fancy him. But he knew that he had always thought the boy to be quite attractive. If he wasn’t such an arsehole, it may have materialised into a crush, but Malfoy’s attitude prevented any type of feelings of the sort. Still, he had to admit, lately, it had been nice seeing him smile, really smile, for a change. It changed his whole face, making it appear almost angelic. Harry shook his head at that thought. Malfoy was no angel, if anything he was the opposite.

But that was kind of sexy as well. The way he walked around with a sense of security and sureness about himself that Harry never could grasp for himself. The way he kept his cool most of the time when other people were freaking out. The way he commanded attention and obedience from his friends.

Harry let out a long sigh as his hand wandered down to his cock as he thought about Malfoy ordering Pansy about the way he had. Only now, instead of Pansy, Malfoy was ordering him around. He sped up his strokes as he thought about Malfoy bending him over,spanking him while his mouth
was stuffed with that red ball he had used on Pansy. His mind briefly flickered to the image of Malfoy spreading him open to fuck him before he shook his head.

What the hell?!

Harry swallowed and slowed down his strokes trying mentally to flip to a more appropriate image. That was easy, though. He had never been attracted to Pansy, but watching her crawl had been one of the sexiest things he had ever seen. And when he suggested that Hermione might like it, she had said ‘perhaps’.

Ever since that day in the dungeon when he had shagged her in front of Ron, he had been thinking about doing all sorts of things to her. But despite the pact they had made, he felt he had to guard his thoughts. Not only did he want to shag her ten different ways to London that he wasn’t sure she would be Okay with, but he wanted to treat her badly the way Draco had treated Pansy, but that wasn’t normal, why would he want to humiliate someone he loved?

Granted this thing between him, Hermione, and Ron wasn’t what he would call normal either, but even he thought that his desires were too freaky to mention to either one of them.

As long as it didn’t slip out when they were all together, he felt that it would be all right. He knew they loved him fiercely, but Harry still carried with him a nagging insecurity that he was the third wheel. He thought that if pushed to it, if Hermione ever had to choose, that she would choose Ron. Ron was after all, the public boyfriend, while Harry was just her friend to the rest of the world. He didn’t want to do anything to test that suspicion.

But there was no harm in thinking about it…

Harry closed his eyes and continued to wank to the vision of Hermione on her knees in front of him. He pictured Hermione worshipping his cock, bathing it with her tongue, adoring it, and using her mouth to show him how much. When he was done, he wanted her to swallow him, all of him and whatever else was left she would wear on her face. But there was more, he wanted her to endure and enjoy any humiliation he chose for her. She would suffer him because she loved him, and she would do it all to show him just how much.

Harry let out a low groan as he came hard, his body shuddering from both the vision and the orgasm. He did a cleaning charm, and pulled the covers over his head as he tried to fight the guilt of wanking to the image of his best friend being degraded for his pleasure.

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In the adjacent girls’ dormitories, Hermione was staring up at the ceiling, fighting with herself—again. She hadn’t lied. She hardly ever did it. She thought about doing it, but usually would hold back, trying to restrain herself from doing it. It was as if she knew where her mind might take her if she dared touch herself.

But she was safe here, in her bed, and she could hear the heavy breathing and snores from the other girls as they slept. Her curtain was drawn and she could feel a hunger begging to be fed throbbing at her core.

She let her fingers slide down to her centre, and slipped two into herself, working them into herself slowly, imagining it was a hard cock. At first it was Ron’s, and then it was Harry’s; they were taking turns fucking her. And then Ron was in her mouth, feeding her his cock while Harry had her legs on his shoulders, balls deep inside of her. Hermione felt her body convulse as she came. But it wasn’t enough, she needed to come again, and so she kept up the pace, adding another finger as her fantasy
She was back in the lower dungeon, but this time, she on her hands and knees, and she was crawling, just like she had seen Pansy do the night before, only this time, she was the pet. As if to make it more obvious, she had a Muggle dog collar around her neck, and it was attached to a very long leash that someone was pulling at as she crawled across the dungeon floor.

She knew Harry and Ron were waiting there for her, but there was also someone else with them. She heard a familiar drawl beckoning her. “That’s it, Mudblood, crawl for us.”

Harry and Ron didn’t protest or defend her. Their silence spoke volumes; they were all in agreement with her treatment. And here in her fantasy, hearing him say that didn’t hurt; it felt like it brushed a deep longing she had long buried. He wanted her, in spite of all of his breeding and prejudice, he was here; they were all here, and all of their attention was focused on her, a Mudblood. They needed her because she could satisfy them in a way that no other witch could. And so even though she was on her hands and knees on a leash before them, she felt strangely empowered.

When she finally reached their feet, she shuddered to see the shadow of all three of them hovering over her. Malfoy, who held the leash, had gathered it in his hand and was pulling her closer to them.

Harry grabbed her hair, forcing her head back to look up at them, as Ron ordered her to beg the way she had in the Room of Requirement, only this time, he wanted her to beg to be used. They all stared down at her, waiting for her to comply. And she did, she begged, and begged until they finally all descended on her, taking their turns using her mouth, her arse, and her cunt.

Hermione continued to thrust into herself, until she came not once, twice, or even three times, but five times, the last one causing her to let out a soft whimper, before stilling herself to listen for any signs that the others in the room were awake. She lay there for several minutes in a daze, trembling, feeling the wetness of her climax on her thighs and on the sheet under her, before finally removing her fingers.

“Thank you, Malfoy.” she whispered before doing a cleaning charm, and turning over to fall into a deep peaceful sleep.
Watching Grass Grow

Is there something wrong?
What’s taking you so long?
Looking for something from you,
Just one fucking measly clue,
Any shitty little tip-off would do…

“I Know It’s Not Easy” by Liz Phair

I always feel like somebody’s watching me,
Who’s playing tricks on me?

“Somebody’s Watching Me” as sung by Rockwell

By the end of the week, Ron and Draco had spoken several times about the upcoming Cannons match. While Ron was excited about the match and seemed to be growing more comfortable with the idea of going with Draco, Harry was weary of why Draco was trying to isolate him. He grew more suspicious as their interactions grew more frequent, and his attempts at blatantly shunning Harry from conversation grew increasingly obvious each time.

“Can’t you see what’s going on?” Harry asked one night while they all sat in the common room studying.

“What?” Ron asked in a weary voice.

“He’s either trying to get you by yourself, in which case, you may be in danger. Gods know what he has planned. Or he’s trying to come between us so he can make us more vulnerable for an attack by someone else.”

“Listen to yourself, Harry. You’re being paranoid; he couldn’t come between us if he tried.”

“Well, actually, he’s not doing a bad job. You guys have been bickering all week long,” Hermione offered as she began to seriously consider Harry’s point.

“Only because Harry’s jealous.”

“I told you I’m not jealous, Ron.”

Ron shook his head and began to write, signalling that the conversation was over. Harry glared at him and closed his book, making an excuse for retiring early, leaving Hermione with Ron in an awkward silence.

McGonagall insisted that any trips made away from school grounds on the weekend have a permission slip signed by a parent. Deciding that it would be less complicated and that there would be much less fanfare made if he didn’t tell his parents, Ron sent an owl to Fred and George at their joke shop, begging one of them to forge the signature instead.

When the owl returned, there were two notes attached. One was a signed permission slip with Mrs. Weasley’s signature and the other note was from Fred and George, which read:
Ron,

Risking your hide for Quidditch? The Cannons aren’t that good, but if you insist on going, be careful. If by chance you get kidnapped by Death Eaters, we’ll deny any knowledge of this.

P.S. You owe us game souvenirs. Kestrels gear only. Strasburg is a wanker.

Satisfied with securing the permission he needed, Ron was in a much better mood and was being extra nice to Harry in an effort to be smooth things over. Harry accepted his apologetic actions, and they were soon on good terms again by the time Saturday’s Hufflepuff match took place. Gryffindor won with Ron making three good saves before Harry caught the Snitch. They remained in high spirits until Sunday morning when Draco came to the common room to walk with Ron to Hogsmeade where there was a Portkey that had been given permission to be used twice a month with parental agreement.

Harry gave Ron a stiff “see you later” before Ron walked out of the common room in awkward silence with Draco down the hall. Whatever excitement Ron had been feeling about going to the match seemed to be dampened by the reality that he had gone through a lot of trouble to go to the match, all to be in the company of someone he didn’t like at all. Draco himself felt that while the plan seemed perfect when he set out to do it, the next few hours were going to be painful, and he didn’t even know how he was going to begin to pull off trying to build some sort of rapport with someone he had despised and taunted for so long.

Once they arrived at the match, Draco and Ron sat in their seats, waiting for the game to start in the same thick silence they had walked together with since meeting up. Finally, Ron gave a feeble attempt at small talk.

“So, um, you and your dad go all the time?”

“We used to; father has been really busy lately,” Draco said quickly.

“Yeah, I’m sure,” Ron muttered.

“What’s that?”

“Nothing.”

“You have something to say, Weasley? Spit it out!”

Ron looked away before standing up and going up to the railing to look out over the Pitch.

“This is an awesome view,” he said more to himself than Draco as he stared at the massive pitch. A loud and colourful explosion of fireworks ignited the sky, and the Cannons came out one by one, flipping over, executing complicated manoeuvres before forming the shape of a long cannon with their Seeker, Lionel Strasburg, tunnelling through the centre as if he were a cannon ball.

“Oh, wow, they come out doing sideways doubles.”

“Yes, they always do that; haven’t you ever been before?”

“Just the World Cup the year before last.”

“Oh, yes, I remember that. Shame it was cut short…”

“Yeah, by Death Eaters!” Ron said angrily, looking back at Draco before turning around and taking
a seat beside him, staring straight ahead and crossing his arms.

Draco looked at him hard before turning his head back to look at the sky. The awkwardness and tension was almost suffocating. They sat there for a few minutes as the opening announcements were read.

“Well, I’m glad that I could give you a chance to watch the game in style, the way it’s supposed to be seen,” Draco said with an air of condescension.

“I’d enjoy the game no matter where I saw it,” Ron said defensively.

“Right, I guess it helps to tell yourself that when you can’t afford to see it the proper way,” Draco said with a small laugh in his words.

“Shut your mouth, Malfoy! Just because you have fancy box seats doesn’t mean it’s the proper way to watch Quidditch. Quidditch is for everyone.”

“The box isn’t.”

“You think because you have money that you can talk to people any way you want.”

“And you think because you’re poor that makes you nobler and gives you the right to judge me as if you know me.”

“You judge me for being poor.”

“I just call it like I see it. You are poor.”

“Doesn’t make you better than anyone!”

“I don’t make the rules, Weasley; I just live by them.”

Ron shook his head at Draco. “Maybe this was a bad idea. I’m not really in the mood for watching the game anymore,” he said, looking as if he were going to rise.

Draco gritted his teeth, trying to hold off the urge to thump Ron on the side of the head and tell him to just suck it up and take his insults like a Slytherin; instead, he inhaled deeply before finally exhaling discretely, maintaining his cool.

“Look, Weasley, we’re here now; I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to offend you. I know I can be a bit… frank, sometimes.”

“Frank? You mean rude and downright unpleasant,” Ron said, folding his arms again.

“Okay, fine, rude, then. Sorry, this ‘being nice’ thing is not my cup of tea,” Draco said genuinely.

“So, why are you doing it, then?” Ron asked.

“I don’t know, really. Just trying something new, you could say,” Draco said, looking at Ron directly.

“It’s a bit fishy, you know. You’ve been a prat towards me all this time and all of a sudden you want to be friends.”

Draco looked at Ron and then off at the field before nodding his head. “You know, I wouldn’t trust me either if I were you, but then again, if I were you I wouldn’t be asking questions; I’d just take full
Ron smiled. “I had every intention of doing that.”

Draco looked at Ron and smiled back. “You see, we do have something in common… besides enjoying spanking Pansy’s arse, that is.”

Ron blushed and ran his hands through his hair. “I can’t believe I did that.”

Draco shook his head. “You know, I can’t believe it you actually did it either.”

They both looked at each other and sniggered as the announcer signalled the start of the game. The mood in the box was considerably more relaxed and quickly they both found themselves into the game, shouting, yelling, and jumping up whenever the Cannons scored or missed a save. By the end, they were both hoarse and very pleased with the Cannons beating the Kestrels, with Strasburg catching the Snitch to win the game.

When they arrived back at Hogwarts, the awkwardness was back, neither knowing what to say, what their brief time together meant, or how they should now treat each other. Finally Ron spoke, “Well, thanks, Malfoy, it was a great game.”

“Yeah, it was.”

Ron nodded and then pushed his hands in his pockets. “Well, um, I’m pretty beat, going to turn in; guess I’ll see you around.”

“Sure, Weasley, maybe we can go again sometime if you like.”

Ron gave Draco a small smile and nodded. “Yeah… maybe.”

Draco returned his smile with his own before they both turned and walked toward their common rooms.

When he entered the common room, Ron immediately noticed Harry on the couch pretending to read. He could tell that he was using it as a front for waiting for Ron to come back and give him a report on what had happened. He also knew Harry had too much pride to ask.

“Hey,” Ron said sitting across from Harry.

Harry slowly looked up as if he had been interrupted in the middle of reading, “Oh, hi. Back already?”

Ron rolled his eyes. “Yeah.”

“Oh, okay,” Harry said nodding his head before resuming reading.

“Just ask, Harry.”

Harry put down his book and sat back up. “Fine, how was it?”

“It was alright,” Ron said, trying not to show too much enthusiasm.

“So, what did you find out?”

“Huh? Oh, erm, well we really didn’t get around to anything like that.”
“But he must have asked you loads of questions. What kinds of things did he want to know?”

“Actually, he didn’t really ask me anything.”

Harry looked annoyed and thoughtful. “Probably knows we’re on to him, so he’s playing it safe until we get comfortable.”

Ron didn’t reply, which seemed to frustrate Harry even more.

“Well, what do you think?” Harry asked impatiently.

“I don’t know, Harry. I’m not saying Malfoy is cool or even a decent person all of a sudden, but maybe he’s just really trying to be nice for a change.”

“Are you serious? Ron, this is Malfoy we’re talking about!”

“I don’t know, I’m just saying… maybe he’s trying.”

“Great, he’s brainwashed you,” Harry said, shaking his head as he picked his book back up. Ron didn’t want to share with Harry that he felt some sort of genuineness in his conversation with Malfoy. He wasn’t even sure why he felt it was genuine or why he had enjoyed his time with the boy so much. He thought it would be best to keep it to himself until he and Harry were back on good terms.

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Draco showed up early for his next study session with Hermione. The first one had been cut short, and he didn’t really get a chance to find out anything that seemed to be of any use from Ron, so he felt he couldn’t waste any more valuable time.

“My, we’re early and eager aren’t we?” Hermione said looking at him with a smirk as she took a seat.

“Did you do it?” Draco asked staring at her.

“Yes, I did.”

“Good girl.”

Hermione smirked. “I read all two-hundred pages on stage two of the potion’s progression.”

“Cute, Granger, you know exactly what I’m talking about.”

Hermione opened her book and began to comb through it, refusing to return his expectant gaze.

“What did you think about when you were doing it?” he asked silkily.

“How the potion actually works. It doesn’t really say how it can impact the body or what happens to those who it’s used against, besides repelling them of course.”

Draco rolled his eyes before replying, “I’m guessing the potion has the same effect as walking into a glass door. So, how many times did you get off?”

Hermione sighed. “Yes, but then why is it so involved, and wouldn’t it be more advantageous to use then, say, a Shield Charm? I mean, why would you want to ingest something to protect yourself if you could just use your wand? Do you think it covers a wider area than just your body?”
“Perhaps, and there may be a time when you can’t access your wand. The effects probably last considerably longer. Although, you’re right, it doesn’t say what the long-term effects may be on the body… so it was that good eh? I hope you at least remembered to thank me.”

Hermione smirked at him again. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, but you sound mental jabbering on about whatever it is you’re talking about. Now, let’s work on chapter four; we need to start thinking about what other ingredients we may need and how and where we want to actually work on this.”

Draco smiled back at her. “Well, you’re welcome. All you have to do is ask.”

Hermione returned his smile before shaking her head. All of the lights in the library went out at once, prompting Madam Pince to do another Sonorous, telling the students to use their wands to cast a Lumos Spell as they guided themselves out.

Hermione groaned in frustration, while Draco clenched his teeth at their session having been cut short once again.

Once again, the students left the library in a single-file line, and Hermione began walking back to the common room, although this time she turned left, taking an alternate and less used corridor. She was walking slowly, as if waiting for Malfoy to catch up.

Draco noticed immediately and walked briskly to catch up to her. She looked at him and gave him a shy smile before looking straight ahead. “We’re never going to get anywhere if we keep getting interrupted.”

“Maybe we should study somewhere else.”

“Like?”

“Oh, I don’t know, perhaps my dormitory,” he said with a sly smile.

“I don’t think your girlfriend would like that.”

“Pansy’s not my girlfriend. She’s trying out for the part and failing miserably.”

Hermione stopped walking and turned to face him. “You might want to tell her that. And if she’s not your girlfriend, then you really are the prat I thought you were,” she said, looking at him in disappointment.

Draco shrugged. “I only make requests. I’ve never forced anyone to do anything they don’t want to do.”

They stared at each other for a moment before Hermione broke eye contact and looked around. “Well, I guess we should each read chapter four on our own and meet to talk about it next week, same time same place, and let’s hope there are no more disruptions.”

“All right, Granger,” Draco said, not moving as if waiting for something.

Hermione slowly began to turn to leave before pausing and turning back to look at him.

“Five times.”

Draco stared at her a moment as if surprised by her revelation before chuckling softly.

“Well, you’re just full of surprises, aren’t you? What’s the matter? Not getting what you need from
Potter and Weasley?"

“Not that it’s any of your business, but Harry and Ron are excellent lovers.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really,” she said, smirking as if daring him to challenge it.

Draco shrugged. “Great, I guess I’ll leave you alone, then,” he said, smirking back.

Hermione studied him for a moment before moving closer to close the space between them.

“I didn’t say you had to,” she said softly.

Draco licked his lips as he looked down at her. She really did have the biggest doe eyes he had ever seen, and she smelled like strawberries. And suddenly she was so close, too close, and he had to tell himself to remain calm and appear unaffected, even though he was feeling anything but unaffected at the moment.

“Granger, if you want a shag, you’ll have to do better than that. I’m not easy.”

Hermione stifled a small laugh, causing Draco to smile.

“Actually, I wanted to ask you if I could get off tonight.”

Draco studied her for a moment. “If you ask properly.”

Hermione inched even closer to him, brushing her chest against him as she took in his scent and looked up into his grey eyes, “Malfoy, can I please get myself off tonight?”

Draco fought the urge to grab her face and make her say it again. He was in the middle of a hallway for Merlin’s sake.

“What are you going to think about while you’re doing it?”

“Hmm, I don’t know,” Hermione, murmured softly, blushing and looking down.

“Well, unless you tell me, I’ll have to insist that you refrain from touching yourself.”

Hermione inhaled before looking back up at him determinedly and pushing herself on her tiptoes to whisper into his ear. “How I know you want to make me beg for your cock and the way it would feel pressed against the back of my throat,” she moaned softly and continued, “and how your cock would feel up my arse, while your hands leave red marks all over my spread cheeks while you fuck me,” she finished, boldly flicking her tongue against the shell of his very red ear.

Draco bit down on his lip to keep from moaning.

“Is that okay?” Hermione asked coyly, smiling up at him.

Draco nodded slowly, trying not to show his excitement.

Hermione noticed that he seemed to be restraining himself and smirked. “Thank you, Malfoy,” she said, smiling cheekily before turning to walk back to her common room, leaving Draco staring after her as if he had just been told that he had won the House Cup.

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Ron had every intention of continuing to go see Cannon games with Malfoy. When Malfoy asked him to go to the next home game, Ron accepted. He sent off another owl to Fred and George along with two Kestrels shot glasses as payment for their services. But instead of a permission slip, he received a Howler from his mother berating him for forging her signature and forbidding him to leave school grounds without her explicit permission for the rest of the year. He couldn’t figure out how his mother found out; the twins denied telling her and no one else but Harry and Hermione knew about the forgery.

The Howler reached the ears of McGonagall, who took away Ron’s privileges to go to Hogsmeade for the next few months as punishment. Harry tried not to gloat but couldn’t help reminding Ron that he told him so a few times, which only made it an even sorrier subject between the two.

Still, Draco still made efforts to reach out to Ron by talking about the progress of the Cannons and the latest Strasburg stats when they ran into each other. This usually put Ron at ease around him, and they even gave a try at listening to a match over the Wizarding Wireless Network, but for some reason the reception went fuzzy and eventually the wizarding radio went dead. After that, any effort they made to talk about matches were usually brief and cut-off by others.

Observing that interacting with Ron was becoming more difficult and more awkward because he didn’t have any time to talk to the boy about anything but Quidditch before they were usually interrupted, Draco began to focus more on trying to flirt with Harry, who seemed to be increasingly ambivalent about how to interact with him.

For Harry, the sparse and random interactions with Draco were becoming more frustrating. The boy would swing from outright ignoring him, especially if Ron or Hermione were around, to slyly acknowledging his presence with suggestive and curious stares but little conversation. Sometimes when Harry was at meals, he would look up and catch Draco staring at him as if in contemplation, and other times he would catch him staring at Hermione, who seemed to becoming bolder in returning his stare. He didn’t know what to make of that but decided confiding in Ron about it was a bad idea.

One evening, while practicing some new manoeuvres he wanted to try out in the next Quidditch match, Harry had the distinct feeling that he was being watched. He came down, looking around as he landed before dismounting his broom and deciding to head back. As he approached the last stand, he saw him. He had been standing there the whole time watching him. How creepy. Harry tensed as he came closer to Draco.

“Hi, Potter, how’s it going?”

“Fine, if you’re looking for Ron, he’s—”

“Actually, I wanted to catch up with you.”

Harry narrowed his eyes. “Is that why you followed me out here? What do you want?”

“I hear that you’re good with defence charms, particularly the Patronus.” Harry studied Draco for a moment, trying to figure out his angle.

“And why would you want my help with that?”

“I’m thinking of taking my N.E.W.T.s next year in Defence Against the Dark Arts, and that particular Charm seems to be my weakness. I hear you’re rather good at it.”

Harry stood staring at Draco for several moments before Draco put up his hands.
“What?”

“What’s your deal, Malfoy?”

Draco shook his head. “What’s yours? I’m trying my best to be friendly and still you insist I’m up to no good.”

“Probably because you are. One minute you’re a total arsehole, and overnight you’re Mr. Congeniality.”

“Huh?”

“Why are you being so damn nice?”

“Ah, I see, you’re like Granger… want me to treat you badly? Well, if you ask nicely…” Draco said with a mischievous smile as he moved in closer towards Harry.

Harry told himself not to back up, to hold his stance despite the strong urge to sprint back to the castle.

Draco stopped suddenly, his eyes focusing intently. “Wow.”

“What?” Harry asked, looking behind him, trying to figure out what Draco was staring at in fascination.

But there was nothing behind him, and so he turned his head back around, and noticed that Draco had inched closer to him. Harry hadn’t heard him move. Damn him. He could smell him; he smelled like soap, really clean. How could someone so foul smell so fresh?

Draco wasn’t staring at anything behind Harry; he was looking right into Harry’s eyes, studying them as if seeing them clearly for the first time. “They really are something,” he whispered, his breath touching Harry’s cheeks, creating goose bumps along Harry’s neck.

Harry swallowed and exhaled slowly before finally croaking, “Thanks,” lamely.

Draco studied Harry’s eyes a few more moments, letting the other boy shift uncomfortably under his gaze before speaking.

“So, will you do it?” Draco asked, licking his lips.

Harry’s eyes widened and his cheeks turned red, “What? Er, I-I don’t know… I really shouldn’t…”

“That’s just a Patronus Charm; it’s not like I can hurt people with it.”

“Oh,” Harry said, letting out a small sigh of relief, “the Patronus Charm, right, er, sure, no problem.”

Draco leaned in closer and smiled. Harry gazed at him, holding his breath. “Thanks, Potter. Let’s make plans to meet up so you can show me.”

Harry nodded, in semi-disbelief he would be teaching Malfoy, anything—alone.

“Sure, where?”

“Hmm, well, I was thin—”

“Harry, ah, I’ve been looking all over for you,” interrupted an old, familiar voice he hadn’t expected
to hear. Both Draco and Harry broke eye contact and looked at the appraising stare of the headmaster. It was odd to see him outside of the castle.

Dumbledore looked at Draco briefly and nodded before turning back and looking at Harry. “So sorry, didn’t mean to interrupt. Harry, if you don’t mind, may I have a word with you?”

“Sure, Professor,” Harry said eagerly turning to follow the headmaster off the pitch before looking back quickly at Draco. “I’ll catch up with you later perhaps.”

“Yeah,” Draco said, balling his fists at his sides, staring at their backs as they walked back up to the castle.

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Several weeks later….

Snape let out a frustrated sigh as Draco told him, once again, how little contact he had made with any of the trio. It was like listening to a broken record. Snape was scheduled to give a report to the Dark Lord soon, and so far he couldn’t even tell him that Draco had made any progress in establishing a rapport with any of the Gryffindors. Snape had been watching the trio since the beginning of the year, and he had noticed that except for small signs here and there, Draco had made absolutely no real progress.

“So, so far, you’ve learned that Ms. Granger is involved in a polyamorous relationship with Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley, they seemed to have scaled back activities related to Dumbledore’s Army and don’t seem to be planning anything against the Dark Lord. What’s really new, Draco? You realize the Dark Lord will expect much more than that.”

“Well, if he’s starving for information, you could also tell him that she thinks Crookshanks is a dog trapped in a cat’s body, her favorite song right now is “Bewitched” by The Wicked Sisters, she’s afraid of flying but isn’t afraid of heights, she wants to be a Healer, she loves the colour red, she likes strawberries, and smells like them, too.”

Snape raised his eyebrows, regarding Draco with surprised amusement. “And tell me, how do you think knowledge of Ms. Granger’s scent will help the Dark Lord?”

Draco blushed.

Snape smirked. “Very well, I suppose that will be all.”

“Oh, there is one more thing, sir.”

“Yes?”

“It may be nothing, really, but we’ve been meeting for almost two months now, and it seems like, well, there’s no seems is there? We always get interrupted.”

“By whom?”

“That’s just it, it’s not who or what, it’s always a different interruption.

“We tried moving to another location, thinking the library was just cursed or something, but it doesn’t matter where we study; we always get interrupted.”
Snape didn’t respond, but a shadow crossed his face.

“And, it’s not just Granger; I still can’t figure out why Weasley got in trouble for going to that match with me, and of course that means we can’t go to any more, so it’s been difficult trying to find an excuse to spend time around him. And the few times I’ve tried to speak with Potter, we’re always cut off, and now I can hardly ever catch him alone.”

“Cut off?”

“Yes, by… interruptions.”

“And what interrupted you the last time you spoke to Potter?”

“The headmaster. And then there’s also the feeling that…” Draco shook his head.

“What is it?”

“Well, sometimes I feel like I’m being watched. At first I thought it was you, but now I’m not so sure. But it may have something to do with all of these interruptions. It occurred to me that perhaps I’m being set up,” he said, failing to hide his nervousness.

“You shouldn’t be concerned about that; there are no other spies at Hogwarts. I would know if there were any.”

Draco nodded as if he wasn’t convinced before asking to be dismissed.

Once Snape dismissed Draco, he went to his cabinet and poured a cognac. He noticed he was almost out of it and would have to get some more soon. He had never drunk so much before.

Lately, he would drink after his meetings with Draco. He was quickly becoming more frustrating that Draco had made no real progress in getting to know any of the trio. It did not bode well that the likelihood of the prophecy being true, but it also was failing to meet the Dark Lord’s command, for which he was going to be held responsible.

Waiting for them all to build rapport over the past few months had been as painful as watching a clock tick or grass grow, and now it seemed that he wasn’t the only one watching them with interest. He had some thoughts about who it may be, but he didn’t have any substantial proof or even enough evidence to justify his suspicions; it was just a nagging feeling that had been growing over the past few years since Potter had arrived. He didn’t want to think about why he thought that—not yet. But he resolved that he would be around to get to the bottom of it the next time Draco and Hermione met for their project.

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Hermione took a seat beside Draco, looking around before looking back at him and smiling.

“Did you do any work on this assignment yet?”

“I thought that was the purpose of our time together?”

“Well, you could at least attempt to do some reading in advance.”

“Oh, I have.”

“All right, then, well, what did you think of chapter ten of the book on mixing with alternative ingredients.”
“Well, I actually started reading the other book. It talks more about the properties of shielding spells, potions, and enchantments; perhaps it will give us some insight into things we can use as comparison models.”

“Comparison models?” Hermione asked, watching him.

“Yes. For instance, this castle is rumoured to have shielding charms all over it. There are supposedly even areas where magic is rendered useless.”

“Of course, that explains why we can’t Apparate, but how come we can do other spells?” she asked, nodding absently.

“Well, Shield Charms can be manipulated to insulate the object or person from specific types of magic, but I’m sure there are places where spells, enchantments, and even potions don’t really work, but it’s not like they’re going to tell us that. What’s important is that we find some sort of model like that so we can compare our final product to it for effectiveness.”

Hermione smiled. “You’re actually rather brilliant when you’re not being such a git,” she said playfully.

“Comes with the package,” Draco said, smiling back at her. “What else comes with the package?” she asked boldly, looking at him before sliding close so that their arms were touching.

Draco looked up and around the library to see if anyone was watching them before looking back Hermione as if debating something with himself. He nodded as if answering a silent question before tentatively reaching up to touch her. Hermione held her breath and began to lean into him to give her assent when suddenly, there was a loud crash and the table shook. They both instinctually jumped out of their seat and fell onto the floor along with several dozens of books. A large wooden bookcase against the wall next their table had fallen over, breaking the edge of a table very close to where Draco had been sitting and narrowly missing crushing his feet.

Once the shock of almost being squashed dissipated, Hermione looked at Draco in concern, inspecting him to make sure that all of his limbs were intact.

“Aren’t you okay?”

“Yes, I’m fine, just a few scratches,” he said trying not to sound alarmed.

Madam Pince came rushing over, yelling for everyone to leave, sounding more concerned about the books than Draco or Hermione, but giving them an obligatory “Are you two all right?” before turning frantically to survey the damage caused to the books and table.

Hermione had almost recovered and was rising when she saw Snape rushing towards her. He stopped and looked around, observing at the ceiling and behind him as if he were searching for something, causing Hermione and Draco to stare at him as if he had gone mad.

After several minutes of looking around curiously, Snape waved his wand and muttered a rather long-winded spell. Hermione and Draco waited for something to happen but nothing seemed to change, except that Snape had turned to stare at Hermione as if he had just seen a troll. He studied her from head to toe and before his eyes finally settled on her neck. He squinted as if focusing in on something as he inched closer. Hermione drew back in fear from the towering man she had come to fear and loathe over the past six years, wondering if he had finally snapped and was about to wring her neck for some unknown reason.

Snape reached out as if he were about to grab Hermione by the neck, causing her to shriek in fear
and back up even more before he pulled her by her school tie hard, drawing her closer to him. As Hermione began to struggle and plead for him to let her go, Snape bent down to study her, holding her firmly by her necktie.

Draco stood up quickly and made an effort to put himself in front of Hermione but Snape quickly pushed Draco to the side so that he fell back down. Reaching up with his free hand, Snape pulled at her robe so that he could reach down into it, giving the appearance that he was attempting to feel her up.

Hermione gasped as Snape’s fingers traced the chain of the locket down to where the locket lay right above her breasts.

“Get away from me, you creep!” she yelled before reaching for her wand. Just as she was about to pull out her wand to try to hex him, he gave the chain a hard yank, snatching the locket up in his hand and staring down at it before letting her go absently.

“Bastard,” he whispered to himself, staring at the locket, his usual pale face flushing red with anger as he turned and walked briskly out of the library.

A small crowd had gathered around Hermione and Draco and was eyeing both of them, waiting for more information or action. Madam Pince was on her hands and knees cursing under her breath and examining the books on the floor, apparently oblivious to the events occurring after the bookshelf had crashed.

“You okay?” Draco asked Hermione.

Hermione was flabbergasted. She thought that Snape had been trying to attack her, and when she felt the most vulnerable, Draco had defended her, and for some unknown reason, the Potions master had snatched a very expensive locket from her and had taken off without any explanation. It was all very bizarre.

“I-I’m fine, thanks,” she said, looking shyly up at him before glancing around the small crowd that had gathered.

“Okay, folks, show’s over,” Draco said, eyeing them threateningly, causing most of them to turn around and move on slowly.

“What the bloody hell was that all about?” Draco asked, looking at Hermione.

“I have no idea, I thought you might know,” she said, looking at him in shock.

Draco shook his head and shrugged.

“Well, I think it’s safe to say that this session is over,” Hermione said with exasperation.

“Yeah, another one bites the dust,” Draco said, staring at the damage.

Hermione smiled. “Isn’t that a Muggle phrase?”

Draco rolled his eyes. “Yeah, so?”

Hermione grinned. “So, um, I’m just going to walk back to my common room now,” she said suggestively, turning to walk out slowly, putting an extra swish of her hips.

Draco smirked. “Right,” he said before following her out.
The orb he had been watching went blank, and so he turned his chair around to gaze at the bewitched mirror strategically mounted on his dress robes wardrobe adjacent to his desk—his *Slytherin* mirror. Of all the houses, he kept the closest watch on the Slytherin House. There were several versions of the magical eye placed in the Slytherin common room and dormitories. Magical eyes in stuffed, mounted animals, portraits, and in dark corners of the ceiling that were all bewitched to capture and project whatever area he wanted to see in that particular mirror. Right now, a magical eye placed in the dark corner of the ceiling in the Slytherin boys’ dormitory was giving him an aerial view of a particularly disturbing exchange between Blaise Zabini and Pansy Parkinson. He silently wondered if Mr. Malfoy knew about that. There were moments like this when he had to admit it was quite entertaining to watch, like one of those Muggle soap operas.

He usually didn’t derive any pleasure from it; rather he felt that watching over them was every bit as boring as watching grass grow, but it was the only way to spot the weeds and cut them down before they infected the rest. And the weeds seemed to always sprout from Slytherin.

He was just about to take another puff of his pipe when Fawkes screamed out in indignation as he heard his chambers being entered by an uninvited guest. He swung his chair around to see the angry face of Severus Snape approaching his desk. Snape threw a gold locket down across the desk and stood in a stance that suggested he was bracing himself for the unexpected.

Dumbledore looked at the locket for a few moments before leaning back and taking a puff from his pipe, giving Snape a small smile that didn’t quite reach his cold blue eyes.
Echoes

I can feel it coming back again,
Like a roll of thunder, chasing the wind.
Voices pulling from the center of the earth again,
I can feel it.

-“Lightning Crashes” by Live

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“Care to explain what in the hell you are doing, Lord Custos?” Snape said the name with mock deference.

Dumbledore took another puff of his pipe as a look of tired amusement grew across his weathered features. “What exactly is it that you want me to explain, Severus? Why or how? It is getting quite late.”

“Both!”

Dumbledore sat back and looked at Snape in consideration before he spoke. “As you have already surmised, the locket projects images to an orb in my keeping so that I can monitor Ms. Granger’s activities.”

“And Potter and Weasley? Do they have lockets as well?”

“No.”

“So, pray tell, how have you been monitoring them?”

“What makes you think that I have?”

“You really think I’m stupid, don’t you?”

“No, Severus, I do not. I am curious, though, as to what you and Draco discuss every Friday after Potions class in – what is it that you call it – detention?”

“What are you insinuating?”

“I’m not insinuating anything; I’m asking questions. And if you must know, yes, I am watching over Harry, as I always have, as I watch over all the students of this school currently under my charge. You of all people should understand the danger Harry is in; now that Voldemort has returned, as well as those who are closest to him.”

“You didn’t answer the question.”

“I believe I did.”

“How exactly are you doing it?”

“Severus, I wasn’t under the impression that you were interested in the Headmaster post. I’ll be glad to discuss your qualifications for the position at a more appropriate time, but, for now, leave the particulars up to me.”
Snape snarled. “I can go to the Governors about this. You could be removed from the school; it is highly unethical for—”

“Ah, yes, ethics. Now that’s a discussion that’s long overdue between us, don’t you think? What is the proper business for a Professor at Hogwarts? I think you will find that the Governors will take much more interest in your activities of late than mine.”

“Is that a threat?”

“Just a reminder. Forgive me, but if I can ask, why are you so alarmed by my efforts to ensure the safety of our students?”

“Safety?” Snape gave a soundless huff looking back at Dumbledore in disbelief. “You call nearly crushing a pupil with a bookcase ensuring his safety?”

“Draco was never in any real danger, but it was a warning, that frankly, I thought he would have heeded weeks ago.”

“A warning? To stay away from your beloved Gryffindors?” he asked rhetorically with a look of distaste on his face.

“No. A warning that it would be in his best interest not to include any innocent students at Hogwarts in whatever assignment he has been given by Voldemort.”

“I told you; the Dark Lord gave Draco no assignment.”

“Yes, you did.”

“Are you calling me a liar?”

“No, I am not, but is there something you may have inadvertently forgotten to tell me?”

Snape curled his upper lip up and raised his chin, “If there was something I thought you could use, I would have told you already.”

“Something that I can use…what an interesting choice of words. I wonder, though, if you would tell me if you learned of something that you thought that you could use.”

A low growl escaped Snape’s throat, as if he were trying to suppress unleashing his full rage on the man before him.

“How dare you! You really are in no position to accuse me of anything. I’ve gone over and beyond the call of duty to report activities related to the Dark Lord to you. You’re not the one risking your life over and over again!”

“Yes, Severus, I understand your burden. More than most, I should think. But need I remind you of why you bear it?”

“I don’t need you to remind me of anything!”

Dumbledore gave Snape a sad smile, “It would seem that you do.”

Snape gave the Headmaster a look of pure loathing before turning his back to him and regaining his composure. He paused to think before continuing cautiously, “You went through a lot of trouble to monitor Ms. Granger; why is that?”
“Severus, if you do not know, then it’s probably in your best interest that you remain ignorant in these matters, especially since you have another meeting with Voldemort approaching soon. We wouldn’t want him to learn of anything that could put Ms. Granger or her friends at risk.”

Snape couldn’t stand being called ignorant about anything. He knew that Dumbledore was trying to get him to either confess what he knew in an outburst of anger or leave the matter alone entirely for fear of being exposed as truly ignorant.

They stared at each other for several moments with Snape studying the Headmaster’s face as he calculated his next move.

“Yes, of course, Headmaster, that makes perfect sense. I’m sure it has nothing to do with the fact that you still think of me as a Death Eater and don’t trust me as far as you can throw a pebble,” he said not trying to hide his sarcasm.

“You don’t think I trust you?”

“Am I wrong?” Severus asked with a twinge of hope creeping into his voice.

“I want to, Severus, I really do. But why didn’t you inform me that Harry, Hermione, and Ron are… shall I say, involved?”

Snape seemed taken aback at the Headmaster’s knowledge of their relationship. But of course, he had been watching them, why wouldn’t he know?

“I didn’t think it was of any consequence.”

“So you were aware of it, then?”

Dammit, he fell into that. Severus didn’t answer and instead pursed his lips and stiffened.

“It would appear then that you have been watching them as well,” Dumbledore said.

“So I have; it was necessary to play the role of a spy convincingly. But their relationship isn’t really news. In fact, it’s common knowledge-- even Riddle knows of it,” Snape said, trying to sound casual.

“Common knowledge, yet you never spoke of it with me? Of course it did occur to me that perhaps it was a painful reminder of Lily’s relationship with James and Sirius and you were uncomfortable discussing it with me.”

Snape cast his eyes to the floor as if ashamed, before looking back up at Dumbledore.

Dumbledore leaned forward to look at Snape closely as he continued, “And you should know by now, Severus, that everything involving Harry is of consequence. If I can’t trust you to share something as seemingly trivial as that, how can I be sure that you are being forthcoming with me about everything you learn when you meet with Riddle?”

Snape slowly nodded reluctantly. “Forgive me, Headmaster.”

“There is nothing to forgive. Trust is built; it’s earned, and hopefully we can continue to do build it together. But for now, I would hope that you will trust me enough to do what I need to do to ensure the safety of our students, and that you will do your best to be as forthcoming as possible about everything you learn.”
Snape let out a long sigh and shook his head. “Very well; I didn’t want to tell you this because I didn’t think it would do any harm, and frankly, I wanted to see what would come of it first.”

“Yes?”

“The Dark Lord has told Draco to become friendly with Granger, Potter, and Weasley.”

“You mean infiltrate their inner circle.”

“Yes.”

“To what end?”

“He thinks that there’s a prophecy revolving around a sixth year Mud— Muggle-born that involves polyamorous sexual magic. It’s ridiculous, really; he hasn’t even heard the full prophecy.”

“And you have?”

Snape hesitated slightly. “No, the prophecy was destroyed along with several others many years ago during the last war.”

Dumbledore nodded. “Just as I suspected, then. Ms. Granger is in danger, as are Harry and Ron. Although, I am sure that there is no way such a prophecy can be fulfilled without strategic planning. Sexual magic of that nature doesn’t just occur, it requires ritual; someone has to orchestrate its fruition.” Dumbledore said the last looking up at Snape curiously, watching him.

Snape trained his face so that it wouldn’t show any sign that he knew all too well the type of planning required to fulfil such a prophecy.

“Nevertheless, the Dark Lord has asked Draco to make sure that he keeps him informed, to alert him of any sign that they will do precisely that. And if I may say, I do think it would be in the best interest of the four of them if Draco was allowed to pursue his assignment.”

Dumbledore took a puff of his pipe and looked past Snape toward the wall, as if in deep contemplation.

“Very well, then. I will allow Draco to pursue his assignment if you are certain that it will not involve any danger to the three. We will watch and see what Riddle does with the information he receives.”

Snape let out a small sigh of relief. “Yes, sir; I will ensure that nothing happens to them.”

Dumbledore nodded cautiously, still studying Snape before telling him goodnight.

As Snape left and began to walk down to his own private quarters, he felt a slow rising dread in his belly. He knew he should have been feeling relief instead. The Headmaster and he had spoken quite frankly, and Draco was now free to pursue his assignment with Dumbledore’s blessing.

But instead of setting his mind at ease, the conversation left him even more disturbed than he had been before he confronted him. The only thing that Snape felt sure about now was that he couldn’t trust the Headmaster at all.

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Once Snape left, Dumbledore sat back and sighed softly, rapping his fingertips against the desk before looking up at Fawkes.
“Sorry about that old friend, perhaps now, you can get your beauty rest,” he said smiling wryly at the phoenix, which answered him in a low, lyrical murmur before closing his eyes to sleep.

Dumbledore tapped his wand once, pointing it at his wardrobe, causing the door to open. A finely crafted mahogany chest floated towards him, and once it landed lightly on his desk, he opened it to retrieve an aged bottle of Firewhisky. He reached into his drawer to pull out his favourite drinking glass when his eyes wandered to his box of safekeepings. He poured himself a drink before opening it, reaching for the picture that lay at the bottom.

It was an old photograph of him and Grindelwald posing very dramatically in the stance of expert duellers about to enter into combat. The photograph kept shifting, showing them trying to hold a serious face, and then bursting out into fits of laughter before attempting to hold the pose again.

His eyes flashed briefly with sadness, and then a familiar dull anger, as he recalled his brief, albeit passionate, affair with Gellert Grindelwald, resurfaced. He had met the wizard after he left Hogwarts while staying with his family in Godric’s Hollow. Grindelwald had spun a devious web over Dumbledore, making him believe that he was the only one after spending long summer days and nights talking about everything from music, art, and wizard mythology to debating about the uses of dark and light magic and the place of Muggle-borns in Wizarding society.

Dumbledore had never encountered someone who could engage him both intellectually and physically the way the Grindelwald had, and had had fallen completely in love for the first, and last, time in his life. It had only been after he had totally committed himself to Grindelwald that the wizard revealed that he had a girlfriend, Verena Baertschi, who had still been attending Durmstrang. Grindelwald had proposed that they all attempt to try to maintain a relationship - the three of them. He had even gone to great lengths to introduce and facilitate conversation and shared time with Verena and Dumbledore.

And Dumbledore had tried to accommodate his lover those first few months, he really had. But Verena had been needy, self-centred, and controlling, taking too much of Grindelwald’s time and attention away from Dumbledore. Besides the fact that her presence had seemed to dampen the vibrant intellectual exchange he had come to enjoy with Grindelwald; sexually and emotionally, the relationship had never felt equitable to Dumbledore. He had always felt like the odd man out. When he had voiced his discontent to Grindelwald, he had been accused of being jealous and manipulative.

In the end, Grindelwald had chosen Verena. He remembered bitterly Grindelwald’s consolation that they could still “be friends”. The anger and pain of the break-up had still been fresh when his brother Aberforth had confronted Grindelwald and him, resulting in a three-way duel that had left his sister Ariana dead.

And so not only did he blame a witch for taking away his one and only true love, but he also blamed the unnatural union he had begrudgingly agreed to for his loss and the pain of that period of his life that continued to haunt him.

He closed the box and poured himself another glass. He would drink almost half the bottle before retiring to his bed for the evening.

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When Hermione arrived back to the common room, after getting permission from Draco to get off on the condition that she think about a specific fantasy he wanted her to think about, she smiled. Upon entering the common room, she found herself bombarded by Harry and Ron rushing to her.

“Hermione! Are you Okay? We heard there was an accident in the library and you were nearly
“Ron, I’m fine, really,” she said looking at them, touched that they were so concerned. Boy did news around Hogwarts spread fast! She shook her head at that.

“Yea, and we also heard that Malfoy may be the culprit. Did he push you or something?” Harry asked as if he had already made up his mind.

“Wait ’til I get my hands on him,” Ron said with his face flushed with anger.

“Oh, I thought you two were friends now?” Harry said with heavy sarcasm looking at Ron.

“Well, at least I don’t want to shag him!” Ron snapped back.

“Stop it! Both of you – I’m sick of it!” Hermione said.

Harry and Ron dropped their eyes and looked at Hermione sheepishly. “Sorry.”

She let out a frustrated sigh before settling. “That’s better. Now, honestly, you should know by now that you can’t believe everything you hear.”

“Well what happened, then?” Harry asked.

“I can’t really explain it. One minute we were talking about our assignment, the next minute a bookcase falls onto our table; it almost hit us,” she said in mild wonderment.

“You’re lucky you weren’t hurt!” Ron said.

“Yeah, I know, but I’ll tell you this, whatever happened in the library has something to do with that locket.”

“You mean the locket you got from your secret admirer?” Ron asked, saying the last with contempt.

“You’re impossible. Still jealous after all this time?” Hermione said shaking her head at Ron.

“I’m not jealous,” Ron said firmly.

Harry and Hermione rolled their eyes.

“Well, anyway, I don’t think it came from a secret admirer. You should have seen how Snape came at me to get it, and then he just…just snatched it off my neck.”

“He did what?” Harry asked in disbelief.

“I told you there something was fishy about it! There’s no way someone just gives you a fancy gift like that and doesn’t tell you who they are. I bet you it has something to do with Malfoy; I mean he’s rich enough to buy something like that, right? Maybe it was a trap, some sort of dark magic artefact!” Ron said.

“No, no. That doesn’t make sense, Ronald,” Hermione said absently as she tried to work out other possibilities in her head.

Harry scrunched his face in contemplation.

“What is it, Harry?” Hermione asked.
“Remember when I said that the locket looked familiar?”

“Yeah,” Ron and Hermione said looking at him expectantly.

“Well, I hadn’t really thought about it since, but now I think I’m sure that I’ve seen it before, I’m just not sure where. Arghh, now it’s going to really bug me, especially since Snape went through the trouble of attacking you to get it.”

“Well, he didn’t really attack me-- I mean, not really,” Hermione offered in Snape’s defence.

“Harry, maybe you saw it in one of your run-ins with You-Know-Who or on one of the Death Eaters or something!” Ron said.

“No,” Harry said, shaking his head, “it’s nothing like that. It’s feels like a really old memory…I can’t explain it.”

Hermione and Ron waited while Harry stared off, filing through his memories for the answer but when nothing came of it, he just shook his head. “I don’t know. But it obviously has something to do with Malfoy.”

Hermione’s brow furrowed. “What do you mean?”

“Well, didn’t you get that locket the day before Snape set the potion assignment?”

“Yeah,” Hermione said stiffly, suddenly not liking where Harry’s train of thought was headed.

“And then the next day, Snape assigns everyone new partners, and then he sticks you with Malfoy. After class that day, I saw him ask Malfoy to stay behind.”

“Blimey, Harry!” Ron said in realisation at what Harry was implying.

Hermione shook her head.

“That’s right, and then the next week Malfoy started acting nice all of a sudden! That settles it, then,” Ron said looking at Harry as if they had discovered some secret treasure.

“No, it settles nothing. Draco isn’t involved,” Hermione said with confidence.

“Draco? Since when is he Draco?” Ron asked looking at her hard.

Hermione blushed and looked down before looking back up at them. “Trust me; I know he isn’t up to anything.”

It slowly began to dawn on Harry why she had been returning Draco’s stares during meals. He shook his head.

“How can you be sure, Hermione?” he asked softly as if trying not to be too harsh.

“Because when Snape went after the locket, he tried to protect me.”

Harry eyebrows went up in surprise, while Ron narrowed his eyes.

“You think he fancies you, then?” Ron asked as if it were the silliest idea he had ever heard.

Hermione felt herself becoming agitated. “I didn’t say that, Ron.”
Ron looked at Hermione up and down and scoffed. “Right, well whatever you think you know about him, Hermione, remember, you don’t really know him. Remember who his father is; he doesn’t exactly like your kind.”

“My kind?”

Ron rolled his eyes in frustration. “You know what I mean, Hermione.”

Harry let out a small gasp as a sudden feeling of déjà vu washed over him before it disappeared just as quickly as it had come.

“Yeah, I think I do, Ronald,” Hermione said through clenched teeth before pushing through the two of them roughly and stomping up the stairs to her dormitories.

“Nice one, Ron,” Harry said shaking his head.

Ron threw up his hands before plopping down on the common room couch and resting his head on his arm in a pout. Harry stood staring from the stairs back to Ron a few moments before walking over to the couch to take a seat across from Ron and conjuring up a Muggle checkers board.

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After seeing Hermione halfway to her common room, and telling her exactly what he wanted her to fantasise about that night before demanding her thanks for his generosity, Draco sauntered his way to Snape’s private quarters with a smug feeling of satisfaction, but it quickly began to dissipate as he drew closer to the Potion master’s door.

What in the world had happened in the library? He couldn’t fool himself into not feeling a sense of apprehension about learning what it may mean and how it may impact his assignment, whatever that was, really. He was increasingly becoming sure that there was much more to what he was supposed to be doing that neither the Dark Lord nor Snape was letting on.

He knocked on the door, half-expecting Snape not to answer. He could be angry that he had tried to intervene on Granger’s behalf.

Finally, he heard Snape tell him to enter.

Draco stepped inside cautiously, looking around before settling his gaze on Snape, who seemed as if had been interrupted from deep thought, one hand shaking the glass of cognac lightly as if mixing it while the other absently stroked his chin. He was looking at Draco but not really; his eyes were unfocused and dazed.

When Snape didn’t say anything and continued to stare blankly at him, Draco cleared his throat.

“Sir, may I ask what happened in the library?”

“No, actually, you cannot.”

Draco was slightly frustrated but told himself to remain respectful. “I see. Can you at least tell me if it had anything to do with all of the interruptions, or me nearly getting crushed?!?” he pressed on, letting the last few words reveal his annoyance with being kept in the dark.

Snape’s eyes suddenly focused, and he stared at Draco before speaking. “I’ll tell you this much – you were right – you are being watched. And from now on, you will have to give thought to how you go about your business; you may have to approach things differently.”
“Who is it? How are they doing it? Does it have something to do with Granger?” Draco asked with each question sounding more unnerved.

“It won’t do for you to ask too many questions; I can’t tell you anything right now anyway. All you need to know for now is that I will be making arrangements soon to ensure that this assignment is completed successfully.”

“What does that mean exactly? You still haven’t told me what I’m really supposed to be learning or doing, and why I’m even doing it!”

Snape nodded his head and stood up to walk back towards the window. He looked over the dark campus of the school for a few moments before speaking. “Do you want me to be completely honest with you?”

“Yes!” he said immediately, remembering the need for respect, he added, “sir.”

“Well, the truth of the matter, Draco, is that there are…two assignments. One, the Dark Lord has already informed you of, for what purpose you do not know of, and you should know that he has no intentions of ever informing you about why you were given your assignment. But I will...at great risk to my safety.”

Draco felt himself release a breath of relief. Finally!

“But once I reveal why he has assigned you your task, you will also learn of the other…assignment.” Snape paused. He couldn’t really call it an assignment could he? It was a choice, and it could be rejected easily. He sighed and continued, “It will be as they say, to be at a crossroads for you, Draco. You will need to make a decision about where your loyalties lie, and what you are willing to die for.”

“Nothing. I don’t want to die for anything! Get it? I’m trying to figure out a way to get out of all of this… sir. I mean, if I can help it.” He said the last as if suddenly remembering where he was and to whom he was speaking.

Snape turned his back toward Draco and shook his head. “Well, that simply won’t do. A war is brewing, and soon everyone will have to make a decision about what side they are on.”

“I told you, my side has been chosen for me. You act as if I have a choice; I don’t!”

“You will fight and die for the Dark Lord, then?”

“If I have to, yes, I will fight, but I don’t plan to die for anyone or their cause.”

“What do you think war is about, Draco? You think you can fight with taunts, jeers, and childish hexes, the way you do when you’re bullying your peers here at school?”

Draco looked at Snape soberly.

Snape let out an amused huff, “You did, didn’t you? You probably don’t even think you will have to fight, because you don’t think this is your war; you think this is someone else’s war.”

Draco shook his head. “Well, I thought—”

“You thought that that you could continue living out your spoiled and pampered teenage years here at Hogwarts, undisturbed by this war?”
Draco blinked.

Snape began walking closer to him, staring at him hard. “No one is coming out of this war unscathed. People of all ages will be called upon to serve, and yes, Draco, there will be death, and all of the money and power in the world will not make you immune to it.”

Draco’s complexion was considerably paler and his hands had gone clammy. He shook his head slowly, looking down at the floor. “No. Nothing is worth dying for,” he muttered to himself, “Nothing.”

“Nothing, Draco? Not even freedom? The chance to be your own person--to live free of guilt or the fear of someone you’ve given absolute power over your life to? Oh, I would have to disagree… there are some things worth dying for; I was hoping that over the past few weeks that you had learned that at the very least.”

They stood looking at each other before Snape spoke, “On second thought, perhaps you are not ready to learn the true nature of your assignment. I will think on it, and we will talk at another time.”

“But, sir—”

“That is all for now, Draco. Goodnight.”

Draco clenched his teeth before turning around and leaving.

Walking back to his common room, he found Snape’s words ringing in his head. He hadn’t really thought about actually fighting in a war. And most certainly not for that maniac that held a firm grip over his father. This was his father’s war. He wanted no part in it. He wasn’t even so sure anymore that he believed all of the crap he had been taught about pure-bloods. Yes, Muggles had persecuted witches and wizards, threatening their very existence with violence, but they weren’t all like that. Granger proved that. Her parents seemed proud of her magical ability. And her intellect alone gave pause to any doubt that anything born of a Muggle could be detrimental to the wizarding world. But would he die to protect someone like her? He didn’t want to die for anything. He let out a groan of frustration as he neared the common room door. Nothing seemed black and white any more. He just wanted it to all go away, and the best way to do that was to just slip into bed and escape through sleep.

Once he returned to his common room, he was greeted by Pansy who threw her arms around his neck as she planted a big wet kiss on his lips. He recoiled and forcibly pulled her arms down.

“Not now, Pansy. I’m not in the mood; I’m very tired.”

Pansy pulled back, her face twisting in an angry look of frustration. “You always say that now. Maybe you should stop spending so much time chasing after the Mudblood and her friends and you’d have more time for your real friends!”

He suddenly felt a strong urge to slap her, but he could feel several eyes around the room turn towards them, watching them with interest. He knew that his recent activities had been the centre of a lot of Slytherin gossip. People wanted to know why he was putting so much effort into trying to be friendly with the Gryffindor Trio, especially Granger.

The urge to slap her passed, and he could feel his anger melting away even as he maintained an impasse expression on his face.

“Really, Pansy, you sound pathetic. Has it come to this? You’re jealous of a Mudblood now?”
Pansy looked out of the corner her eye as if trying to gage who was watching before looking back at him. “Just don’t forget who you are, Draco, or who your friends are. I’ve put up with enough of your shit. I won’t tolerate much more disrespect.”

Draco laughed; it came out hollow and cold in the silent anticipation of the room. “This is news. It’s never bothered you before; in fact, you responded to it like bitch in heat.”

Pansy raised her hand as if to slap him before he caught her by the wrist and pushed her hand down. “Just leave me alone,” he said through gritted teeth.

Pansy turned and ran up the stairs to the girls’ dormitory, leaving Draco standing in the middle of the common room with Blaise, Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott all studying him as if Pansy had just voiced all of their thoughts.

He looked at them and the rest of the room with a scowl before turning around and taking the stairs to go to bed.

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Once Draco left, Snape went back to his seat and got out quill and a piece of parchment. He sat there for several minutes staring at it. What was he doing? What would he write?

*Hi Remus, I know you hate my guts and you think I’m partially responsible for the death of your best mate and his wife, but I’d really like to chat about the good old days with you. Signed, your favourite Order member, Severus.*

A sour smile crossed his lips as he shook his head and put the quill down before picking the glass of cognac back up, swishing it around once again.

He quickly put it down again. Not even drinking right now would dull his senses, and he wasn’t sure he wanted them dulled any longer. Suddenly, he was keenly aware of so much, and he wanted it to stay that way.

The Headmaster had said that he thought that the trio’s relationship may have been “a painful reminder of Lily’s relationship with James and Sirius”. A relationship? He had never discussed what he had seen that night in the forest with Dumbledore, and he had never given any consideration that what he had witnessed was more than a one-time tryst. Of course, he had never been sure of that, but he had been sure that outside of the four, no one else knew about it.

But he had been wrong; the Headmaster knew something about it, and apparently he knew more about it than Snape did.

He also knew about the prophecy; he had even anticipated the Dark Lord’s interest in it and taken measures to track Granger’s activities with a locket designed by none other than Dumbledore himself.

Only a few members of the Order were aware of Dumbledore’s alias, Lord Custos. He had used it to craft a number of valuable spy devices that they used during missions. Dumbledore put some of his less dangerous inventions on the market, and the Order made quite a profit from their sale, securing enough money to equip and support all of its members and stock for the upcoming war.

Occasionally he would agree to anonymously custom design jewellery for special clientele, under the guise of it being purely cosmetic. Of course it never was. Anything with the name Lord Custos on it had an ulterior purpose.
Snape frowned as he thought more on his conversation with Dumbledore. The Headmaster had never answered his question about how he was monitoring Potter and Weasley. Even more troubling, he couldn’t begin to imagine how he had managed to interfere with any of their interactions with Draco from afar.

Yet, he never interfered with his sessions with Draco despite knowing that he had been spending quite a bit of time with the boy each week.

So, what else did he know?

Suddenly he felt self-conscious, exposed, and vulnerable, and he hated it. He had been lied to, and he no longer knew the man he had pledged his life to serve as payment for his past mistakes; in fact, Dumbledore had used it as a bargaining chip, throwing it in his face when pressed for information.

He looked up and around his study as if scanning it for previously unseen eyes before sitting up straight and looking ahead with rising certainty. Then with a rush of determination coursing through him, he finally began to write.

Remus,

We need to talk. Stay around for the next few days; I will be arriving unannounced.

S.S.

He folded the note and sat back. It would be best to go to bed as he usually did at this hour. He would wake up before dawn to go up to the owlery and have the message delivered before anyone was up. He put the note in his pocket and retired to bed, but he didn’t sleep at all that night.
Snape decided that the drama of the past week had settled down enough for him to leave the grounds unnoticed during the Saturday Ravenclaw match against Hufflepuff.

He Floo’d into Grimmauld Place, startling Kreacher, who cursed his entrance, mumbling something that sounded like ‘half-blood miscreant’ before going into the kitchen to announce his arrival. Snape walked cautiously into the kitchen and was mildly surprised to see Remus sitting there, as if expecting his arrival.

“It’s about time. What is that you want, Snape?”

Snape looked at him a moment before taking a seat. “I just want to talk,” he said awkwardly.

Remus sat staring at him, waiting for him to start.

“Well, this is not easy to say but—” He looked at Remus, reconsidering if he should be there at all. Finally he shook his head, “I wanted to talk about Lily and James and… Sirius.”

Remus’ eyebrows shot up and he stared down at the table for a few moments before looking back up at Snape.

“I don’t understand why you need to talk to me about them,” he said guardedly.

“Really? I thought it would be obvious,” Snape said, his voice wavering between incredulity and anger.

“And what do you know about it?” Remus asked defensively.

“I know more than you think, Remus,” Snape said in a chilled soft tone.

Remus sat back and closed his eyes as if willing himself to remain calm. When he opened his eyes again, they were hard.

“Whatever you think you know, Snape, you haven’t the foggiest clue about it. It’s not something most people would understand, and I certainly don’t expect you, of all people, to understand. Anyway, I’m not sure why you suddenly want to discuss them; trying to stir up old shit, are you?”
“Old shit?” Snape spat. “You mean like the kind you and your lot used to cause? You have some nerve; I never started anything.”

Remus rolled his eyes. “Please, I never called you names or did anything to harm you.”

Snape curled his lip into a sneer. “Right, you just sat by and watched while your friends did!”

Remus sighed. “What do you want me to say, Snape? Sorry? Well, you’re not going to get an apology from me. I think we’re just about even. Now, I’m not sure why you’re here, but I certainly do not want to talk about James, Lily, or Sirius with you. Is there anything else you want to discuss?”

“That’s the only thing I want to discuss.”

“Well, it seems you’re shit out of luck then; I’m not talking about them with you.”

“You have to.”

“I don’t have to do anything, and I think it’s time you left,” he said, rising from the table.

His anxiety rising, Snape swallowed his pride and he bit out, “Remus, please. I need to talk to you.”

Remus paused. Snape knew it was because Snape never said words like ‘please’ or ‘I need”. Snape hated having to say such things, but the gulf between the two men was too big to cross without showing a little humility. He hoped the man truly possessed more empathy than his deceased friends.

Slowly, Remus sat back down, his gaze upon Snape steady as he pointed at the other man.

“All right, Snape, you have my attention. But I have the right to refuse to answer anything that I feel is too personal, and this doesn’t ever go outside of this room!”

Snape nodded. “Yes, fine. I have no intentions of telling anyone.”

“I mean it.”

“Yes, all right,” Snape said impatiently, drawing in a deep breath before looking up at the ceiling as if his question could be found there. “So they were…”

He stopped and looked at Remus, hoping that the man would finish the sentence for him.

Remus just sat back looking at Snape with his eyebrows raised, indicating he had no intention of helping Snape complete his sentences for him.

Snape huffed. “Were they involved?”

“You mean James and Lily? Of course, everyone knows that.”

“You know damn well what I mean,” Snape said, feeling his frustration and old resentment for Remus easily resurface.

Remus folded his arms and looked at Snape for a moment before speaking. “If you mean if James, Lily, and Sirius… yes, they were.”

Snape closed his eyes, feeling a sick sense of nausea bubbling in his stomach. How long had that been going on? Had she always been with both of them? Suddenly he wasn’t sure he wanted to know the answers.
“How long were they all involved? When did it begin?” he asked as calmly as he could, trying to hold his voice steady even as it began to tremble.

Remus’ face softened with pity. “I’m not sure when it began, but I reckon right before our sixth year. It ended when James proposed to Lily.”

Snape closed his eyes again. The feeling of being betrayed and the humiliation of playing the fool came rushing back. He swallowed and willed himself to open his eyes to look Remus directly in the eyes.

“And what about you?”

Remus drew back and his brows furrowed. “What do mean?”

A cold smirk grew on Snape’s face. “I think you know exactly what I mean.”

“Well, you obviously think I should know what you mean. Why don’t you tell me what you think you know?”

Snape’s grip around the cup he was holding tightened as he tried to suppress his agitation with Remus’ coy quid pro quo. “It’s not what I think I know; it’s what I saw.”

For a moment, Remus looked startled by the revelation. Then his eyes fell.

“Well, it seems you have all the information you need, so why are you here?”

Snape slammed the cup down and rose out of his seat. “I’m not entirely sure; I forgot how much I enjoyed your company.”

“Well no one’s holding you down; you know the way out.”

“Just answer the question, Remus!”

Remus ran his finger along his cheek, studying Snape. “Why are you asking these questions?”

“I can’t really tell you that.”

“Then why should I tell you anything?”

Snape began to pace the length of the kitchen, folding his hands behind his back and glancing up at Remus. “Because, I need to know what you know in order to make a decision that may save lives.”

“But you can’t tell me what that decision is?”

“No, I don’t think you would understand, and even if you did, it may put you and others in danger if I told you. You’ll just have to trust me.”

Remus let out a mocking laugh. “Why should I? After what you did.”

Snape rounded on the table in front of Remus, leaning over to look down in his face.

“I know full well what I did, and there’s not a day that goes by that I don’t regret it; why do you think I came back? Why do you think I continue to risk my life to get information to bring back to the Order? I’m paying for what I did! If you can’t see that, then I’m not sure what more I can say to convince you. I’m asking for your help, but I won’t beg.”
They stared at each other for a good while before Remus put up his hand in open gesture.

“All right, sit down; this may take a while.”

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Over the following week, Draco rapidly became more self-conscious, looking around during meals and even within the confines of his dormitory room, unsure of who was spying on him and where they could be was quite nerve wracking. He stayed to himself, more watchful of those around him and his surroundings as he thought about how he would conduct himself. He knew that he had to carry on with his assignment so that he would continue to appear valuable, but negotiating that while erasing the doubts of his housemates about his loyalties, while still gaining the confidence of the trio was going to be quite difficult. In fact, it seemed nearly impossible.

But there really weren’t any other options. Draco wasn’t foolish enough to ignore his assignment and return to business as usual while enjoying the familiar company of his Slytherin friends, but he wasn’t ready to deal with the alienation and possible retaliation he would receive from his own house if continued to spend too much time trying to get to know the trio.

His back was against a wall; he felt cornered by Snape, the Dark Lord, his father, Pansy, his whole house, and whoever it was that was watching him. And nobody backed Draco Malfoy into a wall. Whoever was watching him was about to get quite a show.

After being recluse for almost a week, Draco finally emerged the following Monday with the same brash confidence he usually wore. To the surprise of many, he made the rounds in the Slytherin common room. He said hello to several people that he had been ignoring and even flirted a little with Pansy, who seemed bewildered about how to react. He wandered over to Zabini, Nott, and Crabbe and Goyle, announcing he was hungry, his usual signal it was time to eat.

They all looked confused and curious, until Crabbe gave him a goofy smile. “Yeah, let’s eat.”

And with that, the tension and drama of the past few weeks seemed to be washed clean.

As they all made their way down to breakfast, Draco caught up on all of their latest pranks and conquests. All of them seemed to be eager to have his attention, cutting each other off to give him an update. Once they entered the Great Hall, they began to make their way to the Slytherin table, when Draco saw the trio and smirked.

“Lads, give me a second,” he said as he broke away from them, heading towards the Gryffindor table, much to their chagrin.

He strolled over to the trio and took a seat beside Ron. Smiling crazily, he looked at the three of them as they stared back at him with their mouths open in shock.

“So, how’s it going?” he asked casually.

Ron wrinkled his forehead and tilted his head. “What the hell?”

“What’s the matter, Weasley? I’m good enough for a Quidditch match, but not good enough to eat with you?”

Ron’s cheeks flushed, and he looked back at Harry who seemed to doing his best not to laugh. Harry’s suppressed laugh quickly turned into an embarrassed frown once he made eye contact with Draco, who blatantly winked at him and licked his lips before picking up a piece of toast.
“Doing all right there, Potter?”

Harry glanced at Ron and Hermione before saying, ‘yeah’ slowly, still staring at Draco as if he had grown another head.

“And how could I ever forget my favourite Gryffindor? Good morning, Hermione. Did you get off all right last night? I mean, in terms of sleep?”

Hermione nearly choked on her juice as she glanced at Ron who looked confused.

“So, what’s everyone doing for the hols?” he asked, casually picking up a glass of juice.

After a few moments of thick silence, Harry tentatively spoke. “Er, going home I suppose,” he said, watching Draco in puzzlement.

Hermione gave him a small smile, deciding to play along. “I’m going home as well. What are you doing?”

Draco returned her smile. “The usual; Father always has a big Christmas gathering. Some of the most famous and respectable wizards will be attendance, of course.”

“Of course,” Ron mumbled as he rolled his eyes.

“Aww, don’t worry, Weasley, maybe if play your cards right, you might make the list one day.”

“No, thanks,” Ron said.

Draco shrugged. “So, Potter, when can I get that Patronus lesson?”

Hermione turned to look at Harry in surprise, while Ron folded his arms across his chest as if Harry had just been caught with his hand in a cookie jar.

Harry gulped. “Um, well, whenever,” he said, giving Draco a half smile and looked down awkwardly down at his plate.

“How about tomorrow night, in the Room of Requirement, after I meet with Hermione? I want to get started right away; I hear it’s quite a workout,” Draco said with a wink.

Hermione brought her hand up to her mouth to cover a half gasp, half giggle while Harry blushed in spite of himself.

Noticing that Ron seemed a bit agitated, Draco turned towards him and leaned in. “Don’t worry, Weasley, I’m not out to steal your boyfriend, just borrowing him for a bit; feel free to join if you like, the more the merrier,” he whispered as he gave Ron a pat on the knee.

Ron looked disgusted. Draco gave him his trademark smirk and took one last sip of juice.

“Well, it’s been nice, as always, but I do have to tend to my own. See you around,” he said before rising from his seat to make his way over to the Slytherin table.

As he sat down between Zabini and Pansy, he found them both appraising him suspiciously.

“What in the bloody hell do you think you’re doing?” Zabini asked in a hushed tone.

Draco shrugged. “Just making small talk.”
“You’ve gone mental!”

Draco smiled. “Maybe. Crabbe, are you going to eat that?”

Crabbe looked at Goyle in confusion before shaking his head. “Uh, no, help yourself, Draco.”

“So, where were we?” Draco asked. “Goyle, finish your story about that third year you cornered.”

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Ron surveyed the Slytherin table curiously, narrowing his eyes as he watched Malfoy’s interactions with his housemates. “You see, he’s either gone totally nutters, or he’s up to something!”

“Yeah,” Hermione and Harry said together with disappointment in their voices.

“Well, let’s just stick to the game plan and see what he does,” Harry said, avoiding eye contact with Ron who was watching him closely as if debating if he should address the private Patronus lessons. A stern look from Hermione put that debate to rest.

They finished their meal, discussing their plans for the day, but Hermione couldn’t help but glance up at Draco. She accidently caught the eye of Pansy who was staring at her with what could only be described as pure hatred.

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In this next potions meeting with Hermione, Draco arrived early. As Hermione approached, he reclined back with his feet on the table, and his arms behind his back.

“You better put your feet down before Madam Pince comes over,” she warned, pulling a heavy book from her bag. “Now, I was thinking that since the potion has already progressed to—”

“I think we’re ready to move this to the forest, don’t you think?”

Hermione frowned. “It’s getting quite cold, and the ingredients we need from there will probably take longer than an hour to gather.”

“Well, we can at least get started. It’s terribly boring to discuss the same thing week after week, when we could be doing it instead,” he said before licking his bottom lip slowly.

Hermione shook her head. “What’s got into you?”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re becoming quite… bold.”

Draco shrugged. “Are you up for it or not?”

Hermione looked back at him, a daring glint in her eyes. “Yes, I’m up for it.”

After walking back to her common room to get her coat, they walked toward the forest. Draco found himself actually smiling at the effortless flow of their conversation. It was easy to talk to Hermione. He could talk to her about random things as they came to mind without worrying about the usual strategic mental games that most people played.

When they finally reached the forest, it was already quite dark.
“It’s silly, really; why are we even out here?” Hermione said. “We couldn’t even begin to look for anything now. It’s nearly dark.”

Draco turned and looked at her, stepping closer to peer down into her eyes. “Maybe I just wanted to have some time alone with you, in private.”

Hermione narrowed her eyes. “Draco, what’s going on?”

“What do you mean?”

“You want something. You’re up to something. We know.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said, shrugging.

Hermione shook her head. “Whatever it is you’re after, why don’t you just ask. I might just give it to you,” she said with a mischievous smile.

“Careful what you say,” Draco said, licking his lips. “I may make you eat those words.”

“Oh? I don’t think you can make me do anything,” she said with a challenge in her eyes.

“Don’t push me, Granger,” he replied playfully, inching closer to her face.

“Oh, and why not?” she asked, pushing him back softly.

“Because when push comes to shove, Hermione, I shove back,” he said, backing her into a tree. Before she could push back, Draco grabbed her wrists and pinned them above her head.

Hermione seemed to be holding her breath in anticipation as Draco closed the gap between them, his face almost touching hers. For a moment, he actually considered kissing her. His mouth was already dangerously close to hers, but then he hesitated and drew back a little. Hermione visibly tensed, her eyes wide with confusion. Draco swallowed, suddenly too aware he really wanted to kiss her, and not just to fulfill his mission.

Draco tightened his grip on her wrists, caught between letting her go and snogging her. They stood like that for far too long, staring at each other awkwardly, until finally, Hermione broke the tension.

“Are you going to punish me?”

Draco licked his lips. “Perhaps.”

“Oh, Master, please, don’t; I’ll be good promise,” Hermione said in mock despair as she struggled against his hands playfully.

Draco sighed discreetly, relieved at her attempt to make light of an awkward moment. “That’s pretty good; you’ve been thinking about it, I see.”

Hermione blushed and stifled a giggle.

“You like the idea of being a slave, then?”

“Well, maybe in fantasy or role play,” she conceded cautiously. “I would never actually agree to such a thing. I mean, it’s a bit extreme.”

“Hermione, you have no idea what extreme is yet,” he said, quirking an eyebrow suggestively.
“I’m sure you won’t mind showing me, though.”

Draco smiled. “Not at all. For instance, I was thinking of all the things I could do with a tree branch.”

Hermione scowled. “You’re incorrigible.”

“Maybe, but you won’t be saying that when I’m taking a switch to your backside.”

“Is that supposed to be a threat? Sounds like fun,” she said defiantly.

Draco smirked and pulled back, releasing her arms. He looked up at a tree branch hanging over them considering it.

Both of them froze when a snap echoed out in the forest, much like that of a foot cracking a branch.

“Who’s there?” Draco called out looking around suspiciously. Hermione’s eyes nervously darted around them. When they were greeted with silence, they both turned to look at each other in understanding.

“I guess we should be getting back,” he said.

“Yes,” Hermione said not bothering to hide her disappointment.

Draco offered her his arm and she gave him a look of mock surprise, putting her hand over her heart dramatically before wrapping her arm around his.

“You have gone mental, haven’t you?”

“Why does everyone keep saying that?” he asked as they began to walk back.

In the dark, neither of them saw the small patch of black robe blowing in the night wind from behind a neighbouring tree.

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Draco ran back up the hallway towards the Room of Requirement after walking Hermione halfway to her common room. He always felt a bit giddy after his time with her, but that was now quickly giving way to nervousness about his approaching Patronus lesson with Harry Potter. He knew the boy was obviously affected by him, but Draco wasn’t quite comfortable with Potter’s effect on him. He couldn’t deny that his past few interactions with Potter had been (tantalising, exhilarating, hot) interesting, but he wasn’t comfortable with the idea of pushing it past playful flirting. He had to make sure that the flirting didn’t get out of hand, and with Potter, it always seemed to teeter on the edge of doing so. He had already picked up on what Weasley had coined Potter’s ‘slag’ tendencies, and had no doubt that given the right conditions, Potter would cave in if pushed just right.

When Draco arrived, he stepped through the door to see a bare room with a chest in the centre. Potter was leaning against the wall, waiting for him but trying unsuccessfully to appear as if he hadn’t been.

“Hi,” Harry said looking at Draco stiffly as if waiting for a provocative remark to be hurled his way.

Draco almost laughed. “Hello, Potter; thanks for meeting me.”

Harry nodded. “Sure, we don’t have much time, so how about you just show me what you’ve been doing, and we’ll go from there.”

“All right,” Draco said looking Harry over slowly as he took out his wand.

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“*Expecto Patronum,*” Draco drawled lazily waiving his wand casually before him.

“Um, are you even trying?” Harry asked looking at Draco as if he were kidding.

“Well, you do it then,” Draco said, slightly annoyed.

“That’s not really going to be very helpful. I can stand here and cast a Patronus all day, but we’re here so you can learn how to do it.”

Draco stepped towards Harry, stopping when the tips of their shoes touched.

“I’d like to see what you can do first, before I submit to lessons,” he said in a suggestive tone, smirking up at Harry unabashedly.

Harry stood perfectly still, his eyes measuring Draco before he answered.

“I’m not going to show you anything until I’m ready, Malfoy. Now, you asked for this lesson, so we’ll do it my way, or not at all.”

Draco couldn’t help but smile, slightly impressed. He stepped back and put up his hands in surrender. “Whatever you say, Potter. Contrary to what others may believe, I take well to instruction.”

Harry let out a soft sigh that Draco couldn’t quite figure out was out of relief or something else.

“Good. Now, I want you to close your eyes and think of the best memory you’ve ever had.”

Draco closed his eyes, but found it hard to think of anything other than the green ones he had just been looking at before he closed them. He felt Harry move and walk behind him.

“What the—?” Harry blurted out.

Draco opened his eyes and noticed that the room had changed.

Instead of a chest in the middle of the room, which probably had been storing the Boggart they would be practicing on, there was a huge bed. The linens were a combination of both Slytherin and Gryffindor, with green, gold, and silver lines bleeding across the surface of the burgundy background.

“Get your mind out of the gutter, Malfoy!”

“I didn’t do that!”

“Well, I certainly didn’t!”

“You sure about that? I see Gryffindor colours as well.”

“I think this lesson is over,” Harry announced, looking past Draco as he moved toward the door.

“Fine,” Draco said apathetically, as if he didn’t care, even though he couldn’t help but feel disappointed.

“Fine,” Harry snapped as he quickly turned on his heel and walked out.

Draco looked around the room and shook his head, trying hard to convince himself that Harry had been the cause of the change in the room and not him.
When Remus finished, Snape was holding his forehead in his hand, leaning against the kitchen table, and staring at the patterns of the cloth.

“I’m sorry, Snape, I know how you felt about her, but you asked,” Remus offered sympathetically.

“It’s just so…”

“Nuts? Yeah, if I wasn’t a part of it, I wouldn’t believe it myself, but now you know. I hope it helps; I don’t see how it can, but I hope it does.”

“Yes, you’ve been very helpful, thank you,” Snape said pulling back and looking at Remus plainly as he offered his right hand to him.

Remus stared at Snape’s hand for a moment and then shook it awkwardly.

Once Snape Floo’d back, he had plenty of time to think about what he had learned from his conversation with Remus. He had learned some things he didn’t know before, and it was enough to convince him that if he didn’t act now, the opportunity to do anything would be taken from him.

It was absolutely crazy, what he was about to do, but something told Snape it would be even crazier not to try. Resolute in his decision, he decided to make the prophecy known to the four within the next week before plans for the holidays would be solidified.

Snape knew Ron Weasley would not be attending next Saturday’s field trip to Hogsmeade, which meant there was a chance that Granger and Potter would stay behind as well. If Draco was smart as Snape thought the boy to be, he take advantage of that opportunity and stay behind as well.

And so Snape had all week to think about how he would approach them with his outlandish proposal and convince them that it was the best way to prevent a looming war, and possibly the death of Lily’s only son.

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The following Saturday…

Ron was depressed because he had forfeited any chance of going to Hogsmeade with the note forgery. He had whined and pouted about it, much to the annoyance of both Harry and Hermione. They both offered to stay back to be with him, but Ron had insisted that they both go without him; he didn’t want the guilt of keeping them from going on top of the misery of the punishment of not being able to go.

Harry and Hermione reluctantly went without him but once everyone dispersed upon reaching Hogsmeade, they quickly changed their minds and turned back to return to the castle, slipping out while everyone was busy buying candies, gadgets, and chatting it up over butterbeers.

They didn’t see Draco Malfoy following them from afar. And Draco didn’t see Ginny Weasley following him even further behind.

Draco had to practically run to catch up to Harry and Hermione, but carefully so as not to be heard. He hid behind statues, columns, and knights, looking around for any sign of Peeves, who would
certainly blow his cover. He found himself becoming frustrated as they continued to walk, before finally pausing. Harry pulled out a piece of parchment, while Hermione pointed out something on it. Draco looked at them curiously, as they stood there waiting for a few moments before none other than Ron Weasley came around the corner, with a look of surprise on his face. Hermione put her finger up to his mouth to silence him and led the two boys down the corridor.

Draco sighed in frustration, more walking! They were heading to one of the less trafficked corridors before slipping into Classroom Eleven, one of the few unused classrooms at Hogwarts. Draco looked around and when he didn't see anyone approaching, he cracked the door slowly, looking in carefully.

He breathed a sigh of relief when he discovered that there was another door inside, allowing him a few feet of space to crouch down to listen. The inner door was slightly cracked, and he could only make out Hermione and half of Harry but nothing more.

His breath hitched as the outer door open slowly. He expected to see a Professor or prefect; instead, he stared up into the eyes of the youngest Weasley.

He didn’t hesitate to show his annoyance as he tried to shoo her away. Ginny looked down at him with a scowl on her face and then quickly crouched into the corner across from him. Her hand was firmly gripping her wand as if ready for an attack. Draco rolled his eyes.

“What are you doing here?” he asked her quietly in frustration.

“I suppose I could ask the same of you!” she whispered back fiercely.

They stared at each other in contempt until they heard a slapping sound coming from the inside room and then moans.

“Mmmm… yes, Harry, go deeper, yes! Don’t stop, please.”

“Don't worry, I won’t,” Harry grunted, as another loud slap rang out through the air.

Ginny narrowed her eyes in disapproval as if some foul play was taking place.

“Ahhh, yes, Harry, harder.”

“Hard like that, Hermione? Huh?”

“Oooh!”

Draco tried to have a look but couldn’t see much. He raised his eyebrows at what he heard though. So far Potter sounded like he was doing better than he would have imagined him to with a woman, of course still not as good as he was, but nevertheless not bad. He licked his lips and shifted, looking back at Ginny.

Ginny’s anger was evidently dissipating as she squirmed in spite of herself and her cheeks flushed with embarrassment. She gave Draco a bothered glance, trying her best to appear disapproving in spite of her arousal.

“You like that, Weasley?” Draco whispered.

“No, of course not! You’re so disgusting, Malfoy!”

“Then that makes two of us; you’re still here aren’t you? Leave if you don’t like it.”
“That’s a good girl,” he said with a dark grin.

Ginny trembled.

“I love you so much, Harry, mmm, yes, so much.”

“Love. You. Too. That’s it, Hermione; fuck yourself on my cock,”

Ginny let out a little moan, as she looked back at Draco with a mixture of confusion, embarrassment and lust on her face. Draco chuckled.

“You like him don’t you.”

“No! Anyway, that’s none of your business,” she whispered harshly, looking away from his gaze.

“It’s all right, Weasley, it’s rather obvious. Too bad he has other interests,” Draco said trying to peer into the room.

Ginny pursed her lips and folded her arms in disapproval.

“You know you could always get back at them,” he said softly with a wicked smirk.

Ginny scrunched her face in confusion.

“They say the best revenge is having fun, so let’s have a little fun,” he said wagging his eyebrows.

Ginny looked affronted but also mildly interested. Still, she didn’t move from her position.

“All right then,” Draco said. “Why don’t you have a little fun, and I’ll just watch.”

“What?”

Draco licked his lips and smiled. “Fuck yourself.”

Ginny’s jaw dropped.

“I’ll help you if you like,” he whispered as he moved his foot between her feet, pushing them apart before taking her hand into his hand and moving it up to his mouth. He began to slowly suck two fingers into his mouth as he kept his eyes on hers, before using his tongue to part them and lick between them as he worked them deeper into his mouth. Ginny’s eyelids fluttered.

Pleased with her reaction, he then pulled her fingers from his mouth and guided her hand along her leg, tracing it to her inner thigh until both of their hands were resting on the damp centre of her knickers.

“Take them off.”

Ginny bit her lip, considering it before looking up at him as if determined to prove she could and pulling down her knickers.

“Good girl. Now give them to me, and do what I told you.”

Ginny gave him an once-over and then tentatively handed him her knickers. With her eyes still on him, she slipped two fingers into herself. Draco put her knickers in his back pocket and then pushed
his foot forcibly against one of hers, spreading her legs open farther so he could see everything.

“That’s it,” he whispered as he began to unbuckle his belt.

“What are you doing?” she asked nervously.

“I’m about to have a good wank, of course.”

“Gross!”

“You think so?”

Ginny looked down at Draco’s crotch and increased the movement of her fingers.

“Want to help me out?”

Ginny paused, and considered Draco for a moment. Hermione cried out, “Right there, Harry! Yes, just like that…Oooh-oh, don’t stop, don’t you ever stop, pleeeaaase.”

“You hot little— Fuck!” Harry groaned.

Ginny inched closer to Draco, visibly shaking as she reached out slowly with an unsure hand. Draco seized her hand and guided it down to the prominent bulge in his trousers and then ran her hand along the length. Ginny let out a surprised gasp that quickly turned into a moan as Draco pushed her hand up and down against his erection. Finally, he let her hand go so that he could release his erection from the confines of his trousers.

Ginny pulled her hand back in uncertainty. Draco swiftly grabbed her wrist, pulling her hand onto his smooth hardness. She ran her hands over it, apparently enjoying the feel of it in her hands. With increasingly less inhibition, she began to pump her hands over it firmly as she watched his reaction. Draco let his head fall back while Ginny stroked him; it felt good, but he needed more.

He wanted to feel the youngest Weasley’s mouth on him. Not necessarily because he wanted her, but he wanted to feel the sense of accomplishment of getting her to do it. Draco smirked, and sat up straighter, placing his hand on the back of her head to pull her face towards his lap.

Ginny shook her head in protest.

Draco wasn’t deterred; he continued to pull her head down with gentle force. Ginny gave the slightest resistance and then finally let herself follow the pressure of his hand. Her tongue slowly slid out of her mouth and ran hesitantly along the head of his cock, lapping up the pre-come that had begun to gather there. Draco sighed quietly, once again relaxing against the wall as Ginny took him into her mouth.

He moaned softly as she started sucking without her former self-consciousness, apparently growing more aroused as she continued.

“Not bad, Weasley, keep it up,” he whispered, combing his hands through her hair, his breath becoming shorter.

“Harry, what are you doing, don’t stop…please.”

“Hold still, Hermione, and spread your legs more.”

“Harry, no…not there; I’m not ready.”
“Yes you are; I know you’ve thought about it.”

“All right, but wait, take it slow. It’s going to hurt.”

“I promise I won’t hurt you.”

“I don’t know Harry, oh, mmm…Okay, all right, but do it slow.”

“Wait, first tell me you want me to fuck your arse.”

“Harry!”

“Do it!”

Hermione sighed loudly. “Harry, please fuck my—” she suddenly burst into giggles.

Harry groaned in frustration, “C’mon, Hermione, this is serious!”

“I’m sorry, Harry, it’s just that I’ve never done this before.”

“I know; I’ll be careful.”

“Please don’t hurt me.”

“I won’t. But tell me that you want it,” he said as another loud slap rang through the air.

Hermione gasped loudly. “Ahh, Harry, please, fuck my arse.”

“That’s better, now, just relax, Hermione; spread yourself wider for me.”

“It might help if you prepare her more first,” Ron said in a barely recognisable raspy voice laced with both lust and amusement.

Ginny abruptly froze upon hearing her brother’s voice, her mouth half way down the length of Draco’s cock. She looked up at Draco her eyes almost cartoonishly wide and then she pulled back, letting go of his cock with a loud popping sound.

Shit, he was so close!

She was silently hyperventilating even as her hands covered her face as she began to shake her head in disbelief. Draco rolled his eyes and gave her a look that said ‘get over it’ which seemed to send her over the edge. Ginny scrambled to her feet, pushing down her skirt before taking off, running down the hall.

Draco shook his head and carefully pulled at the edge of the door with his fingertips to widen his view. Finally, he had a complete picture. Hermione’s lovely arse was sticking in the air as she was on all fours, her hair pushed to one side as she looked back over her shoulder at Harry who was gripping her waist firmly with just the tip of his cock in her arsehole. Ron was standing over them doing a lubricating spell before dropping his wand and kneeling in front of her.

“Thanks,” Harry said, pushing himself forward as he gripped Hermione’s hips tighter to bring her back.

“Harry! Slow…remember? You know anal sex can be dangerous if it’s not done properly; it can lead to ruptures. Please be careful,” she whined.
Harry rolled his eyes, shaking his head as he looked up at Ron who smirked before taking a handful of her hair and pulling her head back.

“’Mione, sometimes you talk too much,” Ron said before rubbing his cock against her mouth and pushing it between her lips as he pulled her hair, drawing her mouth onto him further. Harry silently mouthed the words “thank you” to him before continuing to push slowly forward, pausing a few seconds to let Hermione adjust.

Draco immediately began to stroke his cock, his breath coming in short rapid takes as he felt the previously curtailed orgasm began to build again. He had fantasised about the Trio many times since he had learned of their relationship, but seeing it was something totally different.

Finally, Harry was fully buried in Hermione’s arse and rolling his hips as if to loosen her up, but it didn’t matter because Ron was pushing her back onto him as he held her face between his hands while he fucked her mouth.

Hermione’s muffled moans were now very audible, and all three boys seemed to be quite affected. Ron began to grunt and grip Hermione’s head tighter, as Draco suppressed his own moan as he quickened his stroke, feeling himself coming closer to release.

Harry was gripping her waist tighter in an effort to control himself and keep his promise to take things slow. He slid out a little before pushing forward again, moving against the force of Ron’s movement, eliciting a whimper from Hermione.

After a few awkward tries at moving together, they finally fell into a comfortable rhythm, pushing Hermione’s body back and forth between them.

“Who knew you were such a good cocksucker?” Ron rasped, pushing his hips more aggressively against Hermione’s mouth.

This seemed to excite Hermione, and she began to suck Ron with abandon, allowing drool to slide over him and down her mouth as she gripped his legs.

“I could have — uh — told you that,” Harry ground out as he leaned over her and sped up his thrusts to meet Ron’s.

She began to assist Ron in pushing herself back onto Harry and grinding her hips so that he could go deeper.

“Well, you did teach her, didn’t you?” Ron murmured as he leaned in to rest his head against Harry’s forehead over Hermione.

“Mmm-hmm,” Harry moaned before capturing Ron’s lips in a passionate kiss. Ron let go of Hermione’s head and grabbed the back of Harry’s head pulling him into the kiss even as he continued to work himself in and out of her mouth. Hermione began slapping at Ron’s thighs to signal that she was uncomfortable.

“Sorry,” he said, pulling back, stroking her head apologetically.

Hermione settled back down and continued to suck Ron and buck back on Harry more insistently. Moaning loudly around Ron’s cock, she paused as she reached her climax, Ron quickly began to make up for her stillness, pushing himself into her mouth erratically as he approached his release. Harry’s thrusts quickened and he dug his nails into Hermione’s hips as he yelled out his release, falling over her spent. Ron was next, grunting loudly as he came in her mouth. Hermione continued to suck him until Ron lifted her head up and he fell back. And then Draco finally let himself go,
biting down on his lip to cover the sound of his orgasm as his own release shot all over his hands and pants.

Suddenly the outer door to the classroom burst open. Draco looked up in surprise and fear into the face of Snape who looked down at him with relief.

“There you are,” he said as he opened the inner door to the shocked gasps of Ron, Hermione, and Harry. They all stared in embarrassment and bewilderment at both Snape and Draco before Ron grabbed his shirt to cover Hermione.

Draco swallowed, feeling his face flush with the embarrassment of being caught with his cock in his hand, coated in come as he looked at the angry face of Ron, the shamed face of Hermione, and the confused face of Harry.

Snape smirked, with one eyebrow raised before addressing all of them.

“I’m glad to see all of you enjoying yourselves. It’ll make what I’m about to propose much easier. Now, get cleaned up; we have a lot to discuss.”
An Indecent Proposal

Well if that’s what you want,
Take me out of your plans,
What kind of a girl do you think I am?

-“What Kind of Girl (Do You Think I Am)” - by Loretta Lynn

Can you hear them?
They talk about us,
Telling lies,
Well, that's no surprise…

It doesn’t matter what they say,
In the jealous games people play
Pay no mind to what they say,
It doesn't matter anyway…

-“Our Lips Are Sealed” by The Go-Go’s

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“That’s it, I’m finally going to smash your little pointy nose in,” Ron said, rising unashamed of his nakedness as he pounded his fist in his hand threateningly.

“I’m not scared of you, Weaselbee,” Draco said with a challenge as he rose to his feet. Quickly, he wiped the come off his hands and tucked himself back into his trousers.

“Oh, shut up and get cleaned up, all of you,” Snape said in frustration. He abruptly turned on his heels, his robes swishing behind him as he made his way out into the corridor.

For one suspended moment, they all gaped at each other and then as if a spell had been broken, the trio retrieved their wands and performed quick cleaning spells.

Draco made his way out the door and chanced a glance up at Snape who stared ahead, refusing to look at him. Inside the classroom, the trio finished dressing and started for the door when Ron grabbed Harry’s arm roughly.

“I thought you used the map? What’s the point of having it if we can’t avoid shit like this?” he scolded in a hushed whisper.

“I don’t know what happened,” Harry said with guilty expression. Glancing up at Hermione, who suddenly looked away. Ron stared back and forth between them, his eyes widening slowly.

“Wait, did you guys know Malfoy was following us?”

“NO!” they both replied together emphatically.

Ron narrowed his eyes, looking them both up and down in disgust. “We’ll talk about this later,” he said, roughly pushing through them to make his way out the door.

Harry and Hermione looked at each other and swallowed.
“You can’t tell him that you saw Ginny on the map… you just can’t, Hermione; he’ll think we’re sick and cruel,” Harry whispered.

“Well, you are! It was your idea! Or don’t you remember saying ‘it serves them right for following us’?”

Harry winced, remembering his angry and reckless response to discovering that Draco and Ginny were tailing them.

“You didn’t exactly protest the idea,” he countered weakly.

Hermione shook her head. “I guess I felt like they both deserved it as well. Well, what’s done is done. We have to do something; it’s going to come out sooner or later.”

“We’ll deal with it then; let’s go.”

As Harry and Hermione walked out into the corridor, they were met by Ron’s icy glare before he turned it onto Draco.

“Malfoy,” he said.

“What?” Draco asked in annoyance.

“What’s that?” Ron asked, pointing down at Draco’s trousers.

Draco looked down and around and saw that Ginny’s knickers were hanging from his back pocket. Harry and Hermione held their breath as everyone waited silently for his explanation.

“Nothing,” Draco mumbled as he stuffed them down deep so they could no longer been seen.

“Yeah right, they’re probably yours,” Ron said with a snigger.

“You wish, Weasley. As a matter of fact, they were a gift fr—”

“Stop it! Both of you!” Hermione blurted out.

“For once, Ms. Granger, I agree with you. Say another word, and I’ll make sure that both of you spend the rest of the year in detention—together!” Snape said, looking at Draco and Ron.

Ron and Draco both looked away.

“Now, follow me,” Snape said.

He led them down to his classroom and into his private quarters. He did a series of long and complicated spells around the room, and then finally a Silencing Charm.

“Expecting someone?” Harry asked sarcastically.

Snape ignored him and then ordered them all to have a seat.

Hermione and Draco sat down, while Harry and Ron remained standing, both folding their arms over their chests.

“Very well,” Snape said, looking at Harry pointedly.

“I’ve thought a great deal about this, and there’s really no other way to do this than to tell you.”
“Tell us what?” Ron asked.

Snape looked down at Hermione. “There is a prophecy.”

“That’s really none of your business,” Harry said defensively.

Snape looked at Harry in frustration. “This prophecy is about a Muggle-born who has the power to bring an end to the war before it begins.”

“What?” Harry and Draco asked in unison as if they hadn’t heard correctly.

“How?” Hermione asked.

“By defeating the Dark Lord,” Snape said simply, shifting his eyes to survey Draco’s reaction.

“Dark Lord? You mean Voldemort,” Harry said as if correcting Snape.

Draco and Snape visibly flinched, while Ron grimaced at Harry’s insistence at saying the name.

“Yes, Potter, although I would prefer if you would not say that name, at least in my company.”

Harry rolled his eyes and sighed loudly.

“Professor, isn’t this a matter to take to the headmaster?” Hermione asked.

“I assure you, Ms. Granger, the headmaster is already aware of the prophecy,” Snape said.

“Oh, okay, so, shouldn’t you be talking about it with him? Since when do you tell us about stuff like this?” Ron asked waving his hands animatedly as if Snape were being dense.

“Since your assistance is required,” Snape said with forced patience, looking back at Ron.

“Well, what do you want, then?” Harry asked demandingly.

“First, I want you to take that arrogant tone out of your voice, and second, I want you and Mr. Weasley to sit down and listen.”

Harry and Ron looked at each other and sighed in resignation, taking their seats. Snape unlocked a cabinet against the wall and reached in, pulling out a dark crystal ball. The four stared at it in puzzlement as Snape held it out before him as if it were a delicate rose petal. When he closed his fingers, it began to swirl. Hermione gasped when she heard a much younger version of Professor Trelawney’s voice rise as if she were standing right there in the room with them.

_In Godric’s house a Mudblood falls_  
sixth year she’ll rise to Merlin’s call  
She will take them in  
and they’ll take her ‘nigh  
_Dark virtuous angel_  
Who bleeds in lust  
And in passion cries

_Suffer their anger_  
_Suffer their pain_  
_She’ll suffer for sacrifice_  
_and a love with no name_
And the Dark Lord will fall
To Her love’s dark light
one from his house
two from her right
And when all three claim her
In love’s carnal hedone
None can defeat them
And it will be done.

When it was done, they were all frowning at the strangeness of the words and the surrealness of Snape presenting them with an old prophecy made by Professor Trelawney. Ron was the first to break the tense silence, his eyebrows raised.

“Well that’s freaky. It sort of sounded sexual or something, didn’t it?” he said, looking at Harry.

“What does it mean?” Harry asked Snape.

“It is sexual. As a matter of fact, it refers to the use of sexual magic.”

“Sexual magic?” Draco asked as he shifted in his seat. “You mean the kind that’s in that book you sent me to check out?”


“You know what book, Hermione,” he said with a nasty leer.

Hermione blushed but held eye contact. “So, that’s how you found out.”

Draco shrugged.

“What the hell are you guys talking about?” Ron asked glaring at both Hermione and Draco.

“Never mind, Ron, it’s not important,” she said hurriedly, turning back to look at Snape. “How do you even know if it’s real? It’s just a prophecy.”

“Oh, yes, Ms. Granger, I forgot you hold a great deal of scepticism about Divination, which undoubtedly affects your ability to understand the subject matter,” Snape replied.

Hermione huffed. “For your information, I’ve received all O’s in Divination this term, however dodgy the subject matter is.”

“Dodgy? Do I need to remind you that less than a year ago you risked your life to protect another prophecy made by the same person?” Snape said not bothering this time to hide his satisfaction of exposing a weakness in her reasoning.

“I risked my life for Harry, not some woolly prophecy! And even if prophecies have some strain of truth to them, this particular prophecy is just outrageous! I mean, you’re a teacher! How can you even suggest such a thing? It’s just…” She stopped mid-sentence, throwing her hands up and looked over at Ron and Harry for support. Ron shook his head while Harry stared at the floor as if in deep contemplation.

“It’s just mental, is what she means. You can’t be serious?” Draco said finishing her sentence.
“I’m afraid that this very serious, Draco,” Snape said, looking at him.

“Has everyone gone mad?” Ron asked.

“Mr. Weasley, remember who you are referring to, and no, I have not gone, as you say, ‘mad’.”

“You don’t actually expect me to allow this? You want me to… to have sex with Ron, Harry, and Draco… at the same time no less, in some sort of dark magical ritual in hopes of defeating Voldemort?” Hermione asked shrilly, half laughing.

“There’s no way that git is coming near her, or Harry, or… me.” Ron said, the last with disgust in his voice.

“You think I want to touch you, Weasley? The thought alone makes me want to run and swear allegiance to the Dark Lord,” Draco said.

“I’m surprised you haven’t already!” Ron said.

“Probably has,” Harry mumbled.

“What’s that, Potter? If I had, believe me, you’d know,” Draco said with a sneer.

“Malfoy, you’d need a lot of help to take me on,” Harry said, glaring at Draco.

Draco rolled his eyes and turned to look back at Snape. “So, this is the real reason?” he asked in exasperation.

Harry stood up, glancing back between Draco and Snape. “Is that why you’ve been acting so weird; you two have been plotting this all along?”

“I told you!” Ron said, rising from his chair, looking at both Snape and Draco with disdain. “Nothing good ever comes from Slytherin, and now they want us to have a big orgy, probably under a full moon, chanting some gibberish in hopes we won’t get killed.”

“Stop it! All of you, I can’t deal with this!” Hermione said, putting her hands up and rising from her chair.

“Ms. Granger—”

“No! I’ve heard enough! I don’t know what kind of girl you think I am, but I can’t do this! It wouldn’t work anyway.”

“And how can you possibly be sure of that?”

“Look at them. They hate each other. It’d never work. The prophecy is about more than having sex, isn’t it? It said there would be love. There’s no love here. Besides, it’s hard enough managing these two,” she said, nodding toward Harry and Ron, who looked offended. “I’m sorry, I just can’t.”

“Potter, Weasley, Draco, wait outside until I call you back in.”

“But—” Harry said.

“Now!”

Draco slowly rose from his chair, and the three boys shuffled out of the door with Harry and Ron throwing worried glances back at Hermione.
Once outside, they all looked at each other guardedly. Ron found himself sneaking glances at both Draco and Harry to see if they were silently communicating something he hadn’t noticed previously. For the first time he noticed how flawless the blond’s skin was and that he smelled good. He narrowed his eyes, trying to hide his appraisal under his usual mask of disgust.

Harry was becoming self-conscious; he could feel Ron’s effort to study both him and Draco. He tried to push down the blush that threatened to expose him as he secretly pictured what his first kiss with Draco would be like. Instead, he tried staring at Draco with an expression of all of the intensity and anger he could muster.

Draco was staring at both boys with the determination of one about to enter into a fight, but in his head he found himself trying to imagine what it would feel like to actually touch Ron and then to kiss him. It was hard. Even though he could concede that Ron was rather attractive with the type of blue eyes that reminded him of a perfect cloudless sky, his face was always the picture of anger and disgust, especially when he was looking at Draco. But, if he could conquer that anger and get the git to cave the way his sister had, it could prove to be quite interesting; he liked a challenge. Then again, he was no pouf!

He shook his head, trying to banish the thought of kissing Ron as he glanced back at Harry’s pretty green eyes with concealed admiration. Pouf or not, they were quite stunning, and he had to admit it wouldn’t be too terrible to kiss anyone with a set of eyes like those. He became keenly aware that Ron was watching him for any sign of flirtation with Harry. For a split second, he entertained the idea of doing something obscene just to raise the redhead’s ire, but then he thought better of it and broke eye contact with both boys.

Harry began to pace; Ron tapped his knuckles against the wall, looking around the classroom while Draco stood against the door, staring ahead.

Back inside Snape’s office, Hermione sat with her arms folded across her chest. “There’s nothing you can say to convince me to do this,” she said firmly.

“Ms. Granger, I’m presenting you with fate.”

“Fate? Sorry, I don’t believe in it. No crystal ball is going to tell me what I should do with my life!”

“Fate doesn’t give orders, Ms. Granger. You always have the free will to choose to do or be anything you want. But whatever you choose, your fate will arrive regardless. The point is: it’s yours to choose.”

“That doesn’t make any sense. You’re saying I have a choice but that I really don’t.”

“I’m saying that whatever you choose, the end doesn’t change, but your role in it may. Even if you choose to not go through with this, you will play your part in the outcome of this war, one way or another. That is how fate works.”

“So why would I choose to do this if that is the case?”

“Because, if you do choose this path, you will be making a conscious and informed choice to save lives, prevent a war, and rid the world of him. If you decide not to do it, you’ll have no control over how you will figure into this war.”

“If it works! And if it doesn’t, I come out looking like the world’s biggest slag! I’m not some toy that you can just hand over for them to play with to see if your little theory pans out!”

“Watch your tongue. I’ve allowed some leniency up to now, but my patience with you and your little
friends is wearing thin,” he said, visibly trying to control his expression.

Hermione shifted in her seat, suddenly remembering why she always felt vulnerable in his class. “What if it doesn’t work?” she asked softly.

“Well, we won’t know until you try.”

“You realise you could get into a lot of trouble for even proposing this; you’re a teacher, and we’re not even of age.”

“Yes, I’m quite aware of the consequences.”

Hermione considered the meaning of Snape proposing something so outrageous to her of all people. It occurred to her that he must have a lot of faith in the prophecy to propose such a thing to one of his least favourite students at the risk of getting in trouble.

She sighed. “Well, even if it did work, what then? We all just shag our way to victory and live happily ever after? What about our families, friends? It would change everything.”

“Do I need to remind you that you are already in a polyamorous relationship? Or have you ever thought about what that may mean for all of you once you leave Hogwarts? You aren’t the first; such relationships have existed for hundreds of years.”

“Yes, but people aren’t exactly accepting of them, are they? Why do you think we’ve been hiding it?”

“I’m not sure, but perhaps it’s time to draw on some of that Gryffindor courage,” he said with a cold smirk.

“Oh, right, and since I’m shagging two blokes, might as well add a third, is that it?”

Snape raised an eyebrow but didn’t reply.

Hermione huffed. “It’s insane! It wouldn’t work anyway, not with Draco, he’s just…” she said shaking her head.

“Yes?”

“Well, he doesn’t exactly fit in with us, does he?”

“Are you telling me that you don’t have any feelings towards him?”

“Well… I didn’t exactly say that,” she said, blushing a little.

Snape seemed satisfied with that response. “I’m not asking you to make a decision now; what I am asking you to do is think on it. I’ll be contacting you before the holidays, and we’ll talk more at that time.”

Hermione let out a breath of relief and rose, heading quickly for the door. She opened it and then paused to turned around. “Does the locket you stole from me have anything to do with this?”

“I didn’t steal it, Ms. Granger, I took it for your own good.”

“What do you mean?”

“We’ll talk about it later, when you’re ready to hear it, but for now, I can guarantee that you’re better
off without it.”

She nodded slowly and then opened the door. Snape immediately called out for Ron to enter.

Ron looked back at Harry and then tentatively stepped into Snape’s office sheepishly, avoiding his eyes.

“Look at me, Mr. Weasley,” Snape said. “How do you feel about what you’ve just learned?”

Ron shrugged as he looked up at Snape. “It’s really rather unbelievable, to be honest.”

“And how does it make you feel that there is a chance you could play a role in saving the wizarding world?”

Ron blinked and looked off past Snape at the window behind him. “I don’t know; I don’t believe it.”

“What if it’s true?”

Ron didn’t respond, and so Snape continued, “What if you finally had a chance to be given just as much credit as Mr. Potter in doing something that people would remember as long as you lived.”

Ron laughed humourlessly. “Right, I’d be remembered for shagging three people, and two of them happen to be blokes! Definitely what my mum and dad had in mind when they sent me to school!”

“Mr. Weasley, this is not just about shagging; it’s purposeful magic that only a few wizards in history have been able to master and use. That honour alone would distinguish you from your brothers.”

Ron narrowed his eyes at Snape and folded his arms protectively over his chest.

“Yeah, well, it doesn’t matter; if Hermione isn’t comfortable with it, then I’m certainly not.”

“And what if she was?”

“I’m not letting Malfoy go near her.”

“And what if she wanted him to?”

“She doesn’t.”

“Are you sure about that?”

Ron stared at Snape dangerously as if he wanted to hit him. Snape stepped closer to him, his face softening a little.

“Instead of getting angry, perhaps you should think about whether you want to be a part of something that can change the world for the better, or if you want to be the roadblock that prevents it.”

Ron opened his mouth but Snape cut him off.

“I’d advise you not to rush to that decision. You have some time to decide. You are dismissed. Tell Potter to come in when you leave.”

Ron eyed Snape warily and then left, throwing a hard stare at Draco as he spoke. “Harry, he wants to see you next.”
“Hermione, let’s wait for Harry,” Ron said, pulling Hermione closer to him while keeping his eyes on Draco. Draco rolled his eyes at the exaggerated protective gesture.

Back inside Snape’s office, Snape waited for Harry to speak first, knowing he probably wanted to interrogate him. Harry studied Snape with suspicion as he spoke.

“What does Dumbledore have to say about this? And why isn’t he talking to us about it?” Harry finally asked.

“He doesn’t know I’m talking to you about it,” Snape said, looking at Harry plainly.

“Then there’s nothing to talk about; anything this important should be coming from him. As a matter of fact, I think I’ll go and see what he thinks of all of this,” Harry said as he turned towards the door.

“Pot-Harry, please sit,” Snape said softly, his mouth twitching as if trying not to grimace at saying the words Harry or please.

Harry turned around slowly with his eyebrows raised.

“The reason the headmaster hasn’t spoken to you about this is because he wants to protect you and your friends, but especially you.”

“Protect me?” Harry asked.

“Yes, he doesn’t want to put you in any further danger, and he definitely does not want you to risk your life.”

“And I’m sure that’s not a concern of yours,” Harry said, setting his jaw.

“Actually, it is with great reluctance that I’m making this proposal.”

“So, why are you then?” Harry asked.

“Because it if it is successful, it can save many lives, prevent a war, and most of all, it can prevent your death,” Snape said, looking at Harry gravely.

“My death?” Harry asked in confusion.

“You did hear your prophecy before it was destroyed did you not?”

“How did you know that?”

Harry shook his head when he realised that Dumbledore had obviously shared that with Snape, which meant that he must have trusted him more than Harry thought.

Harry sat back, relaxing a little. “Yes, but I don’t see how one prophecy can prevent another?”

“Of course you don’t, because you haven’t sat still long enough to consider anything that’s been said. But you will have time over the next several days to consider it before you have to make your decision.”

“Explain.”

“Everything has a consequence. For every action, there is a reaction. I’m sure that the headmaster has imparted the wisdom on you that your choices define who you will be as well as what kind of future you can have, has he not?”
“Yes.”

“Before you were even born there were decisions, actions, and non-decisions that led to the outcome of your very existence. Your prophecy didn’t produce you any more than it can produce the death of the Dark Lord. But it is a guide that can point to how things can happen, but if they don’t, then of course it will affect the outcome of other fates. Do you understand?”

Harry nodded slowly. “I think so, but if it can save my life, then why would Dumbledore not tell me?”

“Because, unlike me, he has hope of finding another way to save your life,” he said, trying to appear as if he actually believed that, even though he didn’t.

“But you hate me,” Harry said shaking his head.

“I don’t,” Snape muttered as he stiffened and looked straight ahead.

“What?” Harry asked, looking up at Snape studying his face.

“I said… I don’t… hate you. I can’t,” Snape said with what appeared to be much effort, forcing himself to look at Harry’s eyes.

Harry looked at him with puzzlement at the last part but didn’t press for an explanation. He broke eye contact and looked away, mumbling that he would have to think things over.

“Yes, please do,” Snape said waiting with bated breath for Harry to rise and leave.

When he did, he breathed a deep sigh of relief and called for Draco to come inside. He shut the door behind Draco who seemed more uncomfortable than he usually did during their meetings.

“Do you remember what I told you last time?” Snape asked.

“Yes.” Draco nodded absently.

“Well, here it is: the fork in the road.”

“Some fork… either way I’m fucked.”

“Language, Draco. And yes, I suppose, in some ways, at least in the short run of things, that may be true,” Snape said matter-of-factly, which seemed to shock Draco.

He considered the fear he saw on the boy’s face. “But would you rather live a long, fucked life under someone else’s thumb? Or face an uncertain future that you’ve chartered for yourself, free of fear and obligation to someone you despise?”

Draco dropped his eyes and looked at the floor.

“Don’t answer me; just consider it. We’ll talk again soon.”

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As the trio walked out of the Potions classroom, they immediately noticed how dark it had grown; the hallways were now beginning to glow with the faintly growing light of the lamps, and they heard the excited chatter of students coming back from Hogsmeade.

“Hey there, Ron… Harry!” Seamus called as he ran up to them.
Harry and Ron both inhaled deep breaths as they turned around to face Seamus with forced smiles on their faces. Hermione stepped closer to Ron as she turned around, thinking of several different answers to the unspoken questions Seamus may have for them.

“We’ve been looking all over for you. Where were you guys?” Seamus asked, catching his breath as he pulled out a cherry flavoured liquorice wand and smacking on it loudly.

“McGonagall banned me from Hogsmeade for the year,” Ron said sadly.

“Yeah, ‘member that. Rotten luck. But weren’t you two with the group? Did you come back or something?” he asked, looking at Harry and Hermione curiously.

“Well—” Harry started before Hermione interrupted.

“Yes, we came back. There are only so many times you can go to Madam Rosmerta’s before it gets a bit dull. Besides, we felt bad Ron had to stay here all alone.”

“Oh, that’s too bad, so what did you guys get into?” Seamus pressed, sounding as if he were ready to pounce on the first sign of a lie.

“Nothing,” they all replied together, a bit too quickly.

Seamus drew back and nodded, looking at all of them like he just solved a puzzle.

“Right, nothing. You guys seem to do a lot of that,” he said not bothering to hide his scepticism as he stared between the three of them.

“What are you trying to say?” Ron said clenching his fist.

“Nothing,” Seamus said sarcastically with a smug smirk.

Hermione and Harry looked worriedly at Ron, who seemed to be contemplating whether he should wipe the smug look off Seamus’ face or ignore him. Seamus seemed to sense that he may have crossed a line with Ron and made a move to exit when Draco came out of the Potions classroom, slamming the door loudly. As he walked up the corridor, the four turned around to see who was coming.

Draco slowed his stride as he approached the group, slightly startled to find them all standing there together. He quickly pulled his face back into its usual cool expression and glanced from Ron to Harry to Hermione to see if there was a problem. Indeed, it appeared from their faces that they were all quite stressed, especially Ron, who looked like he was about to hit something or someone.

“What are you doing here, Malfoy? I thought you were with the lot at Hogsmeade as well,” Seamus asked, narrowing his eyes at Draco, Harry, Ron, and Hermione with more certainty on his face.

“Not that it’s any of your business Finnigan, but some of us are actually working on our Potions assignment. Besides, there are only so many times you can go to Madam Rosmerta’s for Butterbeer before it loses some of its flavour.”

Seamus looked back at Hermione with a smirk. “Funny, Hermione said almost the same thing. If I didn’t know better, I’d say you three came back here to join Weasley for a shag.”

Ron raised his fist but Harry grabbed his arm and held it in mid-air. Seamus recoiled, but Draco stepped closer to him eyeing him intensely with a cold smile plastered on his face.
“If I were you Finnigan, I’d be careful of starting rumours you can’t prove; they have a nasty way of coming back to haunt you. If I’m not mistaken, you have eyes for Padma. It’d be a shame if she found out that you like to stuff more than food in that motor mouth of yours.”

Seamus’ face flushed bright red, and he set his jaw tightly as he glanced at all of them before turning his back on them to walk away.

Draco gave the three a tired look and walked on, leaving them to look at each other in strange relief.

When they arrived back at the Gryffindor common room, there were several students talking animatedly about the trip. Harry and Hermione looked around worryingly for Ginny. Hermione was prepared to grab her and take her upstairs in order to avoid a scene. But she didn’t see her, and so she plopped down on the couch, looking around the room only to see several girls staring back at her with judgment on their faces, some of them turning their noses up. Harry and Ron considered going over to join a group of boys huddled by the fire, but stopped when they saw that Seamus was in the group. Several of the boys looked up at the trio curiously and then turned back around to listen to Seamus who decided to move the group’s conversation upstairs, but not before throwing a hateful glare back at Harry and Ron.

They all looked at each other with trepidation. Finally, Harry shrugged and Conjured a wizarding chessboard for him and Ron to play. Ron wiped his hands on his jeans nervously as he decided it was best to just act as though everything were normal. Hermione breathed a sigh of relief; at least no one had made a scene and exposed them the way she thought they would.

She chewed on the inside of her bottom lip, hoping that it would all soon blow over, flying as much under Hogwarts’ rumour radar as possible.

She was sorely mistaken.

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After an uneventful Sunday spent studying and lounging in isolation, Hermione got dressed on Monday morning as she always did, only to find that the usual cliques were tighter than ever, with everyone either staring at her openly or avoiding her all together. When Harry and Ron came down the stairs, they received the same, and so they walked closely together towards the Great Hall for breakfast. Once there, Hermione noticed that Lavender was smirking at her and whispering with several other girls who looked up at her with derision. She tried several times to catch Ginny’s eye, but Ginny refused to look up and instead ate her breakfast hurriedly and practically ran from the table. Several boys from all houses except Slytherin were leering at Hermione openly with suggestive looks and blatant sexual gestures. She and Harry had to calm Ron down several times to keep him from rising and doing something rash.

Harry, who had been the subject of scrutiny every year since he had arrived, seemed the least affected, but he couldn’t help but look at Ron and Hermione sympathetically, knowing they weren’t used to all of the negative attention. He looked over at Draco and noticed that things seemed normal. Apparently, Seamus was scared of the boy and had chosen to leave him out of whatever gossip he was spreading. Draco looked up to see Harry staring at him and gave him a small sad smile. Harry gave him a small smile back and then quickly returned to his conversation with Ron to help keep his best mate’s mind off of the scrutiny.

For Hermione, it only got worse as the day progressed. By the time lunch had passed, the whole school was abuzz with the rumour that the trio was sleeping with each other. Several girls whispered loudly as Hermione walked towards her afternoon tutoring session. Someone laughed outright next to her ear, mocking her openly. Feeling herself becoming more agitated and upset as she walked
down the hall, she did her best not to run as she turned to escape to the nearest bathroom. Once inside, a third-year year Hufflepuff looking at the mirror turned to look at her with repulsion before making a quick exit.

Hermione went into the last stall, locking the door, and doing a Silencing Spell. She sat down on the toilet seat, trying to calm down. She rubbed her temple and told herself that she had been through worse: she had fought Death Eaters and faced a fully-grown werewolf; what was a little gossip compared to that?

She straightened up, determined not to cry when she glanced up and noticed that the stall’s wall was quite crowded with writing. Everyone knew that the graffiti in the stalls was a good way to catch up on school gossip, but it was usually erased weekly, and it was never allowed to get this out of hand. But this writing was not written in regular quill ink. She leaned in closely, and rubbed her fingers over one of the white letters and instead of smearing it, the writing only glowed more fiercely against the wall.

A small gasp escaped her as she began to read. It wasn’t just random tidbits about random people, but it appeared to be an on-going conversation about her made by various wands in different types of handwriting, each one obviously belonging to a different author.

Who’s the biggest slag: Granger or Parkinson?

Um, duh! Definitely Granger!

Hermione Granger is a dirty Mudblood tart

Gryffindor should be so proud of its Princess!

More like the Gryffindor WHORE

Fuck you! She’s no Gryffindor! She’s just a dirty slag!

No wonder Krum asked her to the ball

I hear she does Weasley and Potter every day and twice on Saturdays.

That’s funny! Too bad it’s true.

She asked Finnigan if he wanted a go and he turned her down.

Hahaha! Serves her right!! What a slag!

You guys forgot about Malfoy! She gives him blowjobs every week in the library.

I wouldn’t mind sucking his dick

Me either!

Gross! Slytherins SUCK ARSE!

Wrong bitch! Slytherins RULE! And Draco Malfoy would never touch a Mudblood!

Hufflepuff rules!

Now THAT’s funny!
Oddly, the last two entries were the ones that cracked what little resolve Hermione had been holding onto to stay composed. She felt herself shaking as a great sob washed over her, finally allowing the tears to fall as she buried her head into her hands.

She decided to skip her tutoring session; instead, she ventured out into the cold to sit on the rocks by the half-frozen lake. She didn’t know how long she had been there, but she was startled when she heard someone approaching. It was Ron.

“’Mione, are you okay?”

“No. I’m not.”

“You know we love you right?” Ron said, sitting down beside her.

“Yes, I know, but…” she said shaking her head.

“What?”

“Everyone thinks I’m a slut,” she said, scared to look at him.

“What? No! Are you serious?”

“I suppose I can see their point. I mean, how many girls would agree to be in a relationship with two blokes?” she asked, turning to look at him.

“’Mione, people just don’t understand. What we have it’s… it’s special,” Ron said, looking out across the lake.

“I know that, Ron, but no one else does. Do you know what’s written on the girls’ bathroom wall? It says I’m a Mudblood whore,” she said, her voice cracking as more tears welled up.

Ron clenched his teeth and closed his eyes, trying not to get angry. When he opened them, he drew closer to her, looking into her eyes tenderly.

“Hermione, what did you tell us the other day?”

She shrugged.

“You said we know better than to listen to school gossip. Besides, what does it matter what anyone else says? We have each other; you’ll always have us. Nothing’s going to change that. You don’t need anyone else’s approval.”

Hermione took a big sniff and nodded slowly.

“I love you.”

“I know, Ron, you said that,” she said with a small smile.
“No, I said we love you. But I didn’t tell you how much I love you. I love you very much, Hermione.”

She smiled as his hand reached out and caressed her cheek.

“I love you, too, Ron.”

He leaned in and brushed his lips against hers softly almost hesitantly as he moved his hand back to rest gently on her neck as he moved up her face to trace her tears with his mouth, catching each trail and erasing them with his lips.

Hermione sighed as Ron began to kiss her all over her face, holding him closely. She nestled her face in the crook of his neck as he began to caress her back until they heard the crunch of feet on rocks and looked up to see Harry grinning at them.

“Now that we’ve gone public, you have to share, Ron,” Harry said playfully.

Ron snorted and held Hermione tighter. Harry came around to her other side and snuggled against her, reaching around her to stroke Ron’s back.

They sat there for several minutes until Ron cleared his throat. “So, um, why didn’t you guys tell me you liked being watched.”

Harry and Hermione exchanged hesitant glances.

“Ron, we’re sorry, we just wanted to give Malfoy a bit of a show since he was following us; we should have told you,” Hermione said, looking at Ron anxiously.

“I’m not really mad, you know,” Ron said with a small smirk.

“You’re not?” Harry said in surprise.

“No, I just wish you would have told me. I could have been so much better.”

They all laughed and then grew quiet in their embrace. Here with each other there were no appraising eyes regarding them with disapproval. They knew it wouldn’t last long, and eventually they would have to go back to face it all again. And so they sat there, enjoying the comfortable and safe silence between them, huddling closer against the growing coldness from the early set of the winter sun.
Fork in the Road

The middle of the road is trying to find me,
I’m standing in the middle of life with my plans behind me...

-“Middle of the Road” by The Pretenders

I walk a lonely road...
Don’t know where it goes,
But it’s home to me and I walk alone.

-“Boulevard of Broken Dreams” by Green Day

When Draco left the Potions professor’s office, Snape leaned against the door with his eyes closed for several minutes. It had gone a bit better than he had thought it might. Still, he couldn’t deny that like Weasley, the proposal made him sound as if he had gone ‘mad.’ He suppressed the small, quiet voice telling him that he was betting his life on a possibly outdated prophecy.

If even one of the four went to Dumbledore or another professor about it, not only would Snape be sacked, but he would be forced into exile with a gang of Death Eaters on his trail. But he really was tired of being a spy, of feeling obligated to a headmaster he no longer trusted, and the guilt. The one person Snape had been most worried about, Harry, had said he would think about it, and that would have to be enough, for now.

He put the prophecy back in its hidden place and opened a new bottle of cognac. He reasoned that one drink wouldn’t hurt. As he sat down with the glass, he mentally replayed his conversation with Remus. He tried to remember every detail, searching for something to bolster his confidence in his decision.

He clearly recalled Remus saying several things that stuck out as peculiar:

“It never felt right to me; it always felt like it was the three of them and then me as a tagalong.

“Maybe someone else would have fit in better with that sort of arrangement, but I was a convenient and willing participant, so I went along with it for as long as James allowed it.

“It probably didn’t help that we were all homophobic at the time, being teenage blokes, of course. It may have turned out differently if we were involved with each other, but as it was, it was just about her, and even then we knew she really belonged to James. We were just along for the ride.

“Don’t get me wrong, I loved Lily, I really did, but it was never really that kind of love. But as long as she was fine with everything, then I didn’t think too much about it.”

Snape had been shocked when Remus revealed that Lily had made the suggestion that Snape be the third person to join them. Of course James had found the idea to be preposterous.

Snape had also been surprised to learn that James had discovered that Lily was cheating on him through the use of that annoying map that Snape had found on Potter just last year. It was the same map that Remus had told Snape was probably a prank toy from Zonko’s.

But during their most recent conversation, Snape had pressed him for more information about the
map, only to discover that Remus didn’t know much about the origins of the map at all. He had said that he had always assumed that they had created it, but he really didn’t know for certain.

But Snape was sure they had not crafted it; they simply didn’t have the skill or knowledge to do so. There was no way that something so intuitive that could locate a person inside of a castle the size of Hogwarts among hundreds of moving people, could be have been crafted by fifth or sixth years, especially the likes of Potter and Black, who were no scholars by any stretch of the imagination.

The grandfather clock struck 11:00 pm once, startling Snape from further conjecture. He was scheduled to meet with the Dark Lord at midnight and knew that it was best to take these thoughts out of his mind so as not to be discovered. He pulled out a Pensieve from his bottom drawer, set it upon the desk, and put his wand to his temple, pulling the memory of his conversation with Remus out of his head and dropping it into the Pensieve.

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Peter sat in the corner with a line of miniature-sized cauldrons filled with dung from various creatures. The Dark Lord had assigned him the task of sorting through them and placing them into storage bottles to be labelled in order to restock the Manor’s Potions supply. It was a task normally done by the Malfoys’ house-elves, but Peter had said or done something (he wasn’t sure which) to annoy the Dark Lord hours before. And so, here he was doing the work of a house-elf and sorting through dung. Quietly disgruntled and humiliated, he sat listening to and observing the various conversations taking place in front of him throughout the day and night.

He glanced up several times as Death Eaters with various assignments and tasks came to report to his Master before being excused. At the stroke of midnight exactly, Severus came through the dungeon’s chimney sweep, wearing his usual joyless expression; at least it appeared to be his usual expression.

Peter, who prided himself on reading people, especially liars, could see a hint of strain in his face as if he were trying to look impassive. He almost had it down, but not quite. Peter glanced at his Master to see if he detected the difference.

“How is the boy doing?” the Dark Lord asked, turning his back to Snape as if he had more important things to do than to stand and listen to him.

“He’s doing as well as can be expected.”

“How’s task is quite difficult.”

“Oh, but it isn’t. He simply has to make friends. Is that so hard?” the Dark Lord asked with mock concern.

“Potter and his friends, especially the Mudblood, who has been the target of Draco’s taunts and pranks for many years, aren’t very forgiving.”

“How disappointing. I was under the impression that the younger Malfoy was quite skilled in persuasion and charm.”

“He is, my Lord. Under the circumstances, he has learned a few significant things.”

“Such as?”

“The group that they organised last year to teach other students defensive magic has greatly reduced
“It’s not entirely clear, but it may be the result of the trio’s increasing interest in spending time alone with each other to the exclusion of others.”

“So, they are isolating themselves?”

“It seems so, which makes the assignment for Draco more difficult.”

“I see; what else?”

“He reports that they do not seem to be planning any sort of counter attack, in fact, they just seem quite distracted from anything related to you in general.”

“That must be quite frustrating to the headmaster,” the Dark Lord said with cheer in his voice.

Snape didn’t answer but gave a slight shrug instead.

“Really, Severus, you haven’t spoken to the headmaster about them? He will suspect you are keeping information from him. He is not a stupid man.”

“Yes, my Lord, we have spoken about them, but he seems to be more relieved than anything that Potter has found something to get his mind off of things pertaining to… this.”

“And what of the prophecy itself? Have you learned of anything that could be helpful? You’ve had quite a bit of time to research it.”

“Yes, my Lord, I have found that is quite possible that the prophecy itself is a hoax.”

“A hoax? You said it was destroyed!” the Dark Lord said, moving closer to Snape to stare into his face more keenly.

“My Lord, it appears I may have been misinformed. There is a good possibility it never existed.”

The Dark Lord laughed, the stench of his breath apparently cracking Snape’s cool mask, causing him to wrinkle his nose in spite of himself.

“No, you are still misinformed. A spy at the Ministry has informed me that there was definitely a prophecy tied to four people— something so rare could hardly be forgotten.”

“Of course, my Lord, but still, it is highly suspicious that something so unique and strange just vanished into thin air.”

“Yes, it is rather suspicious; nevertheless, it is clear that the prophecy is very much real,” he said, pausing before continuing. “Perhaps it does not concern this particular Mudblood. It is quite possible that it refers to another whose time has passed, or is yet to come. In any case, I will have Draco watch them for a little while longer, but as soon as he receives his Mark, we’ll put him to better use.”

Peter noticed that Snape’s forehead wrinkled slightly, but it was gone just as quickly as it had come.

“I’m sorry, my Lord, you mean to give Draco the Mark? When exactly?”

“No, my Lord, this is good news,” Snape said with slight elation in his voice.

Peter thought it sounded forced.

“Of course it is,” the Dark Lord said. “We will most likely do it when he comes home for the break.”

“Very good,” Snape replied.

“Well then, if that is all…” the Dark Lord said.

“My Lord,” Peter interrupted.

“Yes, Peter, what is it?” the Dark Lord asked, annoyed, turning around to glare at the man.

“I’m so sorry, my Lord, I did not mean to inter—”

“Just spit it out, fool!”

“Yes, my Lord; it occurred to me that perhaps the boy should receive the Mark with the others this weekend, before the holidays, so that they could use the holiday break to prepare the school for the others to enter.”

“That wouldn’t work,” Snape said quickly and firmly.

“And why not, Severus? They would be under your protection,” the Dark Lord said, narrowing his eyes as he watched for Snape’s response.

“Yes, but it would raise the suspicion of the headmaster to have three Slytherins, sons of rumoured Death Eaters, staying at Hogwarts during the holidays, especially since pure-blood family tradition dictates the importance of family at such festivities. As Head of their House, it would be even more conspicuous if I stayed to watch over them.”

The Dark Lord paused and studied Snape for several moments. “Yes, I believe you are correct. Draco can wait to take the Mark as previously planned and the others will receive their Marks this weekend.”

Snape’s face remained impassive, but Peter noticed that his body seemed to sigh in relief.

“Very well, you may go.”

“Thank you, my Lord,” Snape said, bowing slightly before turning to toward the chimney and Flooing away.

Once Snape left, the Dark Lord stared at the chimney for a few moments before turning back around to regard Peter.

“You don’t trust him, do you?”

“My Lord, if I may speak?”

“Of course, idiot; I just asked you a question.”

“I’m sorry, my Lord… no, I do not.”

“You think he’s hiding something?”
“Yes, my Lord, I do.”

“And, what do you think he has to hide?”

“I’m not sure, my Lord, but I have never trusted him, and he is a spy, so if he were lying, he’d be quite good at it.”

The Dark Lord grinned. “Yes, he would be, wouldn’t he, Wormtail? Perhaps, you can keep an eye on him for me, hmm?”

“Oh yes, my Lord, most certainly.”

“Good.” The Dark Lord turned and ascended the stairs to dungeons, his cape billowing after him.

Peter stared after him, his heart racing at the opportunity to finally prove his worth and expose the overgrown bat for the slimy git he always believed him to be. He let out a small giggle and clapped his hands to his mouth in glee.

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Once Draco threatened to expose Seamus’ secret extracurricular activities, he left the trio standing in relief in the middle of the hallway. He took quick strides back to his common room. All he could think of was climbing into his bed; he was exhausted from the day’s events and the weight of what he had just learned.

The Slytherin common room was packed with people talking about the trip from Hogsmeade, sharing gifts and candies, and playing various games. His lot was in the centre, as always, claiming the biggest couches as their own as they lay or sat talking lazily, and making fun of others in the room. Draco took a deep breath, understanding that, at the very least, he had to make small talk before making some excuse to go to bed and just think.

Crabbe and Goyle smiled at him curiously, while Pansy crossed her arms over her chest when she saw him. He rolled his eyes and turned toward Crabbe who burst out in fits of laughter.

“What’s so funny?” Draco asked him curiously.

“Did you hear?” Crabbe said laughing.

“What?” Draco asked.

“The Mudblood Granger,” he said, still laughing.

Draco tried to hide his sudden and inexplicable irritation at hearing Crabbe call Hermione that and simply shrugged, indicating he hadn’t heard what they were laughing about.

“Well, apparently she’s getting it from both ends if you know what I mean,” he said, to which Goyle responded by laughing.

“What do you mean?”

“Everyone’s talking about it. She and Potter came back here right after we arrived at Hogsmeade.”

“Can they be any more obvious?” Pansy said. “By the way, where were you Draco?” she asked.

Draco shook his head. “How is it that you keep forgetting you’re not my girlfriend? That’s none of your business.”
Pansy huffed and made her way over to a group of girls in the corner.

Draco listened to the various conversations taking place around the room, and it didn’t take long for him to figure out that the trio’s secret was effectively out of the bag.

Even if Seamus had kept his mouth shut, which he seriously doubted he would, there were already suspicions about the trio being together. Harry and Hermione’s absence from Hogsmeade only fuelled the rumour to new heights; everyone else had gone to Hogsmeade.

When he heard a fifth year talk about what he wanted to do to Hermione once Potter and Weasley were done with her, he knew it was going to be bad for them. He did what he could to minimize the damage, and for a while, it worked.

By Monday morning, the rumour mill had the whole school staring, taunting, and whispering about the trio, with several boys from every House except Slytherin throwing salacious glances and gestures in Hermione’s direction. Draco watched the treatment each of them received at breakfast and lunch with confused uneasiness. It seemed as if Hermione were getting the worst of it, and he found that he could barely look at her. While she looked stoic through it all, her eyes revealed that she was deeply hurt.

By dinner, he noticed he hadn’t seen anyone from the trio for quite some time and they didn’t arrive for the meal until it was almost over, sitting closely together and looking fixedly at their food before rising quickly to leave. Again, he felt a pang of discomfort in his stomach looking at them. He didn’t know what bothered him more, that they were being treated so badly or that he cared enough to be disturbed by it.

After Quidditch practice, he joined everyone in the Slytherin common room, taking a seat besides Crabbe who was engaged in a conversation with Goyle recounting how they had tortured some Hufflepuff first years for their candy. He fought the urge to roll his eyes and turn away and instead looked on with feigned interest.

Goyle looked up from the conversation and laughed, looking at Draco as if he were supposed to join in. Draco offered a smile to show he thought whatever Crabbe had just said was funny, even though he hadn’t been paying attention.

He turned his head to offer Nott and Zabini a casual smile. Nott gave Draco a suspicious look before scrunching his face up and standing to walk off.

Draco wrinkled his brow as he looked back at Zabini. “What the hell is his problem?”

Zabini shrugged. “Heard you told several of the guys in the House to back off of Granger; why the hell would you do that?”

“Maybe you heard wrong.”

“No, I think we heard correctly.”

“Look, I don’t give a flying fuck what’s going on with Granger or her little boyfriends; I just don’t think it’s respectable to have pure-bloods panting after her like common dogs.”

Zabini tapped his fingers along the arm of the couch, studying Draco as if contemplating something. “I’ve known you for a long time, but I’ve never seen you like this. When’s the last time you got laid?”

Zabini was being daft; Draco shook his head and shifted in his seat uncomfortably and cast his
attention around the common room to avoid the other boy’s studious gaze.

“In fact, I haven’t seen you working on anyone lately, unless you want to count Granger and her friends,” Zabini said with one eyebrow raised suggestively.

Draco didn’t respond and sat looking at Zabini plainly, waiting for him to get to his point.

“You don’t hang out the way you used to either.”

“Maybe because the company isn’t as interesting as it used to be,” Draco said with a sneer.

Zabini gave Draco a sour smile. “You’re losing the plot, Draco. Pansy told us that she saw you and Granger getting quite friendly in the forest last week. Did you really think no one would notice? I suppose you did, just like you didn’t think we noticed that you gave us the slip on Saturday? I’m assuming you came back here for Gods know what.”

Draco’s sneer fell.

“And now you’re using threats to protect the Mudblood and her friends? You’re changing,” Zabini said.

Draco chuckled dryly. “Yeah? Well, so are you; you’re becoming more and more melodramatic each time we speak.”

“I’m not sure I know you anymore.”

“Maybe you never did,” Draco replied curtly.

“Oh, but I think I know you well enough to know that whatever it is that you’re playing at, you’re in over your head. It doesn’t seem to be working out very well, does it?”

Draco’s jaw went tight, and he ground his teeth.

“I have a clue about why you’re doing it, though. You can pretend that you don’t care about her all you like, but I see how you look at her,” Zabini said with a smirk, causing Draco to dig his fingers into the arm of the couch. “It’s all right, really. So you have a taste for some dirty blood; it happens, but do get on with it and get it out of your system. Just make sure you do it discreetly, of course,” Zabini said with distaste.

Draco looked off to the side, refusing to give Zabini any serious consideration.

Zabini huffed with amusement and shook his head. “You’re skating on very thin ice, you know. You may be the Prince of Slytherin now, but you can be easily replaced.”

Draco looked back at him with defiance. “You think I care? I don’t give a shit what anyone thinks of me. I know you’ve always wanted the title. It’s all yours.”

“I’m not after popularity points, Draco, but I’d watch what you say if I were you; it might be put to the test.”

“Is that a threat?”

“No, it’s a warning from a concerned friend. Stay away from her and her friends, for your own good. You know as well as I do there are people in this House who could make your life here quite unpleasant if they sensed you no longer respected our values.”
“Right, thanks for reminding me of that… friend,” Draco said before rising to take the stairs.

That night, Draco found it hard to sleep. Long after he heard the snores of Nott and Zabini, he heard Crabbe and Goyle talking excitedly about the upcoming weekend. He turned around to look at them and asked them what they were on about at such a late hour.

“The ceremony this weekend; are you coming?” Goyle asked.

“This weekend, oh yes, I forgot all about that, I don’t think so; I wish I could, though,” he lied. He paused, proceeding cautiously. “I can hardly believe it,” he said with fake enthusiasm.

“Yeah, I know. Father said that you’ll be getting yours over the Christmas holidays. Then we’ll all have it, just like we always talked about.”

Draco nodded and gave Goyle a small smile before telling them both goodnight and turning over. He pretended to fall asleep, but he remained wide awake with his thoughts racing from the news that both Crabbe and Goyle would receive the Dark Mark that weekend.

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On Tuesday, when Hermione arrived, Draco was already in the library, reading. She barely looked at him, apparently still quite affected by all of the gossip going around the school. He exhaled and leaned back in his seat. He wasn’t really in the mood to deal with her shit right now; he had plenty of his own to manage.

“Hi,” Hermione said.

“Hi,” Draco said, staring at her.

“Well, I’ve been thinking how we should proceed while we’re waiting for the potion to progress and that perhaps you should do the paper’s outline, since he seems to favour your work,” she suggested.

“I don’t need you to tell me what to do, Granger,” he said grumpily.

“I didn’t say you did, I was making a suggestion,” Hermione said in confusion.

“Well, I don’t need your suggestions!” he snapped.

Hermione looked up past Draco, narrowing her eyes. Draco looked up to see what she was staring at.

“Careful, Draco, I hear she’s after more than an ‘O’ as far as you’re concerned,” Pansy said, looking down at Hermione.

“Pansy, what the hell are you doing here?” Draco asked looking at her in annoyance.

“I’ll have you know, Draco, that your Potions partner is a dirty slag and there’s a rather reliable source that says that now that the blokes in her House are through with her, she’s making her way through the other Houses.”

“Are you sure they weren’t talking about you?” Draco asked with a serious look on his face.

“You’ll pay for that, Draco,” Pansy said, growing very red in the face.

“Really, I’m so scared; bugger off!” Draco said, shooing her away before turning back around to flip the page of his book.
Pansy gave Hermione one last evil glare before storming off.

“You shouldn’t have done that. I can take care of myself.”

“Yeah, so I can see. You were really putting her in her place.”

“You didn’t give me a chance. I’m not helpless; Pansy doesn’t scare me.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “Oh yes, I forgot you’re a Gryffindor, all courage and no sense.”

“What’s crawled up your arse?”

Draco threw up his hands. “Oh, I don’t know, my future is so bright these days; I’ve just been given the option of committing social suicide by shagging three Gryffindors, two who happen to be blokes, one a half-blood attention seeker, and the other a brainless blood traitor, and then of course there’s you: the know-it-all Mudblood.”

Hermione scowled. “I told you about calling me that! Besides, I don’t know what you’re complaining about! Right now, I’m competing with Pansy for the title of the biggest slag Hogwarts has ever known, and it appears that I’m winning!”

“You, the biggest slag? You and she are nothing alike.”

“Why, because I’m a Muggle-born, and she’s a pure-blood?”

Draco shook his head. “That’s not what I meant and you know it. She really is a slag, and you… for all your book knowledge, you’re just naïve. If you insist on listening to what others think of you and making yourself more miserable for it, be my guest, but don’t whine to me about it.”

Hermione bit her lip and considered him for a moment. Draco rolled his eyes, and began to read again.

“So…” she said hesitantly.

“So, what?” he asked impatiently, not looking up at her.

“So, that prophecy was pretty crazy, don’t you think?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, what do you think about it?” she asked with impatience in her voice.

Draco shrugged dismissively.

“I’m not surprised. I don’t expect you to go through with it anyway,” she said, sounding disappointed.

“Oh, and why is that?” Draco asked finally looking up at her.

“Since when have you done anything for anyone other than yourself? You’re a Slytherin, after all, and a bigoted one at that,” she said with scorn.

Draco leaned back his chair, folding his arms. “Right then, I was wondering when it would come out. Don’t hold back; tell me what’s really on your mind.”

“I just did!”
“Well then, let me tell you what’s on mine. Gryffindors are just as selfish and self-serving as anyone else in this school. They claim courage, loyalty, and honour, not because it’s the ‘right’ thing to do but because they use it to justify any brash and dim-witted thing they can do to get their way.”

“At least we don’t pride ourselves on lying and cheating to get our way.”

“Oh, you mean the way you and your boyfriends walked around for who knows how long pretending as if you weren’t shagging each other’s brains out? The way you pretend you’re the perfect Gryffindor Princess while taking it up the arse when everyone’s at Hogsmeade? Right, you guys are the picture of integrity.”

Hermione’s face became tight. “We wouldn’t have had to hide what we were doing if it wasn’t for people like you, who like to use anything that doesn’t seem ‘proper’ as a reason to bully others. You and your lot would have made our lives just as miserable as you make it for the Muggle-borns at this school.”

“If they can’t handle it, maybe they shouldn’t be here,” he said, looking at her challengingly.

“Maybe you shouldn’t be here! Hogwarts doesn’t need that kind of thinking. Slytherin is stuck in the Dark Ages; your obsession with blood is ridiculous!”

“And the way Gryffindors talk about Slytherin makes them just as bigoted as any proud pure-blood,” he said.

“Nice try, Draco, but Gryffindors don’t have a long history of turning into Dark wizards. Gryffindor isn’t made up of a bunch of bigots who look down on anyone not considered a pure-blood!”

“Did you read all of *Hogwarts: A History* or just the parts that made you feel good? Muggles are the reason why this school was built! Or didn’t you know they used to torture us and then burn us at the stake?” he said, anger rising in his voice.

“That was then, this is now. Muggles aren’t like that now, at least most of them. And those that think like that are controlled by laws to prevent that sort of thing,” Hermione said as if embarrassed by that particular piece of history.

“So you say. And where’s the protection? Where’s the guarantee it won’t happen again?” he asked rhetorically.

“It won’t, because there are people like my parents who wouldn’t let that happen again.”

“And there are people like my parents who will give their lives to make sure that it won’t happen again.”

“By purging the wizarding world of Muggle-borns?”

“By protecting their family, their culture, their right to be who they are.”

“And what about my right? Don’t I have a right to be a witch? Whether you like it or not, I have magic in me. You just said that was the reason Hogwarts was built, for people with magic, people like me!”

Draco shook his head. “You don’t get it, do you? You have nothing to lose. You can always go back to your Muggle world if you like. I can’t do that, this is my world, this all I have, this is all we have, and if Muggles keep inviting themselves into it, there’ll be nothing left of it. We’ll be just as vulnerable as we were before.”
“So that’s it then. You’re worried I’m here to take over.”

“That’s what Muggles do; if they don’t understand something, they destroy it or try to control it and claim it’s for the ‘public good’.”

“So the solution is to destroy them before they destroy you?”

Draco shrugged.

Hermione frowned, her eyes measuring him in a way that made Draco angry. “Why am I even wasting my time arguing with you? You sound just like a Death Eater; maybe you should take the Mark and make it official.”

“Maybe I will,” he said as if he were seriously considering it.

Hermione shook her head in disbelief. “I can’t believe I almost let you kiss me,” she whispered more to herself than him.

“Don’t worry, I never had any intentions of kissing you—wouldn’t want the taste of Weasley or Potter’s come on my lips,” he said with his most hateful sneer.

Hermione blinked, tears welling in her eyes, before rising from her chair and walking away. Draco held his sneer until she left before slamming his fist on the table and putting his head in his hand.

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On Friday, Snape watched as the students filed in his class, waiting for Draco to enter. The boy had failed to drop by like he usually did in the middle of the week to speak to him. When Hermione and Draco arrived and took their seats, he noticed that they had put considerable distance between each other, almost at opposite ends of the table.

This was a bad sign; over the past several weeks they had managed to work together amicably, sitting much closer together. He pursed his lips briefly before rising in his usual foreboding manner to review the properties of ingredients that would be essential to nullifying the shielding potion.

The class, as usual, barely responded to his questions, but to his surprise, Hermione did not try to answer a single question. He found it quite unnerving, even if he never called upon her, somehow her eagerness and silent demand to be acknowledged always gave him a small sense of satisfaction.

After several open attempts to invite answers she normally would have jumped to answer, he gave up all together. He decided to cut the lesson short and instructed to the class to use the rest of the time to work on their assignment, disappearing into his private study and leaving the class temporarily unattended.

Several students rose to retrieve stored cauldrons, including Hermione, who had decided to take the most direct route to retrieve her and Draco’s cauldron, which happened to lead her in between Crabbe and Goyle’s desks.

“I’d like to get some of that,” Crabbe said loudly, sniggering as Hermione passed him.

“You’ll have to get in line; I heard she’s taking numbers,” Goyle said in response, causing Crabbe to laugh outright.

“You mean the way people are taking numbers to hex your fat arses,” Draco drawled, glancing up at them.
Most of the class sniggered at that, while the Slytherins and Hermione turned around to look at Draco in disbelief. Harry and Ron looked at each other with their eyebrows raised.

Zabini shook his head at Draco, while Crabbe and Goyle appeared completely flummoxed, their faces red and their eyes downcast. Nott, however, levelled a hateful glare at Draco, before a small dangerous smile grew on his face.

“Zabini, I suppose it’s true what they say,” Nott said loudly as Draco held his breath, waiting for the anvil to drop.

Zabini glanced between Hermione and Draco with a smirk. “Yeah? What’s that, Theo?”

Nott smirked back. “That poufs are better lovers than fighters; Weasley and Potter can’t even defend their girlfriend, they need someone else to do it for them.”

“I’ll show you who’s the pouf, Nott!” Ron said, rising from his seat.

Nott didn’t cower, instead he rose from his seat and began walking back towards Ron and Harry’s desk.

“What are you going to do, Weasley? You can’t even decide whether you prefer boy or girl bits. But I suppose for a pouf, it doesn’t really matter; any arsehole will do.”

Several other students stood up and inched closer to witness the confrontation. A few students stayed glued in their seats, looking back from the escalating scene to the door of Snape’s study, nervously waiting for him to appear.

Hermione and Harry both stood when they saw that Nott was making his way towards Ron. Hermione stepped in front of Ron and Harry’s desk, quietly telling Ron to calm down and sit. Nott pushed Hermione out of the way, prompting Ron to grab the front of Nott’s robes and Harry to move closer to Ron protectively. Crabbe and Goyle rose instinctively to stand at Nott’s side.

Crabbe pulled out his wand and muttered a curse directed at Ron’s stomach, causing Ron to double over in pain. Nott laughed as he drew his wand out and aimed it down at Ron. Harry moved quickly and pointed his wand at Nott.

“Expelliarmus!”

Nott’s wand flew out of his hand, and Harry turned to point his wand at Crabbe who was already set to cast a hex at Harry. Before Harry could disarm Crabbe, Goyle’s fist connected to Harry’s jaw with a loud cracking sound, causing the entire class to wince.

Harry was lying out on the floor, holding his bleeding mouth. Goyle moved as if to get to the other side of the desk to finish him off. It was quite clear that he intended to use his foot to either brutally kick or stomp on Harry. Just as he made it out to the aisle, he stumbled and went sprawling face first into the floor, with the loud crunch of his nose breaking.

The entire class looked back at Draco in shock; he had tripped Goyle in mid-step on his way to stomp Harry. Nott clenched his fist and turned toward Draco with an incredulous look on his face.

Before he could make his way over to Draco, Snape re-entered the classroom, causing several students to run back to their seats.

Everyone held their breath, waiting for Snape to speak.
Snape frowned as if he smelled something most foul. “Pity I can’t leave sixth years alone for five minutes without a brawl breaking out.”

Ron groaned, still recovering from the hex, as he bent over to help Harry. He threw nervous glance back at Snape.

“Fifty points from Gryffindor,” Snape said looking down at Ron and Harry.

“What about Slytherin? They started it!” Ron said in protest.

“Yes, thank you, Mr. Weasley; fifty points from Slytherin,” he said as if it were an afterthought, the hint of a smirk on his face. “Back to your proper seats. Now! Mr. Crabbe, see Mr. Goyle to the Infirmary.”

Crabbe quickly kneeled to help Goyle, whose face was covered in blood, up off the floor and out the door. Snape made his way back to the front of the classroom, throwing only a cursory glance down at Harry on his way.

“And what about Harry?” Ron asked angrily.

Snape turned around slowly. “Potter, do you need to go see Madam Pomfrey?” he asked in a patronising voice.

Harry shook his head as he rubbed his jaw and licked blood from his lips. “I’ll go after class,” he mumbled.

Snape nodded stiffly and continued to the front of the class. Nott glowered at Ron one last time and threw Draco a nasty look as he took his seat.

For the remainder of the class, Hermione, Ron, and Harry snuck curious glances at Draco who appeared to be focusing on the potion as if nothing had happened, except for one give away; his jaw moved as if he was grinding his teeth.

When class finally ended, Ron and Harry looked back at Draco one last time as they waited for Hermione. She gave Draco a small, stiff smile before leaving with Harry and Ron flanking her.

After the classroom emptied, Snape moved to the centre of the room to lean against his desk. He stood like that for several moments, staring at Draco, who sat rooted in his chair, unable to move.

“I didn’t expect you to make your decision so publicly,” Snape finally said.

Draco sighed in response but didn’t answer him.

“Whether you like it or not, you have,” Snape continued.

“So stupid… I’m so fucking stupid,” Draco muttered to himself, shaking his head. “I can’t even go back to my House now.”

“You can, and you will,” Snape said.

“They’re going to kill me,” Draco said, looking at him in desperation.

“You really think so, Draco?”

Draco chuckled humourlessly. “No, of course not, but they might as well. No one will want to talk to me now; it’ll be open season on me.”
“Yes, I imagine so.”

Draco’s ran his hands through his hair nervously before looking back up at Snape. “Are you going to tell them to hold off on me? Give me some sort of protection?”

“Of course not; what kind of soldier would you be if I did that? No, you’ll have to fight your own battles, Draco.”

“Professor, you have no idea what it’ll be like.”

“You’re wrong; I know exactly what it will be like, and you might as well get used to it now that you’ve chosen your path.”

Snape’s words hung in the air for a few moments before he straightened and uncrossed his arms.

“That will be all; you can go now.”

Draco swallowed, running his fingers along the edge of the desk as if he didn’t hear him.

“Draco, get up and go back to your House. Deal with it.”

Draco nodded and rose slowly before turning around and leaving. Even though he felt sympathy for the boy, Snape couldn’t hold back a smirk of satisfaction that crept on his lips once he left.

When Draco returned to an icy reception in the Slytherin common room. Zabini had Pansy on his lap, and Nott was seated next to them. Several younger students crowded as close to them as possible without intruding on their space. They were all laughing and talking rather loudly.

Pansy gave Draco a dismissive look and proceeded to lean in to give Zabini a lustful kiss.

Draco rolled his eyes and muttered, “Thank Merlin,” as he headed toward the stairs.

“I hope you’re going up there to pack,” Nott called after him.

Draco paused and turned around. They were all sniggering, even some of the younger Slytherins who normally trembled when he walked by were laughing nervously.

“What’s that?” Draco asked narrowing his eyes. Outnumbered or not, he didn’t take well to threats.

“I’m sure Gryffindor is making room for you as we speak. Or maybe you and your boyfriends and the Mudblood can all get one big bed together,” Nott said, causing Pansy to laugh dramatically.

Zabini shook his head in pity at Draco, before turning his attention back to Pansy, while Nott began to chat up an eager sixth year girl who had been trying to get his attention.

When Draco reached his dorms, he found his bed curtain torn, and his mattress ripped to shreds, feathers everywhere. He ground his teeth, and began to clean it up. He muttered a repairing spell to finish it off and sat down on his bed, his arms folded.

Finding his property in such a state was a clear message that he was no longer of any importance in his House. In fact, he had made himself the probable target of many future pranks and insults from the same people who had once regarded him as their unofficial leader.

Cautiously, he laid down, keeping his curtain open, just in case. He kept his wand out firmly in hand as he tried to close his eyes and get some rest. He knew once housemates came up, he’d have to sleep with one eye open.
There would be little security or sound sleep in the coming days. For the first time since the Dark Lord had taken over the Manor, Draco found himself wishing he could go home.
Since the altercation in Potions, Draco, Ron, Hermione, and Harry had all received word from Professor Snape that they were to meet and discuss their decision about participating in the prophecy on Tuesday night. The following Friday would be the last day of classes before the Christmas holiday break and students would be leaving that day.

Nott did not pass on the opportunity to announce Draco’s new status as the Gryffindor bodyguard. The younger Slytherins laughed at his taunts while the older Slytherins eyed Draco warily, keeping their distance from him.

After almost two days of enduring sniggers and cowardly behind-the-back jeers from people in his House, Draco had almost grown accustomed to the alienation. He had to resist the urge to get comfortable with the newfound isolation; an attack or public act of humiliation would be even more potent if he became complacent.

That weekend, he ate his meal in the Great Hall, separated from his house mates. He was more than relieved that Crabbe and Goyle were away. It gave him some time to think on the best way to avoid getting into a physical altercation with either one of them, since they could easily overpower Draco in a fight.

On Sunday evening, he was startled out of reading on his bed when his curtain was drawn back. It was Goyle. Draco immediately dropped his book and grabbed his wand, ready for the boy’s retaliation for Friday’s incident. Instead, Goyle bowed his head and pushed up the left sleeve of his arm. The Dark Mark stood out starkly against the boy’s pale flesh. Draco’s mouth went dry upon seeing it.

“It’s done,” he said soberly.
Draco looked back at Goyle in confusion, unsure of why the boy felt the need to show his Mark or had not yet lashed out at Draco for tripping him and breaking his nose.

“I’m sorry; I didn’t know. You should have told us,” Goyle said with a shaky voice.

“Told you what?” Draco asked.

“We could have helped you. We never would have put you in that position if we had known,” Goyle said apologetically.

Draco nodded with the sudden understanding that Crabbe and Goyle had been informed of his assignment.

“Whatever you need, Draco, just let us know; we’re here to support you. We all have to help each other now,” he said.

“You didn’t get into any trouble, did you?” Draco asked, concerned by the quiver in Goyle’s voice.

Goyle swallowed. “It’s alright. We shouldn’t have done that. We should have left it alone, but don’t worry; it won’t happen again,” he said earnestly, his eyes pleading for Draco to forgive him.

Draco cringed as he thought of the horrible punishments the Dark Lord may have inflicted upon Crabbe and Goyle for giving Draco a hard time. For a moment, he felt some sympathy for them. He nodded, giving the boy one last glance before picking up his book to resume reading. Goyle closed his curtain and walked back downstairs.

Draco exhaled to be alone again, and silently hoped that Goyle or Crabbe would keep their mouths shut and not say anything that would be dangerous for him to disown later.

In his younger years, he used to brag about his family’s ties to the Dark Lord. However, since the maniac had come to occupy the Manor, Draco was no longer enthusiastic about being linked to such a monster. And he definitely didn’t want anyone knowing about his assignment. Public knowledge of his assignment would not only invite more pressure, but it would push him one step closer to a life of servitude to a Master he did not want to serve.

Nevertheless, after Goyle’s appearance by his bedside, Draco noticed with unease that both he and Crabbe became reverent in their interactions with him. And as quickly as it had started, the taunting, jeers, sniggers, and whispers ceased. No one else bothered Draco, not even Nott.

But instead of bringing him relief, Draco was more unnerved than ever.

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Hermione had finally settled into a familiar routine of getting dressed and waiting for Harry and Ron after almost everyone else had gone down to the Great Hall for breakfast in order to avoid stares and whispers, but to her great relief, it was all beginning to die down.

She noticed that although both Parvati and Ginny had been avoiding her, neither seemed to express any derision. And now a few of the younger Gryffindor girls who had previously looked up to Hermione were giving her brief smiles and head nods in support here and there, usually out of view of anyone who might see.

On Monday, after her Advanced Herbology class, she came back to Gryffindor’s common room to find Ginny on the couch reading. She paused upon seeing her and decided to take a chance at talking to her. When she sat down next to her, Ginny shifted uncomfortably and continued to stare down at
her book.

“Ginny,” Hermione said softly, inching in closer when she saw that the other girl was not responding. “Ginny, can we talk?” she asked with more determination in her voice.

Finally Ginny put down the book and looked back at Hermione with a hardened expression.

“There’s nothing to talk about,” she said.

“Sure there is.”

“What do you want from me? To ease your guilt about making a fool out of me?”

Hermione nodded reluctantly. “Yes, I suppose, but I’ve also been worried about you; I know how hard this must be for you.”

Ginny laughed. It sounded hollow and cold. “You’re such a liar! Gods, I can’t even tell when you’re telling the truth. You don’t care if I’m all right; you never did!”

“Ginny, lower your voice; let’s go upstairs and talk in private,” Hermione said, glancing up at the few people scattered throughout the room.

“Oh, you want me to lower my voice?” Ginny asked shrilly. “Don’t want any more attention, do you?”

Those who were in the room were now openly staring at them.

“What? You want me to be careful and protect your feelings? The way you protected mine when you told me that—” Ginny paused and Hermione held her breath, waiting for her to spill out the rest and provide new gossip for the nosy eyes watching them.

Ginny looked around to see who was watching them and huffed in frustration. “C’mon on, then,” she said rising quickly to head for the stairs.

Once they were upstairs, Hermione closed the door and cast a Silencing Charm. Ginny didn’t waste any time laying into her.

“Hermione, you told me that you didn’t find Harry attractive. That he and Ron were teaching you how to fly. That you didn’t know, if he liked me or not. You lied to my face, over and over again. How could you do that?”

Hermione took a cautious step forward. “Ginny, I really value our friendship, so I suppose I was scared you wouldn’t understand and you’d judge me for it. I just didn’t know how to tell you without hurting your feelings.”

Ginny rolled her eyes. “And this doesn’t? You being honest would have hurt a lot less!”

“Well, since you really want me to be honest, I know you didn’t find out through the gossip that’s been going around. I know you followed us to Classroom Eleven,” Hermione said, folding her arms over her chest.


“Harry and I both knew.”

“And you went on with it anyway?” Ginny asked in exasperation. “Doing what you did, knowing I
“Well, we didn’t think you would stay once you found out! But, apparently you did. Tell me, did you and Draco enjoy the show?” Hermione asked, raising one eyebrow.

Ginny blushed but if she was ashamed, it didn’t temper her anger. “That was foul! You’d rather me catch you screwing Harry than to come out and tell me?”

“Why were you following us?”

“Because you three have all been acting funny since the summer; I knew something fishy was going on!”

“It’s still wrong to spy on people!” Hermione insisted.

“And that was your way of teaching me a lesson, I suppose. To humiliate me?”

Hermione sighed. “I was angry at you; it was a rash and foolish thing to do. I’m sorry. I was just so tired of it all: the hiding, and the lying. I guess I just wanted to be done with it.”

Ginny shook her head. “It was bloody awful! Listening to you guys doing… that. Do you know how it made me feel?”

“No, I don’t, but apparently Draco helped you get through it all right,” Hermione said with a smirk.

“That’s not funny,” Ginny said, scowling.

Hermione nodded. “Ginny, nobody knows how serious this is more than I do. That’s why I wanted to talk to you; I was hoping we could try t—”

“Try to what? What do you want me to say? Now that you’ve apologised everything goes back to normal?”

“No, I didn’t think that. I just wanted to start trying to work through it; I really do miss you,” she said sincerely.

“I can’t believe you,” Ginny said, her voice considerably softer. “This whole time you’ve been acting like you’re all about your books and Ron, while you’re shagging him and Harry.”

Hermione hated how disappointed she sounded. She was tired of bearing the weight of the school’s judgment of the trio’s relationship.

“And why aren’t you mad at Ron or Harry?” she demanded.

“I am!” Ginny said defensively. “I’m mad at all of you! But, Harry didn’t know I fancied him unless you told him… did you?”

“No, I swear I never did,” Hermione insisted.

“Right.” Ginny sounded unsure about whether to believe her. “And Ron, well, he’s Ron, but I expected better from you.”

“I’m sorry; I’m not perfect!” Hermione said in exasperation.

“No, you certainly aren’t,” Ginny said giving Hermione an once-over.
“I never was; I wish everyone didn’t put that sort of pressure on me. I never wanted to be.”

“Well, you’ve certainly made that clear, haven’t you?”

“I guess I have, seeing as I’m officially known as the Gryffindor whore now,” Hermione said with resignation.

Ginny’s eyes went sharp. “Don’t you call yourself that!”

“I’m not! I know I have nothing to be ashamed of, but have you seen the stalls in the bathrooms?”

Ginny huffed. “Those tarts have nothing better to do than to spread gossip. You should know that they’re just jealous; they know you’re smarter than the whole lot of them put together, and now you’ve snagged two guys on top of that.”

Hermione’s eyes widened. “That was you!”

“What?”

“You wrote that in my defence on the last bathroom stall by the library!”

Ginny looked away and cursed under her breath. “Yeah, and the stall by the Greenhouse, the Room of Requirement, and the one on the second floor by Charms class.”

Hermione gave Ginny a grateful smile, and leaned over to plant a big kiss on the cheek. “Thank you.”

Ginny pulled back, still frowning. “You’re still a cow.”

Hermione tried her best to look apologetic, but she couldn’t control the smile growing on her face. Ginny’s scowl turned into a reluctant smirk. A fragile tentative silence grew as they both looked for cues about how to move pass the awkwardness.

Finally, Hermione decided to plop down on her bed. She looked up at Ginny and patted the space next to her in invitation. Slowly, Ginny walked over and sat down beside her.

They sat in silence for several moments until Ginny started to fidget, picking at the duvet in a nervous manner, which usually indicated she wanted to talk about something embarrassing.

“So…” Ginny said, her ears starting to turn pink.

Now it was Hermione’s turn to smirk. “So?”

A small, curious smile appeared on Ginny’s face as she continued to stare down at the bed.

“So, what’s it like taking it up the arse? Does it hurt?”

Hermione blushed and put her hands over her face in shame. She had no idea Ginny had stayed long enough to hear her and Harry doing that. But then she remembered something.

“Wait one minute, Ginerva, before I tell you anything, first you have to tell me how Draco got your knickers!”

This time Ginny blushed.

Hermione’s eyes went wide. “Ginny, you didn’t!”
“No, I didn’t!” Ginny insisted. “But, how did you find out about that? Did you catch him?”

“Sort of.”

Ginny gasped and giggled. “Well, serves the git right! Oh rats—does Ron know?” she asked nervously.

“No, he doesn’t,” Hermione said gravely. She knew how dangerous that bit of news could be.

Ginny sighed in relief. “Really, it’s not what you think.”

Hermione levelled a serious stare. “Tell me everything.”

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They talked for a long time and when they finally came downstairs to go to lunch, they both noticed Lavender and her friends sniggering and whispering in the corner.

Hermione paused as she passed Lavender, and then turned around to face the girl brazenly. “Why don’t you whisper a little louder so I can actually hear the crap you’re saying; otherwise, you’re just being a spineless twat.”

Lavender gasped and glanced back at her girlfriends, who looked away shamefully. She rose and gave her clique a head nod, throwing Hermione one last nasty glare before walking away.

“You all right?” Parvati asked from the couch.

“Sure,” Hermione said curtly. Ginny put her hand on Hermione’s shoulder to calm her. Parvati slowly walked over to stand with them. She appeared more sheepish looking than usual. Ginny gave Parvati an encouraging head nod.

“Hermione, I was thinking of having a girls’ night on Thursday, sort of a sendoff before the holidays,” Parvati said.

“In our room? When had you planned on telling me?” Hermione asked bitterly.

“Well I wanted to tell you a few days ago, but I had to make sure everyone there would be all right with it,” Parvati said, looking at Ginny.

“Well, who did you invite?” Hermione asked guardedly.

“Just Padma, Ginny, and Luna. Lavender and her lot will be staying in Ravenclaw for the same sort of thing that night. So are you interested?”

Ginny gave her a tiny smile and immediately Hermione felt at ease with the idea.

“Well, it is my room, too,” she said with a smirk.

“One condition, though,” said Parvati.

Hermione’s brow furrowed as Parvati and Ginny exchanged an amused look.

“You have to give us advice on boys,” Parvati whispered.

“What?”
“Well, none of us have a boyfriend, and it’s the least you could do after stealing two for yourself.”

Ginny tucked her lips in an effort not to snigger. Hermione rolled her eyes, smiling. Parvati smiled back at her in relief.

“Hungry?” Ginny asked.

“Starved.” Hermione beamed.

Ginny wrapped her arm around Hermione’s arm, leading her out with Parvati by their side, towards the Great Hall.

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After eating lunch for the first time in a long time with the girls, Hermione headed towards Snape’s office to discuss the prophecy.

She had been wrestling with the various consequences of going through with it, and had finally decided that she couldn’t not at least try to give it a chance, especially if it meant that a war could be prevented and that lives could be saved.

When she arrived at his office, however, she was practically trembling with the realisation of the weight of her decision and knocked on Snape’s door much harder than necessary.

“Come in,” he said.

She inched her way into the door as if it were cursed. Snape was sitting in his chair, reclined all the way back with a drink in his hand. It was odd sight to see him drinking, especially so early in the day while classes were still in session, but then again, so many things were odd lately.

“Yes?” he asked.

Hermione took a deep breath and told herself to calm down and look at him straight in the eye.

“I’m here to tell you that I intend to go through with it,” she said proudly.

Snape’s face remained impassive as sat up, put his drink down, and clasped his hands on the desk. “Very good, Miss Granger, but is there a reason why you’re telling me this now? I asked you to meet me tomorrow night about this matter.”

“Er—yes, I know. I just thought you might like to know I’ve made up my mind. I’m fully committed to it,” she said.

“I’m overjoyed,” Snape said dryly, causing Hermione’s proud expression to falter.

“And what about the others?” he asked.

“You mean Harry and Ron?”

“Yes, unless you have taken two new lovers I’m not aware of,” he said.

Hermione narrowed her eyes. “Well, I’m not really sure what they intend to do.”

“Well, it really won’t matter then, will it? If you want to do it and they don’t, it won’t work. All four of you have to agree,” he said with doubt in his voice.
“Well, I’m not sure about Harry and Ron, but I’m pretty sure that Draco won’t do it,” she said matter-of-factly.

“Oh? You’re sure of that, are you?” he asked.

“Well, he said as much!” she said defensively.

“Did he really?” Snape asked, his eyes boring into her.

“Well, he might as well have,” Hermione said, folding her arms over her chest as she recalled their spat in the library.

“Don’t be so quick to assume, Miss Granger; as they say, actions speak louder than words.”

Hermione pursed her lips.

“That leaves Mr Weasley and Mr Potter; it’s been over a week and you haven’t spoken to them about it?”

“Well, no, we’ve been sort of preoccupied with other things, and it’s not the easiest subject to broach, is it?”

“You mean to tell me that you have no problem appearing naked in front of each other and exchanging bodily fluids, but you’re uncomfortable with talking about it? Perhaps it’s time to reconsider if you are mature enough to be involved in such a relationship,” he said.

“I have no problem with talking about it! As a matter of fact, we will discuss it this afternoon,” she said determinedly.

“Good,” Snape said, seeming satisfied with himself.

Hermione exhaled loudly, rising out of her seat, and turned to leave.

“Miss Granger.”

“Yes?” Hermione stopped with her hand on the doorknob and her back turned to him.

“Good luck,” he said with a smile in his voice.

Hermione turned to give Snape a strange look and left to find Harry and Ron.

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In another part of the castle, Harry and Ron were walking up to their dormitory room. They weren’t surprised to see Seamus excuse himself, followed by a seemingly reluctant Dean. Neville smiled and asked them how they had been doing, and after a brief period of small talk, he left awkwardly as if to give them privacy.

They had both received notes from Snape that morning about the meeting about the prophecy, and now they each sat on their beds, staring at the ceiling.

“So, what do you think of it?” Harry finally asked.

“I think it’s mad, that’s what I think,” Ron said.

“What if it’s true?” Harry asked cautiously, trying not to press too hard.
“You’re seriously considering it, then?” Ron asked.

“You aren’t?”

“I’m trying not to think about it, to be honest.”

“I don’t know how you can do that. What if we have a chance to put an end to all of this?” Harry asked with hope in his voice.

“By shagging, Harry?” Ron asked, sitting up to look at Harry.

“You keep saying that, but sexual magic is one of the oldest forms of magic. I’ve been combing through all of our History books, and there’s hardly anything on it, but I did find it listed briefly in a few. Apparently it’s pretty powerful stuff, and it’s also rarely used; we’d be one of the few people to pull it off,” he said, letting some of his excitement show.

“Yeah, but how does it work exactly? And who usually uses it?” Ron asked suspiciously.

“I don’t know, Ron; I told you, I couldn’t find much. But, I bet you anything it’s because it’s hard to find people who can form the bond necessary to make it work.”

“Exactly! And you really think we can form one with Malfoy?”

Harry shrugged.

“Or, maybe people don’t use it because it’s mental. It sounds like Dark magic if you ask me.”

“Well, not totally, “Harry said softly.

“What do you mean? Magic is either dark or light,” Ron said firmly.

“Ron, do you really believe that?”

“Yeah, I do. As long as my dad has been working in the Ministry, he says he’s never seen Dark magic put to good use, despite what some wizards may say. And I think he’s right; it can’t be used for anything good.”

“I’m not sure what to believe. Good magic can be used in bad ways too,” Harry said sceptically.

Ron shook his head as if Harry were uninformed.

They heard footsteps approaching and immediately turned their conversation to something more mundane, discussing the plays that they wanted to use in the next Quidditch match. They dropped the pretence when they heard a knock on the wall and Hermione’s voice.

“Harry? Ron? Can I come in?”

“Yeah, it’s just us, Hermione,” Harry said.

“Hi,” she said, smiling at both of them as she came through the door.

“Hey,” they both said in unison, smiling back at her.

“Want to take a walk?” she asked.

“It’s awfully cold,” Ron said.
“I know, but I was thinking we could go somewhere more private?”

“Like? You know people are watching us now; it’s not like we can go to the Room of Requirement or an empty classroom.”

“Well, no one goes the Shrieking Shack,” she said with a mischievous smile.

“You forget, I can’t go to Hogsmeade,” Ron said as if it hurt.

Hermione grinned at Harry who shook his head and smiled before bending over and reaching under his mattress to pull out his Invisibility Cloak.

“I love you guys,” Ron said putting his hand over his heart and smiling back at both of them.

Once they made it upstairs to the parlour of the shack, they closed the door behind them despite the fact that no one would dare come within a hundred yards of the place.

“I think we need to talk about the prophecy,” Hermione said, looking at Ron anxiously. Harry nodded his head in agreement.

“Oh, great; not you, too?” Ron said tensing.

“Ron, please, you have to at least consider it,” Hermione said, putting her hands around his neck.

Ron shook his head. “No, I don’t want him going near you, or Harry… none of us.”

“You know, I don’t really even believe that you really mean that,” Harry said with a small smile.

“And why don’t I?” Ron asked, giving Harry a threatening stare.

“You’re not even a little curious, Ron?” Harry pressed, now smirking.

“Harry!” Ron said as if the suggestion had been crass.

“Are you?” Hermione asked.

“NO! But I can see that the two of you can’t wait to jump in the sack with him!”

“What are you afraid of, Ronald? You think he’s going to steal me and Harry from you?”

“Well you both did call him gorgeous. And it’s hard enough with the three of us. It’s just… too much! Someone is going to end up with the short end of the stick, and if I had to wager who it would be, it’d probably be me.”

“You always say that about everything,” Harry said, amused.

“Because it’s true, isn’t it?” Ron said, irritated at Harry’s amusement.

“Ron, you’re being silly. You get your fair share!” Hermione said, removing her arms from around his neck and putting them on her hips.

“I would have to disagree,” Ron said stubbornly.

“What if we made sure that you got yours first; would that make you feel better?” Harry asked, reaching up to run his hands through Ron’s hair.
Ron shivered and then pulled back. “I’m not a sucker for bribes, Harry; that’s not going to work.”

Harry moved in closer and leaned in, brushing his lips along Ron’s earlobe before whispering, “You sure about that, mate?”

“Damn it, Harry, stop it!” he said, pushing Harry back. “This is serious. Are you guys really ready to shag Draco Malfoy, son of Lucius Malfoy, junior Death Eater in training, the Slytherin Prat? He’s been a nightmare to us all, and now I’m supposed to keep a hard on while he’s fucking both of you?”

“Who says he’s going to be fucking me?” Harry asked as if insulted.

Ron shot Harry an eye roll at that. “Well, he’s certainly not going to be buggering me, I know that!”

“Well, I don’t know about him keeping you hard, but I can manage that,” Hermione said running her hand over his chest.

“You’re really all right with this?” Ron asked looking down at her seriously.

“I don’t know, Ron, but I know that if I don’t at least try, it’s going to haunt me. Lives could be at stake,” she said, looking up at him.

Ron took a gulp and looked away. “Well, what’s this business about falling in love; you actually think that could happen?”

“Well, I was thinking about that. Besides being generally dodgy, prophecies aren’t usually meant to be taken literally, and they can be easily misinterpreted, which makes them even dodgier if you ask me,” she said.

Ron and Harry gave her an impatient look.

“Oh, alright, so, I was thinking that perhaps that the type of love the prophecy describes may actually refer to lust. In Greek there’s even a name for that kind of love- Eros. It can easily be seen as a darker form love.”

“Yeah, along with obsession and who knows what else. It’s all Dark magic if you ask me, and I’m not sure we should be fooling with it,” Ron said as if he was making one last plea.

Harry and Hermione didn’t reply, but stared back at him.

Ron rolled his eyes. “Well, I guess lust does sound a right bit better than love. I can’t imagine having to kiss that prat, let alone fall in love with him.”

Harry and Hermione were now both smiling at him.

“What?” he asked.

“So, we’re going to do it, then?” Harry asked.

“Maybe, let’s make some rules first,” Ron said.

“Ron! Making rules is silly; who knows what will happen when we all come together,” Hermione said, not quite able to mask her excitement.

Harry sniggered at her, while Ron frowned in disapproval.
“I need both of you to promise me something,” Ron said looking between them.

“What is it?” Harry asked.

“That nothing will change.”

“Sure Ron,” Harry said, draping an arm around Ron’s shoulder.
Hermione walked up to Ron and gave him a kiss on the cheek. “Nothing will change Ron; you’ll always have us.”

Ron nodded slowly. “Mione, what if he’s some sort of pervert,” Ron said looking at her with concern.

“I don’t suspect he’s the only one,” Hermione said with one eyebrow raised.

Ron smirked. “Well, I don’t know about me, but you definitely are.”

Instead of making her laugh, Hermione’s expression sobered considerably.

“I’m sorry,” Ron said uneasily.

“No, it’s not you; it’s just that I’m feeling a bit like a freak lately,” she said.

Harry put his other arm around her, pulling them both into a tight circle. “Hermione, if you don’t want to do this, just tell us; we don’t have to do it. I don’t know if we should trust Snape anyway.”

Hermione shook her head. “No, no, I want to; I do. But before we do this, and things get really weird, can we do something normal for a change?”

“You want to make love?” Harry asked softly.

“Yes,” she said with a small smile.

Harry pulled Hermione and Ron in even closer, tightening their circle until they were practically kissing. When he pulled back, he slid his hand from around Hermione’s shoulder, tracing his fingers along her neck. She shivered as he gently lifted her chin up so that he could look into her eyes. Hermione licked her lips and Harry moved in quickly to kiss her, taking his time, softly tasting her lips before parting them to caress her tongue with his own.

Hermione felt Ron moving in behind her, holding her hair up so that he could trail kisses along her neck while his other hand brushed down her back.

Harry’s kiss lingered, kissing her slow and deep. Hermione reached up to run her hands through his messy black hair, pulling him further as she reached back with her other hand to feel for Ron.

Her hand slid from Harry’s hair to his shoulder as they all began to stagger back towards the wall together. When Ron’s back finally collided against the hard surface, he pushed his hips and erection against Hermione. Harry pushed back with his body, revealing his own arousal. Hermione let out a moan at the sensation of being sandwiched between them, and began to claw at Harry’s shirt.

They ground against each other for several minutes and when Harry finally broke the kiss, he and Hermione were quite out of breath and aroused. Ron reached around Hermione’s waist, pulling her shirt out of her denims. Harry began unbuttoning her shirt while Ron moved on to her denims, unbuttoning the top and tugging down on the waist.
Hermione sniggered. “I think you’ll need my help for the rest,” she said, pushing off of Ron. She pulled her denims and knickers down unceremoniously, stepped of them, and pulled her top over her head.

Ron tried unsuccessfully to unclasp her bra, swearing under his breath until Hermione giggled and reached around and did it for him. She threw it across the room and stepped out from between the two of them.

“Now undress each other,” she ordered.

Harry leaned in and gave Ron a hungry kiss as he fumbled with the button on his trousers. Finally, he managed to unzip Ron and quickly reached in to stroke his cock. Ron moaned appreciatively as his hands slid under Harry’s shirt and over his chest. He paused only to pinch Harry’s nipples and then he completely pulled the shirt off of his best mate.

Harry resumed stroking Ron’s cock as Ron pulled his own shirt over his head, breathing heavy as he looked at Harry’s bare chest. He thrust his hips forward to increase the friction of Harry’s hand on his cock.

Hermione smiled at Harry’s flushed complexion and prominent erection. She watched as he licked his lips and fell to his knees to pull Ron’s cock out so that he could run his tongue along its length. Ron let his head fall back against the wall until he heard Hermione coughing.

The both stopped and looked at her.

“Guys, I’m over here,” she said, her arms crossed.

“Right,” Harry said, trying to regain his composure, getting up off of his knees and then taking off his trousers. Ron also stepped out his trousers and they both stood looking at her as if waiting for her instruction. Hermione shook her head and smiled.

“Do I have to do everything?” she said, Summoning over the massive seat pillows off the couches around the room, creating a makeshift mattress on the floor.

“Brilliant,” Ron whispered as he walked over to pick her up and gently laid her down on it. He held himself over her with both arms before settling down between her legs and resuming kissing along her neck.

He began to run his hand over one of her breasts, lightly touching and pinching a nipple, causing her to sigh. She felt Harry lie down next to her, slipping a hand over her other breast as he nuzzled against the other side of her neck.

She moaned softly as their hands continued to caress her breasts. Ron’s hand slid down to her stomach to her very wet centre and lingered there, stroking her folds for several minutes before pushing a finger slowly into her. She moved her hips up to push his finger in deeper. He added another finger and curled them both inside of her, causing her shiver and clench herself around him before he removed them. She whimpered at the loss and looked up at him frowning only to see him smiling at her need.

“Git,” she hissed.

Ron smiled up at Harry who smirked before continuing to kiss her neck. Ron settled back down and shifted up to push his erection against her opening, prompting Hermione to spread her legs wider, urging him in. He held himself steady, pushing into her slowly until he was completely encased in her. He watched her face as he began to pull out slowly before pushing back into her carefully,
trying to give Harry room to continue to caress her breasts while kissing her.

Harry slid his tongue up from her neck and took her mouth again with one eye open, watching Ron as he made love to her.

“How do you want to do this exactly?” Ron asked suddenly stilling, looking at both of them.

“What do you mean?” Hermione asked.

“You want us to take turns?” Ron asked looking down at her. Hermione shrugged.

“Let’s try it, then,” Harry said, sounding excited.

“All right, give me a few more minutes,” Ron groaned, moving inside of her again.

Ron set a feverish pace, thrusting more aggressively than before. Hermione met his thrusts with her own, wrapping both of her legs around him while Harry moved up above her to lie on his stomach so that he could continue to kiss her, facing her upside down on the mattress. She moaned in his mouth and seemed close to climaxing when Ron grunted and quickly pulled out of her as if to stop himself before he was too far gone.

Hermione groaned in frustration, glaring up at Ron, but her irritation was quickly forgotten as Harry lay down to settle between her legs. She threw her hands around Harry’s neck, urging him in deeper. Ron rose to where Harry had been and leaned over her to kiss her.

Harry moved slowly and deliberately, treating each move forward carefully as if he wanted to savour every minute. Hermione wrapped her legs around his back and reached up to grab Ron by his hair, wrapping her tongue around his as she moaned into his mouth.

Harry’s lips brushed along her neck until his lips were nipping her ear.

“I love you, Hermione,” he whispered.

“I love you, too, Hermione” Ron whispered against her lips.

“I know, Ron, I love you, too,” she said, smiling up at him before turning her face up to smiling up at him before turning her face towards Harry, stroking his back.

“And I love you, too, Harry.”

Ron looked up at Harry, smiling. “I love you, too, Harry,” he said, being purposefully over dramatic.

Harry suppressed a snigger and managed to say “I love you, too, Ron,” before breaking out into full giggles, prompting the other two to burst into laughter.

“Great, now that we all know how much we love each other, can we get back to shagging?” Ron said, still chuckling.

“You’re so romantic, Ronald,” Hermione said in amusement.

“Hey, at least I’m trying,” he said with a grin.

Harry shook his head at Ron and leaned down to kiss Hermione languidly as he pulled out and fell onto his back.

Ron moved back down and slipped back inside of her.
Harry took Hermione’s hand in his as he watched her and Ron. Ron increased his pace and then stopped completely.

“Why’d ya stop?” Harry asked looking up at him.

“Got another idea,” Ron said.

Both Harry and Hermione looked at him expectantly. Ron leaned down to kiss Hermione, entering her again. She gasped in shock as he pulled her leg up, wrapping it around him and rolled them both onto their sides with Hermione’s back to Harry.

Harry looked at him in puzzlement until he felt Ron reaching over Hermione and tugging on his cock, urging him closer. Ron sucked two fingers into his mouth and then slipped them into Hermione’s back opening, causing her to tense up.

“Relax,” he said, pulling out of her slightly before sliding into her again.

Hermione nodded as Ron began to work his fingers in and out of her arsehole while he continued to push himself into her gently. Once she relaxed considerably, he pulled his fingers out and grabbed Harry’s cock, placing it at the entrance.

Harry shook his head and reached for his wand, whispering the lubrication spell. Hermione let out a low moan once Harry began to press into her, pushing her body into Ron, who was already completely inside of her. Ron pushed forward, pressing her against Harry’s chest. She had trouble closing her mouth and catching her breath as she could feel the both of them moving inside her separated by only a thin wall of skin.

“How do you like that, ‘Mione?” Ron whispered.

Hermione nodded, finding it hard to speak.

“Tell us that you’re ours,” he said, staring at her.

“You know that I am,” Hermione said, looking at him, her head dizzy from the feeling of both of them inside of her and the possessiveness in his voice.

Ron squeezed her hip harder as he pulled out and pushed his full length into her roughly.

“Aaah,” Hermione gasped, her eyes widening as she stared back into Ron’s.


“No matter what… ahhh, I’m yours, all yours.”

“Look at me,” he said, pulling out a little, studying her face.

Hermione let out a soft moan as she tried to open her eyes fully to stare back into Ron’s.

“You’re so beautiful,” Ron whispered as he drove his entire length into her again.

Hermione cried out, gripping Ron’s shoulder harder.

Harry watched Ron as he began to thrust into her, and he slowed down his own movement within her as if to temper Ron’s urgency and forcefulness with tenderness. He pressed his mouth to her shoulder and caressed her arm as he moved slowly inside of her.
“You alright? Hermione?” Harry murmured against her skin.

“Uggh, y-yes,” she stuttered as Ron pushed her back onto Harry once again.

“Keep your eyes on me, ‘Mione,” Ron said.

Hermione began to whimper as she tried to focus her sight through hooded eyes, feeling overwhelmed and light-headed.

“I love you,” he said breathlessly, increasing his pace while gripping her hip and pulling her forward, opening her up more for Harry to move. Harry could feel Ron’s cock rubbing against his inside of her, and it only aroused him more. He began to roll his hips so that he could feel his cock meeting Ron’s inside of her. He pushed deeper, causing Hermione to tense and cry out again as her climax washed over her.

Ron and Harry began to move in tandem inside of her, reaching for their own climax. Hermione was moaning incoherently and gripping Ron’s shoulder while Harry buried his head into the nape of her neck, grunting into her ear. She yelped when Ron gave one last hard thrust before shattering inside of her.

They both lay still as Harry continued towards his release. Hermione reached with her hand to stroke Harry’s hair, and when her hands grazed the spot on his neck below his ear, he groaned as he exploded inside of her. He let his head fall on her shoulder and then rolled over onto his back, panting.

“Well, that was an interesting way to make love,” Hermione said looking at Ron curiously.

Ron smiled back at her. “Well, you can’t say we didn’t try.”

“We’ll just have to practice ‘til we get it right,” Harry said with a smirk.

“Sounds good to me,” Hermione said, smiling up at the ceiling.

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It was Tuesday night and they were all gathered in Snape’s office, everyone except for Draco. They sat in tense silence, waiting. After fifteen minutes had passed, Ron finally broke the silence.

“I don’t think he’s coming,” Ron said with a glimmer of hope in his voice.

Hermione gripped the arm of the seat, looking at Snape, who seemed to be deep in thought.

“Well, are you sure we need him?” Harry asked.

Snape didn’t answer, only stared at the door.

“Well, we can’t wait here all night,” Ron said, rising. Snape let a groan escape him before closing his eyes in disappointment. Hermione, also disappointed, looked at Snape before rising and following Ron to the door.

As soon as Ron reached for the doorknob, the door hit him in the arm.

“Ouch!”

“Well, what do you expect if you stand in front of a door, Weasley?” Draco asked in irritation.
“I was just leaving!” Ron said angrily.

Recalling what had Ginny told her about her encounter with Draco; Hermione couldn’t help but give Draco a look of distaste before turning to look back at Snape. Draco gave her curious look when he noticed that Ron was studying him closely.

“Surprised you came,” Ron said as if disappointed that Draco had actually shown up while rubbing his arm.

Draco rolled his eyes, moving past him to take a seat.

“So you’re going to do it, then?” Hermione asked, looking down at him.

“I’m here, aren’t I?” he said glancing up at her and then at Snape.

“Is that a yes?” Snape asked looking at Draco.

“Yes,” he said through gritted teeth.

Snape tried to mask a sigh of relief, looking back at him.

Ron and Hermione slowly sat back down while Harry moved forward in his seat with the alertness of someone learning a new spell.

“So, how are we going to do this exactly?” he asked.

“What does the ritual require? It is a ritual, isn’t it?” Hermione asked.

“Yes, there does appear to be a ritual,” Snape replied.

“Well, what is it?” Harry asked.

“Not so fast; this ritual is to be done by witches and wizards who already have a bond, otherwise it’s useless.”

“What do you mean? I thought the bond was sexual,” Draco said.

“It is, but you can’t very well establish a sexual bond during the ritual. It requires a well-established bond,” Snape explained.

“Wait a minute! Are you saying we have to have sex with him more than once?” Ron said in shock.

“Brilliant deduction, Mr Weasley; I forgot what a quick thinker you are.”

“Well, how many times?” Ron asked.

“As many times as it takes to establish some sort of magical bond that will be useful for the ritual,” Snape replied.

“That could take forever with him involved!”

“I doubt that, Weasley, you might find you’ll have more difficulty staying away,” Draco said, winking at Hermione and grinning at Harry.

Harry shuddered, his cheeks turning red as he made a visible effort to pull his eyes away from Draco’s. Hermione unconsciously bit her lip before remembering that Ron was sitting next her. She
shook her head and forced herself to stop staring at Draco and then nervously glanced up at Ron to
 gauge his reaction.

Ron’s eyes were narrowed as he appraised both Harry and Hermione. He turned to scowl at Draco
who gave him a cheeky smile in return, as if he had proven his point.

“How are we even going to—er, work on this? We’re about to go home for the holidays and the
whole school is already watching everything we do,” Harry asked Snape.

“Yes, I realise that, which is why I’ve taken the liberty of crafting notices to all of your parents,
informing them that you will be returning from your holiday break a week early to do independent
study with me. Potter, I believe you were planning to stay with the Weasleys, so there should be no
problem with that.”

Draco wrinkled his forehead as if he were considering a problem with Snape’s plan, but Snape shot
him a look to communicate that he would talk to him about his circumstance later. Draco nodded
slightly to show he understood.

Harry noticed the exchange between the two, but decided not to say anything; instead, he studied
Snape’s face more closely.

“Hold on, you want us to cut our holiday break short so that we can spend an entire week
shagging?” Ron asked dumbfounded.

“Five points for Gryffindor,” Snape said snidely.

“Here?” Harry asked in disbelief.

“No, Spinner’s End.”

“Your house?” Draco asked, his face uncharacteristically shocked.

Snape gave them all a look of nauseated irritation as if the idea having them in his home had just
sunk in.

He nodded and waited for another round of questions, but they all sat staring at him and each other in
disbelief.

Snape stood up and walked to the centre of the room.

“Stand up, and come here, all of you.”

They all hesitantly rose from their seats and formed a circle around Snape, looking up at him
fearfully. He took out his wand and told them to hold hands.

“No way! You’re not going to do an Unbreakable?!” Ron said, looking at Snape like he was mental.

“No, Mr Weasley, not quite, something a bit lighter but almost as effective, now hold hands.”

Draco grimaced as he grabbed Ron’s hand, but his face softened when Hermione slipped her hand
into his, causing Ron to narrow his eyes again. Harry yanked on Ron’s hand as if to tell him to cool
it as he grabbed Hermione’s other hand.

“Do you swear, on your life, to keep this prophecy a secret?”

“I swear,” Hermione said, looking around the circle, waiting for the others to join. Harry, Ron, and
Draco all looked at each other wearily before saying “I swear,” under their breaths.

Snape continued. “Do you swear to the best of your ability to work towards the fruition of this prophecy?”

This time they all answered together. “I swear.”

“And if you do not fulfil this vow, there will be severe consequences.”

“Such as?” Harry asked narrowing his eyes at Snape.

“I suppose you’ll have to venture going back on your word and see for yourself, Mr Potter,” Snape said. Harry glared back at him and looked around at the others.

“Not so fast; you don’t honestly expect us to agree to a vow without knowing what the consequences of not following through with it will mean?” Hermione asked, looking at him sternly.

Snape seemed to making quite an effort not to snarl at her.

“Let’s just say, not trying to the best of your ability to keep your word will prove to be quite uncomfortable and embarrassing,” he said.

They all looked around at each other; Hermione gave Snape an appraising stare, but didn’t question him further.

Everyone seemed to accept the terms

“Well, then you, Hermione Granger, Harry Potter, Ronald Weasley, and Draco Malfoy are bound by promise and duty to work together to ensure that the prophecy is fulfilled,” he said before grazing all of their hands with his wand and muttering something incoherently under his breath.

A strange blue glow formed over their joined hands and blue sparks shot out of Snape’s wand, causing them all to stare transfixed on it until it glowed white and then died out completely.

And although they no longer needed to hold hands, several moments passed until finally they dropped their grasps with each other and stood looking around, not sure of what to say next.

“Well, um, I guess we’ll see you soon,” Harry said looking at Draco as if he wanted to leave right away.

“Yeah,” Draco said with a blank expression.

The trio left, leaving Draco alone with Snape.

“How are you going to pull this off? And what about my parents? How is this going to work? What if he finds out and decides to punish them for it?” Draco asked looking at him with worry.

“I’m going to tell him you’ve succeeded in gaining their trust, and may have a lead that he’d be interested in, and it would sabotage everything if you were to take the Mark at this point. He doesn’t need to know how you’re involved with them; just that you are.”

“You think he’ll buy it?”

“Yes, unless you do something to screw it up,” he said, looking down at Draco.

Draco nodded to show he understood what was at stake and then turned to leave.
When he left, he walked around, trying to avoid going back to his common room. He went out onto the Astronomy Tower, letting the cold evening air hit him and looked down to see the trio heading out toward the frozen lake. He went back to his common room and quickly grabbed his cloak, heading out to where they were sitting.

When he reached them, they were sitting bundled together and laughing amongst themselves. They paused when they saw him, staring at him, waiting for him to say something. When he didn’t and took a seat beside Harry, they all shifted awkwardly and sat in tense silence, sneaking glances up at him.

“You didn’t have to follow us out here,” Ron said.

“I know,” Draco said.

“You’re friends won’t think much of you sitting with us out here in the open,” Harry said, watching Draco.

Draco shrugged. “I don’t really have any friends.”

They all stared up at him, taken aback by his candour. Hermione glanced up at Harry and Ron to see if they were about to take advantage of what he just said and say something cruel.

When she saw that they weren’t, she relaxed and looked at Draco with concern. “You’ve always had plenty of friends, Draco.”

“No, but there are plenty who like to call themselves that,” he said with fatigue.

Harry smirked and nodded knowingly, “People who think they know you, but don’t care to really get to know you,” he said, looking up at Draco.

Draco glanced up at Harry. “Something like that.”

Hermione couldn’t help but look at Draco with pity, while Ron studied him before clearing his throat.

“You know, Malfoy, you have to be a friend first to have friends,” he said.

A small smile played on Draco’s lips as he wrinkled his forehead. “Thanks, Weasley, just what I need, life lessons from someone who can’t Transfigure a feather into a spoon.”

Harry sniggered while Ron scowled and nestled closer to Hermione, who was trying to hide her smile at Draco’s comment.

“So, Snape put you up to trying to get to know us this year?” Harry asked, looking at Draco.

Draco didn’t reply; instead, he sat looking sombrely out across the frozen lake.

None them attempted to say anything else; they all sat in silence for the next hour, each deep in their own thoughts.

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Dumbledore bit down on his pipe, and instead of taking a puff, he chewed on the wood.

Something was wrong.
Now that the trio’s relationship was public, he had made sure that he addressed the concerns of the professors by holding two staff meetings about it. He found that he had to deal delicately with a very disturbed McGonagall and an embarrassed Hagrid, assuring both of them that such relationships were normal and that if there ever were any students who could handle such complexity and scandal; it was Harry, Hermione, and Ron. And although Dumbledore had acted as if it were nothing of any significance, he had to hide his revulsion at having to pretend that he felt the relationship was all right.

But, over the past few weeks, since he had given Snape permission to allow Draco to pursue his assignment, he had seen hardly anything materialise from it.

Of course, there was that peculiar interaction between Draco and Hermione, which led them to leaving the castle to a place in the Forest where Dumbledore’s eyes could not follow, but only a few days later he had witnessed Hermione running out of the library and Draco leaving a short time later looking quite angry.

He couldn’t help but to be pleased when he had seen that.

But it had only been a little over a week that he had observed Harry and Hermione coming back to join Ron for another one of their three-way trysts, only this time they had two observers, which had proved to be quite entertaining in itself.

But then Snape had appeared and the four of them had simply vanished from his surveillance. Dumbledore was not sure where they had gone, but they were out of his range of view for far too long.

And then there was the little incident of Draco’s housemates vandalising his bed and ignoring him, but that had only last for a few days and now things were back to normal.

Ever since Goyle had revealed that he had taken the Dark Mark to Draco, the House’s treatment of the youngest Malfoy had been even more respectful than ever.

Dumbledore hadn’t been surprised about Goyle taking the Mark; that was to be expected, he was a Slytherin after all. But, he had been surprised to see a look of fear on Draco’s face when Goyle had left the room.

And then there was the fact that Dumbledore no longer could see anything on the dungeon level where Snape’s classroom was located.

Snape was up to something.

Not that Dumbledore was surprised, the Head of Slytherin House was not to be trusted, and he had never intended to fully place any trust in the Potions professor.

Dumbledore hummed to himself as he noticed for the second time that term, Peter Pettigrew coming into his sight within the bewitched picture of the Forbidden Forest he kept mounted between two former Headmasters’ portraits behind his desk.

The man was the living image of a human rat, crouched down and scurrying about by the Forest’s edge, in wait or just watching perhaps. And once again, instead of calling Aurors or alerting professors of the man’s presence, he kept the knowledge of it to himself.

Removing the pipe from his mouth, Dumbledore let out a long sigh of resignation, deciding that he would watch and wait, like he always did, to see what Peter was up to.
PART II
Six Days to Eternity

“Everything in the world is about sex except sex. Sex is about power.”
— Oscar Wilde

Don’t check me!
It was your girl who let me
Take it this far then, ooh-ween
She had to have it every chance that she could get...
You can get mad if you want to
Say whatever you want
But she’s still going to give it up...

She likes it my way... my way,
You can’t satisfy her needs
She keeps running back to see me do it
My way... my way,
What I say goes—and I’m in control.

– “My Way” by Usher

By the end of the first week of Christmas break, Hermione had grown increasingly anxious about the coming days at Spinner’s End. It didn’t go unnoticed by her parents, who were already concerned that their daughter was too involved in her schoolwork and had volunteered to do extra work at the expense of rare family time. She had reassured them that the assignment was necessary for her to do well on her N.E.W.T.s the following year, which she had already explained to them were important for her future career goals. As usual, they placed full confidence in their daughter and put their worries aside, focusing instead on enjoying her brief stay.

Ron and Harry on the other hand encountered an on-going battery of questions about why they would sign up for independent study with Snape of all professors. Molly Weasley was worried about Harry in particular, knowing that his past experiences with the Professor were anything but pleasant. Mr. Weasley thought it was a rather odd request and remained suspicious, although he had to agree reluctantly with his wife that it was good to see Ron finally taking some initiative in his studies.

For Draco, the holidays were a bittersweet occasion: on one hand he had the opportunity to see his mother and father and return to his old bedroom, catching up on some much-needed sleep that he could no longer get at Hogwarts.

But he also felt more pressure than ever now that Snape had informed the Dark Lord that he had a lead about the trio. He had been instructed to keep the knowledge of the lead vague and uninformed, which was no problem since there was no lead.

Snape was always present whenever Draco was in the presence of the Dark Lord. Although he had
been pleased to find the boy had been trained in some rudimentary Occlumency skills, Snape wanted to prevent any need for Draco to use them.

He made a credible alibi for Draco, convincing the Dark Lord that Dumbledore himself had given the four permission to stay over and would receive special privileges for constructing a formal training programme that modelled after Harry’s teachings for Dumbledore’s Army.

As the days passed and the time to take leave of the Manor drew closer, Draco’s fear about his decision grew. There was the possibility that he would fail, that the prophecy had been misinterpreted, as prophecies often were, or that it really was as woolly as Hermione had initially said.

He found that he was less concerned about himself and much more about the implications of his decision on his parents. Whether the prophecy was successful or not, there would be a period of planning and waiting where he would be expected to produce something, anything, to show that he was still useful and loyal to his original assignment and the Dark Lord.

If he failed or raised suspicion that he was disloyal, he knew that not only would he be disciplined or killed, but his parents would be at risk as well. And although a part of him wanted his father to pay for putting them all in this situation, he loved the man too much to ever really want to see him suffer significantly.

So it came of no comfort to him when his father actually smiled openly at him for the first time since his second year, just before he had entered his first Quidditch match against Gryffindor.

“I’m proud of you, Draco,” Lucius said, turning from his conversation with Lestrange to give Draco a rare pat on the back.

Draco managed to force a smile back up at his father and bow his head slightly in acknowledgement before excusing himself to pack to “head back to Hogwarts” to hang out with the trio.

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The Sunday after Christmas, Harry and Ron sat waiting at the train station for Hermione. When she finally arrived, she and her parents spend some time saying her goodbyes. After the Grangers left, the trio stood in awkward silence until Hermione pulled out the directions to Snape’s home.

They rode the train in silence until it dropped them off right outside of Derby at a rundown train station that looked to be in dire need of renovations.

As they approached the address listed, Harry was surprised to see that Snape appeared to live in a Muggle neighbourhood like his own, only the houses here were much shabbier. In fact, there were many homes that had been boarded up or that had broken windows.

They were grateful they had decided to come early in the day because there weren’t many streetlights, and the few that were there appeared to be bent or broken. Each street that brought them closer to his address appeared much the same, giving the entire neighbourhood a spooky, deserted appearance that made them look behind them in apprehension more than once.

“They really need to pay professors better,” Ron remarked. Harry shook his head at the irony of Ron of all people making such a remark about Snape’s salary.

Despite Hermione’s talent for reading maps and figuring out directions, Snape’s hand-written instructions appeared purposefully vague and confusing, and they made a few wrong turns before they finally came to a familiar street name. It was adjacent to the one Snape had indicated was his, so
they made a left, hoping it was the right way.

The tarmac turned into cobblestone, and they finally saw a sign indicating that they were indeed on Spinner’s End. Snape’s home was at the very end of the row. And although it was morning, the street appeared to grow darker and eerier the farther down they walked, and each of them jumped at least once as they walked in complete silence, hearing only their footsteps echoing on the stone beneath their feet.

When they finally came upon the last house, they were shocked at how dark and uninhabited it looked. It was painted dark green, the wood boards had rotted at the bottom, the lights were out, and the screen had a large spider web across the centre as if no one had opened the door in weeks.

“Are you sure this is it?” Harry asked, looking at Hermione.

“Yes, it clearly says that it’s the last house on the row, and this is the very last one,” she said, looking at the dead end that extended past the street.

They knocked and there was no answer. After standing outside the door for about five minutes, Hermione turned the door handle. It was not locked. She looked back at Harry and Ron who shrugged.

Carefully opening the door, they all tiptoed inside, looking around. Once they were over the threshold, they soon discovered that looks could be deceiving. The interior of the home was in stark contrast to the outside. The sitting room in which they stood was small and quaint, decorated with very cosy seats and a very inviting looking couch. The colours, although dark green, were complimented with finished cherry wood. There were no pictures or other wall decorations hanging, but there was a fire going in the hearth, which gave the walls a warm orange glow.

There was an open doorway in the back of the room that appeared to lead to a hallway, and then they noticed that there were two other doors: one inner door that apparently led to the kitchen, and the other was ajar, and what it led to was not apparent.

Hermione began to walk around, fascinated by the rows of books tucked in the oddest of places: besides the backs of the doors, there were also books on the mantle of the fireplace, on the shelves in the kitchen, and stuffed in an overcrowded bookshelf.

Ron plopped down onto the couch, running his hands over the seat while Harry ventured down the hall, marvelling at the depth, since the home appeared to be relatively small from the outside.

“Goes pretty far back,” Harry said.

“Does he have a family we don’t know about?” Ron called to Harry.

Harry raised his eyebrows as he came to a door with a bolt lock on it.

He grasped it and began to shake it.

“It’s locked for a reason,” Snape said, startling all of them.

“I’m sorry, we—we saw that the door was open, and—”

“And instead of knocking, you decided to just invite yourselves in?”

“Well, yes.”
Draco came out and stood at the doorway of the room from which Snape had emerged.

“Should we leave you two alone?” Harry said with a smirk.

“You’re one to talk, Potter; I heard you spent quite a bit of time in the dungeons with him last year,” he said with a sneer.

Snape clicked his teeth and moved past them towards the sitting room. Draco glared at Harry briefly and then took a seat on the sofa on other side of the coffee table facing Ron. Hermione sat down next to Ron on the couch, leaving Harry no choice but to take a seat beside Draco on the love seat.

“Now, listen all of you; I’m not in the habit of repeating myself, and I don’t want there to be any misunderstandings while you are here.”

They all looked up at Snape, waiting.

“You will respect my home and each other while you are here,” he said, casting a pointed look at Ron and Harry.

“Here are the rules: First, you may not, and I repeat, may not at any time, enter into my bedroom.”

“Where is that?” Ron asked.

Snape closed his eyes briefly. “Secondly, if you are unsure about whether you should be entering a room or touching something, you probably shouldn’t be. In any case, ask first, or deal with me later.”

“Third, all of your activities will take place downstairs, where there are two bedrooms. I’ve taken the liberty of enlarging the beds to accommodate all of you.”

Draco grimaced.

“How you decide to use those bedrooms is entirely up to you, but I remind you that this is not holiday break; you are here to work on your assignment. Fourth, you’ll find there’s plenty of food here. Meals are on your own. I don’t cook, and I certainly will not be cleaning up after you; therefore, for your free room and board this week, you will make sure that everything stays in the same order and condition in which you found it.”

Ron made a face that said he was thinking of something sarcastic to say, at which Snape glared at him until he dropped his eyes in shame.

“What if someone knows we’re here, or comes over?” Draco asked.

“Not to worry, security wards have been placed on my house, assuring that not only will you have privacy, but there will be no unexpected interruptions. In the meantime, you should remain downstairs as much as possible. If I need to see any of you, I will knock.”

“And where will you be when we’re… doing what we came here to do?” Hermione asked looking at him suspiciously.

“I assure you, Ms. Granger, I have no interest in being around while you work on your assignment; I have several important matters of business to attend to at Hogwarts, so I will be away for most of this week. Now, are there any questions?”

They all shook their heads.

“Very well, then; I’ll leave you to it,” he said, Summoning his cloak and a small bag.
“You’re leaving now?” Harry asked.

“Yes, Potter, is there any reason I should stay?”

“No,” Harry said in confusion.

They all watched as he Apparated away, leaving them sitting uncomfortably in strange silence, trying not to look at each other.

Almost ten minutes went by, and they sat around staring at the floor and the wall, anything but each other, each one sneaking glances at the others only to look back down quickly if caught by another doing the same.

“Well, should we get started?” Draco asked looking around.

“And how do you propose we do that? Just get starkers and start going at it?” Ron asked, looking at him in disgust.

“Hardly, Weasley, unlike you and Potter, I’ve never been with a man like *that* before,” he said in a condescending manner.

Ron scoffed. “That’s not what Zabini said at your party,” he said looking back at Draco smugly.

Draco narrowed his eyes. “I’ve never been with a bloke the way *you* have,” he said with a sneer.

“Well, that’s about to change, isn’t it?”

“All the same, I’d prefer to ease my way into this,” he said, turning his eyes towards Harry.

Harry bit his lip and glanced up at Draco.

Draco smirked. “Perhaps if we just started with a bit of kissing first, it would break the ice,” he said, now blatantly staring at Harry.

Harry tensed, looking back at Draco.

Draco slowly licked his lips and then flashed him an arrogant smile. Harry could feel the heat in his face as he tried not to visibly seem intimidated. But he was.

Kissing Draco was something he had thought about a lot lately, and he was afraid he had built up the moment too much in his mind, and that he would be a disappointment, or worse, he may actually like it and want more.

Draco slid closer to Harry, putting his arm on the back of the sofa behind Harry’s head. Harry shifted and looked up at Ron, who was watching the two of them with the same serious attention that he usually gave a good Quidditch match.

Harry glanced around and leaned back with his best effort to try and relax into the sofa. Draco let his hand almost casually brush the back of Harry’s neck, causing him to shiver.

“Interesting,” he said softly.

“What?” Harry asked, jerking a little.

“The way you react to me touching you, it’s almost like you’ve never been touched by a bloke before… scared Potter?”
“You wish,” Harry said looking back at Draco with what he hoped to be a fearless expression.

Draco smirked and then pressed his hand more firmly to the back of Harry’s neck, sliding his hand up as he went, running his hand through his messy black hair, playing in it as if he had done it many times before.

Harry suppressed the urge to lean into him and instead went rigid.

“Malfoy,” he breathed.

“Yes, Potter?” Draco said as he firmly grabbed a handful of the hair in his hand, pulling Harry closer.

Harry moaned softly when Draco pulled his hair.

“Maybe we should—”

“Shhh,” Draco said, inching closer to Harry’s face.

Harry swallowed and a small sound escaped him as he watched Draco’s lips approaching his slowly—too slow, no, too fast! He wasn’t ready for this!

Harry pulled back and jumped up, breaking free of Draco’s grip so fast that Draco pulled out a few of his hairs as a result.

“I think we should split up!” he declared, both breathing rapidly and trying to catch his breath all at once. “Ron or Hermione, you should pair up with Malfoy first, and then we’ll take it from there.”

“What? Harry, what are you talking about?” Ron asked, confused.

“Actually, that makes a lot of sense. It’s going to be hard enough trying to get comfortable with each other individually, let alone all four of us together. I think it’s an excellent idea,” Hermione said, nodding.

“I’m sure you do,” Ron said giving her an evil look.

“Oh, Ron, don’t worry, you’ll get time alone with Malfoy, too,” Harry quipped.

Ron huffed.

“So if we each break into pairs for the first three days that will leave three days for experimenting with… other arrangements,” she said as if working out a math problem.

“Got it all worked out do you?” Ron said with resentment.

“Do you have a better suggestion?” Harry asked still refusing to take a seat.

“As a matter of fact, I do. How about we call this whole thing off.”

“Too late, I’ve gone through too much shit to get to this point; no one’s leaving now,” Draco said, looking at Ron challengingly.

“We can’t, anyway; we’re bound,” Harry said almost regretfully.

“Fine, but I’m not going with him first,” Ron said crossing his arms, glaring at Draco.
“There is a god,” Draco murmured.

“I’ll go first,” Hermione said, looking at Draco and then back at Ron.

Harry nodded slowly, while Ron set his jaw, staring back and forth between Draco and Hermione.

“All right, then, so for today it’ll be Malfoy and Hermione, and me and Ron. Tomorrow, it’ll be Ron and Malfoy,” Harry said.

“Hey! No fair! Me and Hermione need some time alone together,” Ron said firmly.

“You always have time together, you’re going to have to be with him sooner or later,” Harry said looking at Ron in frustration.

“Well, make it later,” Ron said glancing at Draco.

“Fine!” Harry said, tired of dealing with his tantrum. “So, tomorrow it will be Ron and Hermione, and Malfoy and… me,” he said, his voice cracking. “And then it will be Ron and Malfoy and me and Hermione.”

“And then?” Draco asked with one eyebrow raised, giving Harry a sly smile.

Harry shrugged.

“We all have a big orgy?” Ron asked, looking pale.

“We’ll see. We shouldn’t force anything. It should come naturally; that’s the whole point of us being here,” Hermione said.

“There’s nothing natural about this,” Ron said.

“I agree, but she’s right; it’s no use in planning too far into the week. Let’s just try this rotation and see what comes of it,” Harry said.

“Fine,” Ron said, staring back at Draco.

Hermione stood up and went to the door leading downstairs, and looked back at Draco, who seemed determined to win a staring contest with Ron.

“Draco,” she said.

He smirked, looking at Ron and standing up slowly to follow her down the staircase.

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Once they made it to the bottom of the staircase, there was a small corridor with two doors. They opened the first door to see a dark room with no window and a huge and ancient looking canopy bed. Draco watched Hermione as she surveyed the room. She frowned and glanced up at him, indicating she didn’t much care for it. She turned to try the other door. When she opened the other door, she let out a small gasp.

There in the middle of the room was a huge cast-iron bed with an elaborate gothic headboard; there was a small window in the corner, which let in a little bit of light, but most ostentatious was set of chains dangling from the ceiling in the corner with restraints attached to it, and next to the bed there was a glass cabinet embellished with iron, containing various types of whips, riding crops, floggers, paddles and many other things that Draco surmised she had read about and some she undoubtedly
had no clue about.

“Freaky… I like it,” Draco said, smiling as he walked over to the cabinet.

“Well, I never!” Hermione said in obvious disbelief that Snape hadn’t bothered to hide his rather depraved collection of sex toys.

“Never say never,” Draco said, smirking back at her as his fingers caressed a particularly striking red and black leather flogger.

“The other bedroom suddenly seems more appealing,” she said, glancing back at the door.

“Oh, I don’t know, I rather fancy this one,” Draco said still looking at all of the toys.

“What kind of freak is he?” she asked looking at the chains in the corner.

“Same type you are,” he said smirking as he walked away from the cabinet and towards the door.

“Regardless, it’s highly inappropriate.”

He shut the door and turned to face her. “This whole thing is inappropriate. Besides, I’m thinking that this room was not necessarily used for those types of games.”

“Oh, right,” Hermione said soberly. “Do you really think Snape allowed Death Eaters to torture people here?”

Draco shrugged.

Hermione studied him cautiously for a moment, and Draco recalled their spat in the library and his remarks about considering taking the Mark. She seemed to be thinking of the same thing because she took a deliberate step back from him.

Draco sighed. “Will you relax for once?” he said, leaning back against the wall.

Hermione tried to mimic his actions to show that she was relaxed, which made him snigger.

“I’m surprised you volunteered; I thought you were still angry with me,” he said, giving her a small smile.

“Oh, I am, and this is the perfect opportunity to give you a piece of my mind,” she said, causing his smile to drop.

“I know what you did with Ginny,” she said with a scowl.

“Why am I not surprised? Of course, with a mouth like that, she’d find it hard to keep it shut,” he said in annoyance.

“Oh shut up! You have some nerve with your reputation! You don’t care who you use or hurt, as long as you please yourself!”

“Don’t get your knickers all in a bunch. She was enjoying herself as well.”

“You took advantage of her!”

“I told you, I don’t make anyone do what they don’t want to do. Don’t blame me because your friend likes sucking cock.”
“She’s never done anything like that before,” she said in exasperation.

Draco’s eyebrows went up. “Really? I’m surprised; she was quite good at it.”

Hermione frowned. “You’re disgusting.”

“I think you’re just jealous,” he said with a sly grin.

Hermione laughed. “Hardly! As you said, I get more than enough from Ron and Harry.”

Draco’s jaw went tight and he clenched his fist.

Hermione smirked.

He glanced away from her, his cool demeanour returning. “It’s really no one’s fault. Listening to you and Potter go at it made for good entertainment. It’s funny what people will try when they’re aroused,” he said, leering at her.

“You mean like having a good wank while watching others engage in real sex?” she said coldly.

Draco narrowed his eyes at her. Suddenly, it felt as if his temper were being tested.

Hermione seemed to sense she had hit a nerve, when she spoke, her voice was softer. “You know you deserved that; I mean you were spying on us.”

“And I bet you love knowing that,” he said smugly.

Hermione scoffed. “Why would I?”

He straightened up and walked over to her, putting his hands on either side of her head, pinning her to the wall.

“Oh, I don’t know, maybe because it made you feel powerful; to know that I was so aroused by the sight of you servicing Weasley and Potter that I had to get off right then and there,” he said, studying her expression.

Hermione looked back up at him stoically, but her flushed cheeks gave her away.

“Did you like it, Hermione?” he asked, waiting for her to respond.

But she didn’t, instead she seemed to hold her breath as he leaned in closer.

“That feeling… feeling like we all wanted you, like we were all under your spell? Did you get yourself off thinking about it?”

She went rigid against the wall as his lips approached hers. But he pulled back at the last minute, removing his arms from the wall to stuff his hands in his pockets.

Hermione’s brow furrowed in confusion. “Do you want me to ask you for permission or something?” she said as if trying to catch her breath.

“What?” he asked, looking at her in puzzlement.

“You know,” she said, giving him a meaningful look.

“Oh,” he said. “No. It just occurred to me that we might need to clear the air about a few things
before we go any further.”

Hermione nodded and looked away. “If you’re talking about blood status, I already heard what you had to say, and there’s really nothing else to be said about it. You have your feelings about the matter, and I have mine.”

Draco shook his head, recalling their spat in the library and how he had used her relationship with Ron and Harry to belittle her. “No, I wasn’t talking about that. I wanted to talk to you about what I said at the end.”

“Oh,” she said, her face growing red.

“Well… I didn’t mean it,” he said softly.

Hermione nodded absently, avoiding his eyes. Her mouth was drawn into a thin tight line and she was still standing stiff as wood against the wall. Draco swallowed. It was clear her guard was back up and he could tell she didn’t trust that he wouldn’t lash out at her if he had the opportunity again.

He considered her, thinking of a way to convince her otherwise. “I know you probably don’t believe me, but I really didn’t. It was a really cruel thing to say, and I’m sorry,” he said, looking at her earnestly.

“Thanks,” she said. It sounded half-hearted to Draco.

She crossed her arms defensively across her chest and looked past him. Draco pressed on anyway.

“I really did want to kiss you that day in the forest,” he said, hoping she would look at him.

When she finally did, she looked suspicious. “So, why didn’t you?”

Draco shrugged. “I don’t know, just didn’t feel right. But now, I’d like to very much.”

She stared him for a moment before exploding. “You’re so—argghh!”

“What?” he asked in confusion.

“One minute you’re really charming and half-way decent, and then the next you’re a total prat. I can’t figure you out!”

“Maybe I don’t want you to,” he said, unable to help the sneer in his voice.

She rolled her eyes and uncrossed her arms as if giving up. “Let’s just get on with it. Are you going to kiss me or not?” she asked in a formal business-like manner.

“You make it sound so attractive,” he said sarcastically.

“Look, let’s not pretend like this is something it will never be. We should just get on with it. Perhaps we should skip the kissing all together,” she said.

Draco frowned. “You don’t like kissing?”

“Kissing is fine. I’m just trying to make this as painless as possible,” she said curtly.

“Well, I don’t consider kissing to be painful,” he said with a chuckle. “I actually rather enjoy it, just like I enjoy hugs and cuddling.”
“Cuddling?” she said, sniggering.

“Yes; you don’t cuddle?”

“Yes, of course I do. Just didn’t think you were the cuddling sort,” she said.

“Didn’t you know? Slytherins need love, too,” he said playfully.

“Is that what you want? Love?” Hermione said, now outright laughing.

Draco fought to maintain control of his face despite feeling another jab.

He reached up to touch her face, caressing her cheek. “I want a lot of things, Hermione. More than you know.”

He paused before leaning in to brush her lips lightly with his own. Tentatively at first, and then with more confidence, he pressed his mouth against hers demanding entry with his tongue.

She let him in, showing him how much she welcomed the intrusion by caressing his tongue with her own as she ran her hands up his chest and around his neck, pulling him down into her. Draco allowed her to take over the kiss, enjoying the feeling of her need for more as she opened her mouth wider to give him more access. She moaned into his mouth as he pressed himself against her, rubbing his growing erection against her.

His mouth became more demanding as he ground himself into her, stroking the inside of her mouth and pulling back teasingly, causing her to chase his tongue so she could coax it back for more of the same. She began to grind back in response to his hips, then lifted one leg up and wrapped around his waist so that he could position his hardness closer to her centre.

“Hermione!” Ron called before bursting into the room, causing Draco to snap his head up, breaking the kiss abruptly.

“Ron, what are you doing here; we have an arrangement!” Hermione said in frustration, putting her leg down.

“I’m just not comfortable with it,” Ron said, looking at them both as if they had committed a crime.

“Ron!” Harry shouted, running in after Ron.

“Weasley, take a hike,” Draco said in irritation.

Ron shook his head. “No, I don’t trust you. Anything you do with her, you can do in front of us.”

Hermione groaned. “Ronald, you’re being ridiculous!”

Ron folded his arms across his chest. Draco almost laughed in his face. “You are a jealous one, aren’t you, Weasley? What’s the matter? You’re scared I can satisfy her better than you do?”

“That’s funny, Malfoy; you don’t know anything about Hermione.”

“I know a lot more than you do,” Draco said with a smug smirk he couldn’t help.

“Draco, please,” Hermione said, eyes pleading with him to keep quiet.

Ron scoffed. “You’re mental; you think just because you’ve spent a few hours studying with her you suddenly know her?”
“Oh, we’ve done a bit more than just study,” he said suggestively.

“What?” Harry asked looking at Hermione for an explanation.

“Mione, what the hell is he talking about?” Ron asked, clenching his fist.

“Nothing, Ron, nothing. He’s making things up,” Hermione said, shaking her head.

Harry looked at Hermione sceptically.

“Am I?” Draco asked, narrowing his eyes at her. He could feel his face heating up as his temper broke.

Hermione put a hand on his chest to calm him. “Draco, just drop it, all right? Ron, Harry, go back upstairs, please!”

“Hermione, what is he—”

“Ronald! You should know by now that’s he’s just trying to get under your skin. We haven’t done anything, and I don’t have any feelings for him, all right? This will all be over before you know it, and then I’ll come out and get you once we’re done, promise!”

Despite wanting to tear every bushy strand from her head, Draco’s face was impassive as he looked at the back of Hermione’s head for a few moments and then up at Ron and Harry. They were studying him as if looking for affirmation to support Hermione’s statement.

Draco nodded and gave them a small smile. “She’s right, Weasley, I was just trying to get a rise out of you, and surprise, surprise, it worked,” he said, stepping past Hermione and closer to Ron and Harry.

“I’m sorry; I took it a bit too far, no hard feelings?” he said, extending his hand to shake Ron’s. Ron looked down at Draco’s hand with distrust before slowly reaching out to shake it. Draco shook his hand briefly before his smirk quickly turned into a nasty snarl.

Instead of releasing Ron’s hand, he yanked it hard, pulling him down, and causing the redhead to stumble down to the floor. As soon as Ron hit the floor, Draco stepped on his back with one foot. Harry reached back to pull out his wand, but Draco had already anticipated his reaction and put his hand up in surrender.

“No need for that, Potter, just hear me out for one minute,” he said.

Harry lowered his wand slightly and then pointed down at Draco’s foot. “Take your foot off of him, Malfoy!”

Draco nodded slowly, but before he could remove his foot, Ron pushed himself up on his forearms and then jabbed an elbow up into Draco’s leg, causing the blond to falter.

Ron jumped up and rushed at Draco, but Hermione put herself between them, placing her hand on Ron’s chest.

“Ron, please!”

“What the hell was that, arsehole?” Ron asked his face almost purple with anger and embarrassment.

“Maybe if you weren’t so hot headed and stopped to listen for once, you’d learn a thing or two, Weasley,” Draco said.
“Malfoy, back away from him,” Harry said, still pointing his wand at Draco.

“Fine,” Draco said.

His normally cool demeanour was gone, and he was visibly shaking with anger as he glared at Hermione as if he wanted to throttle her.

He thought about the wand in his back pocket, but saw Harry watching him closely with his wand raised, and now Ron was clutching his own wand.

“I just thought you two should know what your girlfriend has been up to during our study sessions,” he said staring at Hermione in contempt.

Hermione shook her head. “He’s lying; whatever he’s going to say is a lie.”

He chuckled coldly. “I should have known better. I don’t know why I was even considering trying to be romantic with you. You don’t want to be treated nicely.”

“Shut up, Malfoy,” Ron said raising his wand.

“No, Weasley, you need to shut up and listen. You’ll want to hear this.”

Harry and Ron both pointed their wands at Draco as he turned his back to them.

They looked at each other in puzzlement, as he stood there motionless for a few moments. He was taking in deep breaths, calming himself. When he turned around his face was neutral again.

He wasn’t bothered by the fact that Harry and Ron were both poised to hex him. He ignored them and stood regarding Hermione, his eyes measuring her slowly in contemplation.

“They still don’t know, do they?” he finally asked her.

Hermione didn’t answer him; her eyes darted to Harry and Ron nervously.

He smiled. “But, that’s about to change.”

“What are you playing at?” Ron asked looking back between Hermione and Draco, his wand still pointed.

“Boys, I’d hate to be the one to break it to you, but whatever she may have told you about your sex life, it’s highly unlikely she’s really satisfied. You see, she requires a bit more than just ‘rough sex’.”

“What are you talking about, Malfoy?” Harry asked, lowering his wand.

“Let’s let Weasley and Potter here in on our little secret, shall we?”

Ron lowered his wand, glaring at Hermione.

“How you thank me after getting yourself off. Of course, that’s only when I give you permission to do so. How many times have you asked me for permission to get off, Hermione? Eight times, or is it nine?”

Hermione glanced up at Ron and Harry and shook her head slightly, looking back at Draco with eyes begging him to stop.

“Oh, don’t get shy on me now; you’ve never been before,” he said with an evil smile, glancing up at
Ron, who was still gaping at Hermione in disbelief.

“Cat got your tongue? Answer me, bitch.”

Both Ron and Harry flinched at hearing Draco call her that, but didn’t move; instead, they continued to watch her, waiting for her response to his question.

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Hermione couldn’t move; it felt as if time was frozen. She could feel Ron and Harry staring at her, and Draco’s eyes burning into her, waiting for her to answer.

And she wanted to answer him, she wanted to disagree, and say ‘no’, but ‘no’ was not the right answer. Everything Draco was saying was true, and hearing him say it only made it more so, as she felt herself becoming aroused from the humiliation of being exposed in this way in front of all of them and feeling more ashamed for it.

She finally nodded slightly, not looking at any of them.

“Hermione,” Ron murmured in shock.

Hermione glanced at Draco nervously, trying not to look at Ron and Harry.

Draco began to circle her, running his hands along her back to her rear, causing her to tremble.

He chuckled as he stopped in front of Ron, with his back to her as he addressed her. “Do you remember what you told me you thought about while you were getting yourself off that first time?”

Hermione didn’t reply; instead, she stared at the floor, wishing she could melt right into the carpet.

“You wanted me to, and I quote, ‘make you beg for my cock’,” he said, turning from Ron to look at her again.

“Isn’t that what you said? Yes or no?”

Her breath seemed to be caught in her throat, and she was unable to breathe properly. This was not happening. This was never supposed to happen.

“Yes,” she whispered shamefully.

Draco smirked, looking back at Ron and Harry’s shocked faces.

“And did you not say that you wanted to feel what it was like to have it pressed against the back of your throat?”

Hermione blushed furiously. “Yes.”

“And then, my favourite part: how you wondered what it would feel like to have me up your arse…” he said, grabbing her arse obscenely. “While my hands left red marks all over your spread cheeks…” he said, pulling his hand away before smacking her arse harshly. “While I was fucking you,” he whispered from behind her, just loud enough for Harry and Ron to hear.

Hermione let out a small whimper and looked up at Ron, expecting him to retaliate for Draco touching her; instead, he folded his arms across his chest, looking at her in condemnation.

Draco grabbed a handful of her hair, pulling her head back so that her ear touched his lips.
“Isn’t that right?”

Hermione couldn’t understand why her body was responding to this humiliation the way it was or why. Despite her shame, she didn’t want him to stop, and once again she found herself succumbing to his demanding questioning and nodding as the word ‘yes’ spilled from her lips once more.

“You keep saying yes, but you’re not saying it properly, and that simply will not do. Yes what, Hermione?” he asked as he let go of her hair to walk around and give her a demanding stare.

Hermione’s mind was racing. She didn’t know what he wanted her to say. She had an idea of what she would like for her to say and what she had fantasised of calling him if he ever demanded it, but she couldn’t bring herself to call him anything deferential. She would not admit he held any power over her right now.

She shook her head.

“When I say answer me, you’ll say ‘Yes, Draco’, or on a rare occasion, ‘No, Draco.’ At least, my name will do for now. Understand?”

Hermione chewed the inside of her bottom lip as she debated with herself. She couldn’t deny she was aroused and it felt like that had gone too far now to retreat. Plus, she was incredibly curious. So she gave in.

“Yes, Draco,” she murmured.

“Good girl.”

Hermione glanced up at Harry and Ron. They appeared transfixed by what was taking place in front of them. Harry was staring at Draco with a wide-eyed stunned expression. When he turned his eyes to Hermione, she found she could hardly bear it; her eyes found the floor again.

“And stop looking down in shame like that,” Draco chided. “You’re a Gryffindor, after all. Stand tall and proud, and look me in the eye when I speak to you.”

Hermione slowly raised her head, steeling herself for his penetrating stare.

“I want you to watch me while I’m breaking you,” he whispered, creating fresh goose bumps on her skin as she tried to stop herself from trembling.

Draco reached out and stroked her cheek, his eyes suddenly full of concern.

“Are you scared? Be honest,” he asked in a much softer tone.

She nodded before saying “A little… Draco.”

“Hermione, you don’t have to do what he tells you to,” Ron said hesitantly, looking caught between anger and concern.

“No, Ron, this is what I want, I’m just… nervous,” she said. “But I want to try it.”

“Do you want us to leave?” Harry asked in an obligatory way that indicated he preferred to stay.

“No, I want you both here,” she said, finally looking at both of them plainly.

Draco stared at Harry and Ron, waiting for their reaction. When they didn’t protest, and instead stood regarding Hermione as if they had never seen her before, he smirked.
“Why don’t you two get comfortable; we’re going to be here for a while.”

Harry and Ron looked at each and then slowly sat down on the floor, leaning back against the wall.

“Shall I continue?” he asked he asked Hermione.

Hermione took a deep breath and nodded.

“I’m sorry, what was that?” he asked.

“Yes, Draco, please continue.”

“Good, because I’m going to give you everything you’ve been dreaming of and then some, Mudblood.”
Chapter 22-Mal-Intent Part II

Screamin’ loud and holdin’ sheets,
Scared that you’ll be called a freak,
Gotta let it go while you can.
Ain’t too proud to beg you see,
’Cause my man belongs to me
And I know that he understands…

-“Ain’t Too Proud to Beg” by TLC

~~~*~~~

“Take that back, Malfoy!” Harry said, snapping out of his momentary shock upon hearing Draco call Hermione a Mudblood.

Draco refused to acknowledge Harry and kept his eyes on Hermione. “Why should I? She likes it, don’t you, Mudblood?”

For some time, Hermione had been uncomfortably aware that, depending on how Draco used the offensive epithet, it no longer had the same effect. She absolutely loathed that it sometimes aroused her. It was quite disturbing, really. And since it was unacceptable to be aroused by such a thing, Hermione regarded Draco’s question with a socially appropriate shake of her head. Draco stare bored down into her, reminding her that was not the proper way to respond.

“No, I don’t… Draco,” she said, correcting herself.

“Oh? Then, why are you wet right now?” he said, sliding one hand down to her clothed centre. He smirked as Hermione blushed from the heat of his hand between her legs and then took a step back, extending his hand. “Give me your wand.”

Harry and Ron immediately raised their wands; set to hex him. Hermione reached into her back pocket and retrieved her wand. She paused hesitantly, studying it.

“How do you trust me?” he asked.

She shook her head slightly and gripped her wand tightly, holding it just out of reach of his hand.

“Well, this isn’t going to work, then,” he said, standing back, regarding her.

Hermione stood still, watching his face as she thought about whether she could trust him.

“Hermione, if you don’t feel comfortable, don’t do it,” Ron said.

“Weasely, she’s a big girl. I think she can make up her own mind,” Draco said calmly.

As Hermione studied him, she reflected on how much their relationship had changed over the past few months; how much he knew about her; what risks he had taken for her, and how he was going against everything he has been taught to fulfil the prophecy. And she realised that she did trust Draco – a lot.
Slowly, she held out her wand, offering it up to him. Draco stepped closer to her, clasping both of his hands around her extended hand. His grip was tight as he looked intently into her eyes.

“Thank you,” he said softly, sliding it slowly from her grip as if it were precious and fragile.

He put it in his back pocket, and as soon as he did, his eyes hardened and his familiar smirk was back.

“So, you’re finally admitting that you’re a submissive slut, hmm?”

Hermione’s eyebrows instinctively furrowed at the insult, but the derogatory word had the effect of a lust curse. She scowled harder to hide the flush of arousal spreading over her and inwardly scolded herself for reflexively relishing the way it made her feel.

“But, I wonder what kind?” Draco continued. “You could be a humiliation slut, perhaps a bondage slut, or my favourite: a pain slut. I guess we’ll just have to try a bit of everything and find out… Strip!”

Hermione’s eyes darted to Ron and Harry, who looked up at her with blank expressions indicating that she was on her own since she had consented to giving him so much control.

They all watched in complete silence as Hermione looked down at her shirt and, with trembling hands, began to undo the buttons of her blouse.

She was thankful that she had worn a button up blouse so that she could take her time and concentrate on undressing, prolonging whatever she had just agreed to participate in.

Draco gave an exaggerated yawn. “I know we have all day, but I’d much rather spend it fucking instead of watching you fumble with your clothing. Do I have to take them off for you?”

“No, Draco, I’ll take them off,” she said quickly.

“Get to it, then,” he said sharply, staring at her.

In spite of her shaky hands, Hermione made quick work of her blouse and bra. She blushed to see her nipples hardened with arousal.

Draco was regarding her breasts with poorly concealed admiration; his erection served as proof that he was quite pleased. He reached out to brush his fingers over each of them and then stopped to pinch her left nipple harshly.

“Ouch!”

“Not bad,” he remarked, still playing with them.

Hermione smirked, knowing that her breasts were far better than ‘not bad’. It was obvious from his physical reaction that Draco thought so as well.

He seemed irritated that she was very much aware of how beautiful her body was, and roughly twisted her left nipple again. Hermione hissed in pain.

“So sensitive. I can’t wait to see how you respond to nipple clamps,” he said with an evil grin.

“Nipple clamps?” Ron asked.

“You’ll see, Weasley,” he snapped.
Hermione stepped out of her skirt and began to slide out of her knickers. When she did, Draco frowned, but didn’t say anything as he studied the curly bush similar to her hair covering her mound.

“Now then, turn around, bend over, and grab your ankles,” he said.

“What?” she asked in mortification.

“You heard me. It’d be unwise for me to claim property without measuring its worth first.”

Hermione’s breath quickened at hearing him regard her in such a manner. She didn’t know whether to be worried or disgusted at how sexy the idea seemed to her.

“She’s not property!” Harry said.

“And definitely not yours!” Ron said.

“Harry, Ron, please!” Hermione said.

“Do I have to cast a Silencing Charm on both of you? Or would you just rather leave?”

Ron folded his arms across his chest staring up at Hermione angrily, while Harry glared at Draco.

A jumble of emotions was swarming through Hermione. Although she was excited by Draco’s words and anxious to explore this forbidden part of herself, she also felt a small measure of dread about being inspected so intimately. They would all see her arousal.

She swallowed and slowly fell forward, grabbing her ankles. She clenched her eyes shut, suddenly utterly humiliated from the vulgarity of the pose.

Draco lightly ran his hand over her back, causing her to shiver and grow more anxious as his fingertips lightly graced over her spine, down to the curve of her hips, and then finally over her arse cheeks, down her thighs, and then back up to her arse.

He seemed to be enjoying the feeling of her skin, running his hands back and forth over it as if feeling silk for the first time. His hands were curious, exploring the way her body curved, and the way she trembled, tensed, or squirmed when touched in different places.

“It’s too late to be embarrassed; we’ve all seen you naked before. Open your eyes,” he ordered.

Hermione took a deep breath and forced her eyes open. She was immediately greeted by the sight of Harry and Ron sitting against the wall on the flow. From their expressions, they appeared considerably more relaxed and entranced by the sight of her fully exposed in front of them.

Draco ran his hand back over her arse, stopping at the cleft to trace his finger along it. He paused at the puckered hole of back entrance. Hermione tensed until she felt his finger sliding down to her very wet centre.

His fingers glided over her folds, teasing her as he watched her unconsciously wiggle her hips in response. He smirked at her obvious arousal, and slipped a finger inside of her. Hermione gasped at the intrusion and then waited for him to finger her. But instead of finger fucking her, Draco twisted his finger around slowly, as if trying gauge how tight and deep she was. When he seemed satisfied with his inspection, he pulled his finger out, smelled it, and licked it off.

“What a pretty pussy,” he murmured, still staring at it.

Hermione’s face flushed, feeling both embarrassed and flattered.
“So, tell me, why would you want to hide it behind this?” he said, running his hand over the hair there.

It was strange having this conversation with Draco while she was bent over, fully exposed in this way. She also found it somewhat aggravating that he, like Harry, thought she should get rid of her pubic hair.

“I don’t want to do any spells in that area that may cause damage,” she said.

“Have you ever heard of a razor? You are Muggle-born, so that should be easy enough.”

“I don’t like using them down there,” she said in aggravation as peered through her legs at Harry. There was a faint smile on his face.

“I see Potter agrees with me. What do you think: razor or spell?” Draco asked Harry.

“Razor, definitely,” Harry replied.

Draco smirked. “I think I agree. Perhaps you’d like to do the honours?”

Harry flushed briefly and looked away.

“Right then, perhaps another time, after we get a few things straight. Bend over the bed,” Draco ordered.

Hermione rose and stepped closer to the bed and fell over face first into the mattress, grateful that this pose was considerably more comfortable. He stood behind her, not moving. Hermione grew more anxious as the seconds passed, unsure of what he was about to do.

He resumed stroking her folds, running his fingers in small gentle circles around her clit and then around her entrance, making her squirm with increasing need.

“If you could have anything you wanted right now, Hermione, what would it be?”

Hermione shook her head, her face heating up once again. She couldn’t bring herself to say it. She wanted Draco to fuck her through the mattress right now, but she couldn’t very well just come out and admit that, especially in front of Harry and Ron.

Draco slipped a finger inside of her and began to slide it in and out of her slowly and then added another.

“Tell me,” he said softly.

Hermione let out a soft moan but tried to hold her hips still, despite wanting to move on his fingers. She turned her face into the mattress and mumbled something inaudible.

He withdrew his finger, slapping her cunt, causing her to flinch.

“Speak up,” he said.

“I said, I want you to take me… Draco.”

“Wrong answer,” he said, slapping her clit and causing Hermione to shriek.
“Do you think this is about you?”

Hermione huffed as her irritation grew; she didn’t like being told she was wrong.

“Do you?”

"No, Draco," she said through gritted teeth.

“Do you think it matters what you want?” he asked with a hint of amusement in his voice.

Hermione pursed her lips. Part of her was growing tired of his mocking tone and wanted to stand up and give him another suggestion for where he could stick his finger. But then, another part, the larger part, of her wanted to see where this was headed.

"No, Draco," she said with resignation.

"That’s right… it’s about what I want. Making me happy is going to make you happy. Isn’t it beautiful how that works? Stand up and look at me.”

She stood up and turned around to face him.

“When I ask you what you want, you’d better have a clearer answer next time. But let’s talk about what I want right now.”

She waited, feeling some trepidation about what he could possibly want instead of fucking.

“I want you to suck my cock, the way you were sucking off Weasley here when Potter was balls deep in your arse.”

Hermione glanced over at Ron and Harry. Harry was still glaring at Draco, but there was also a noticeable bulge in his trousers. Ron still had his arms folded across his chest, but his angry stare was gone, and he shifted as if trying to will away his own arousal.

She looked back at Draco before reaching out to undo his belt. He stepped back with a look of incredulity on his face.

“You think you can just touch me when you want to, Mudblood?”

“You just told me th—”

“I told you what I would like; I didn’t say that you could do it. You have to earn it,” he said cutting her off.

“Earn it?”

“That’s right. Do you know how many tarts want to suck me off? Beg.”

Hermione pursed her lips. The prat really did think he was a sex god.

“Please,” she murmured.

“Oh, you can do better than that.”

She sighed in frustration, her annoyance climbing. “Please, Draco, please let me…” She stopped and shook her head. She couldn’t believe she was doing this; it was insane!
“Go on!”

“Please let me suck your cock, please,” she huffed.

Draco gave her a look of distaste. “You really stink at begging. You can’t do any better than that?”

“I really want to suck your cock, please,” she said with more effort.

“Do you really want to, or are you just begging because I told you to?”

“I want to,” she said sincerely.

“Yeah? How much?” he asked with a sly grin, reveling in her admission.

“I want it badly,” she mumbled, irritated that he was drawing this out.

“Tell me,” he said with the same grin, enjoying her obvious discomfort.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “I want to suck your cock so badly, Draco,” she said in an exaggerated mocking manner.

Both Harry and Ron sniggered.

“Oh please, please,” she barely finished before joining Harry and Ron in sniggering.

Draco looked at them all with narrowed eyes, his pale complexion turning rose red. “You think this is funny?”

“No, but—”

Draco grabbed her face harshly between his fingers. “I’m going to wipe that stupid smile off of your face. You see that case?” he asked, glancing at the glass case filled with various instruments.

Hermione swallowed, glancing at the case nervously. “Yes, Draco.”

“Get up and go pick out something for me to punish you with,” he said, letting go of her face.

Hermione walked over to the glass case slowly, perusing all of the different types of instruments before she even got close to it. Her eyes were immediately drawn to the black and red leather flogger Draco had been touching when they had first discovered the room.

Although it was very pretty and seemed well crafted for its use, the sight of it made her nervous, and so she searched for something that she thought would cause minimal damage if it turned out he was a real sadist.

The paddle, that could hurt… then perhaps the funny little leather whip with several strings at the end, oh no, the ends were knotted, that would definitely hurt. She sighed in relief when she saw a feather.

What was he going to do with that, tickle her? She’d take that over a lash any day.

She picked it up and turned around with a small smile. Draco scoffed.

“Are you sure you’re ready for that? If I use it on you, rest assured, you’ll be bound and helpless and you won’t be able to stop me once I start.”
She thought about that. Getting tickled non-stop with no control over how much or when it ceased suddenly didn’t sound very pleasant. She put down the feather and tried to hide her smile as she picked up a cute little whip with soft tassels that felt more like yarn than anything else. When turned around, Draco laughed.

“That’s cute; try again. You know what, never mind. See that black and red leather flogger in front of you?”

Hermione winced.

“Bring it to me.”

She picked up and examined it more closely. The leather straps were soft, but they were long and thin and she couldn’t tell if that was a good thing or not. She walked back over and tentatively handing it over to him.

Both Ron and Harry had remained strangely silent throughout all of this. In fact, they seemed captivated, like an audience waiting for a play to begin. Hermione wondered if they had been secretly thinking of doing things like this to her, but hadn’t had the nerve to ask.

“Bend over the bed,” Draco commanded.

Hermione began to bend over when a she felt the sharp sting of a few ends of the flogger hit her on her thighs. It had much more of a bite than the soft leather feel suggested.

“You move much too slow,” he drawled.

She promptly bent over, gripping the edge of the bed, with her face turned away from Draco onto the mattress.

“You’ll count them out for me, and you’ll thank me for every one of them,” he said as he brought a soft swipe of it down on her arse. She sighed in relief; that really didn’t hurt at all.

“One,” she said confidently.

“Wait, that doesn’t count,” he said, sounding frustrated with himself. He dealt out a much harder lash across her back.

Hermione gasped. “One... thank you.”

Several stripes of the flogger immediately landed across her arse, creating a stinging sensation.

“I mean, thank you, Draco!”

“You’ll learn,” he said as he brought it down again on the other cheek with just as much force.

“Two, thank you, Draco,” she said, trying to sound unaffected, despite feeling both surprised and unnerved that being punished in this manner was turning her on.

“Welcome,” he said as he brought another harsh lash across her thighs.

“Aaaa… three, thank you, Draco,” she moaned.

Her eyelids fluttered and she squirmed. Hermione had never dreamed that being whipped would feel so... good. The sting of the lash hurt, yes, but it also felt strangely freeing, clearing her mind of all the endless things she always worried about to focus on the burning sensation it left.
She dug her fingers into the mattress, bracing herself for more pain. When the fourth and fifth lashes landed she found that they were surprisingly soft. She began to relax and actually smiled against the duvet as she counted and said her thank yous. But, as soon as she did, another harsh stripe hit her back.

“Six… thank you, Draco,” she gasped.

There was an audible snap as the flogger whipped in the air and landed on her back for the next.

“Owww! Stop!” she said, flinching and turning her head to the other side to glare at him.

“Stop? I just started.”

“It hurts,” she whined.

“Malfoy, that’s enough,” Harry said, standing up.

Draco shook his head at him, motioning for him to wait.

“Now, do you really want me to stop, Hermione, or are you just saying that because you’re scared?”

“I don’t want you to hurt me.”

“I’ll hurt you, but I would never harm you, understand the difference?”

Hermione nodded cautiously, still watching him guardedly.

Draco sighed. “Does it make you feel better to say stop?”

She nodded. “Yes.”

“Even when I don’t?” he asked, looking back up at Harry to make sure he understood as well.

“Yes,” she said.

Harry exhaled and sat back down with a confused look on his face.

“Well, that’s a problem, isn’t it? How am supposed to know when you really want me to stop?”

Draco asked, stroking her back.

“Safe word?” she said.

“Good girl. Pick one.”

“Ferret,” she said with a smirk.

The leather bit into her skin once more and she whimpered.

“Pick another one,” he said sternly.

“Filch?” she said hesitantly, bracing herself for another stripe just in case he didn’t like that one as well.

Draco paused and then nodded. “I like that.”

Hermione breathed a sigh of relief.
“But you’ll only say it when you really need me to stop. If I find that you’re just saying it just because you feel like being a disobedient little bitch, we’ll pretend that you don’t have one for a bit, understand?”

“Yes, Draco.”

“How about three more, just to round it out?”

He delivered three more lashes and, to Hermione’s surprise, each of them was playfully soft. By the time he was finished, she was actually disappointed and asked him for more, which he seemed to find sexy.

“So much for punishment; you enjoyed that entirely too much. Sit up and look at me,” he said.

Hermione sat up and looked over at Ron and Harry, who were both clearly confused with arousal and disbelief at what they were witnessing.

“See, I’m not such a bad guy,” he said with a small smile.

Hermione looked at him strangely as he reached around to stroke the spots on her back where he had delivered the most severe of the lashes. He leaned in and kissed her softly, and she returned it hesitantly before allowing it to grow more passionate.

He pressed himself against her breasts, running his hands down her body, and then between her legs as he snaked his tongue between her lips. Hermione moaned as he probed deeper into her mouth and began to run his tongue between her lips. She squirmed to push his hand harder against her but he pulled it away and drew back from the kiss.

“Fuck yourself for me, right now,” he whispered against her lips.

As he pushed her back onto the bed, Hermione looked nervously over at Ron and Harry, who watched intently, obviously excited with the anticipation of seeing her obey Draco’s order.

She spread her legs and clenched her eyes shut.

“No, open your eyes. I want you to watch us watching you,” he said, leaning over her and staring at her briefly before pulling her legs further apart.

He guided one of her hands down between her legs and began to stroke her before lifting her hand and pushing it harder against herself. “It’s OK; fuck yourself for me, Hermione,” he whispered, moving his hand up to her breasts to caress her nipples as he watched.

Hermione looked up at him as she slid a finger into herself, trying not to focus on them watching her, but instead on the feeling of getting off while Draco stroked her breasts.

She began to pick up a steady rhythm as she looked back up at him, picturing what his cock would feel like inside of her. He leaned over to take her left nipple into his mouth, sucking and teasing it with his tongue. Hermione moaned and added another finger as she continued to work toward her climax. His tongue felt so warm and good. She began to imagine how it would feel against her clit.

She spread her legs wider and rotated her hips as if he was, in fact, doing just that. She was so close now and began to shudder as her climax approached.

Draco removed his mouth from her and sat up.
“Stop,” he said.

“What?” she asked in confusion as she continued to work frantically towards her release.

“I said stop,” he said firmly, slapping her hand away.

Hermione whimpered and squirmed in need. He lifted both of her arms over her head holding her wrists together with one hand, looking down at her.

“Now, let’s see how you beg.”

She stared at him, with the slow and infuriating realisation that he had done all of this to get her to beg properly.

She clenched her teeth and reminded herself that expressing anger right now would not get her the release she wanted. She groaned instead. “Please, Draco!”

He stared down at her unimpressed.

“Please, Draco, please, I want to suck you cock, I do, please!”

“You know what I think? I think you just want to get off,” he said coolly.

“No, no, I really do; I’ve dreamed about sucking your cock,” she said desperately, feeling something akin to a balloon about to burst. “I want to taste it, I’ve wanted it so long...” she continued.

He searched her face closely. “Really?”

“Yes, I’ve gotten off many times thinking about you fucking my mouth, please... please,” she whined.

“Please what, Hermione?”

“Please use my mouth, Draco.”

“Are you going to suck me like a proper slut should?” he said as he ran his free hand over her breasts, down to her folds, before barely grazing her clit.

Hermione gasped at the contact and pushed her hips up to increase the friction.

“Yes, yes, please! I’ll suck it just like a good slut should, I promise, please!”

“Is that what you are, Hermione? A slag?” he said, withdrawing his fingers once more.

Hermione growled. “Yes! I’m a slut!”

“Do you really think that you’re a slut? Tell me the truth.”

Hermione looked up at him with irritation and frustration before finally shaking her head. She winced when his hand slapped her clit harshly.

“When will you learn?” he asked, amused.

“No, Draco, I don’t think I’m a slut,” she said quickly.

“Good girl. Of course you’re not. But right here, right now, you are. You’re my slut, and maybe by the end of the week, you’ll be our slut, that is if Weasley and Potter agree to play along,” he said,
looking over at Ron and Harry.

“Would you like that?” he asked as he resumed stroking her clit.

“Yes, Draco,” she gasped.

“Well then, now that that’s been established. Ask me again,” he said, increasing his pace.

“Draco, please, please let me suck your cock. I’ll suck it like a good cock sucking slut should, promise!”

“As you wish,” he said as he thrust two fingers her and brought her to climax, causing her to scream out as she arched her back before falling back flat in relief.

Draco didn’t allow any time for her to rest. Pulling off his trousers and underwear, he climbed onto the bed and straddled her face. Hermione opened her eyes to see his swollen cock over her face. He looked down at her and traced her lips with it before smirking.

“Suck.”

Hermione wasted no time in doing as she was told, swiping the head with her tongue before applying gentle pressure as she lifted her head up as far as she could to take him her mouth. Draco put his hand behind her head, relieving the strain on her neck as he thrust himself forward into her mouth. He let out a low moan as he began to move in and out of her mouth.

She opened her eyes and saw that his mouth was slightly open and his eyes shut. She smirked over his cock, enjoying the feeling of having such an effect on him.

He pulled out of her mouth and moved off her and laid on his back, she followed his lead and slid between his legs to continue.

“Weasley’s right, you are a good cocksucker,” he said, weaving his hands through her hair tightly, pulling her mouth onto him.

Hermione was becoming more aroused by the minute, more than she ever thought possible. It wasn’t just the raw sexuality of sucking Draco’s cock, but it was being told to suck it while he guided her mouth back and forth over his shaft in front of Ron and Harry.

She was confused about why she was revelling in this humiliation, but nevertheless she could feel her desire beginning to run down her thigh.

Draco looked down and smirked at her. “Why am I not surprised to see you getting off on this? So you do like humiliation… good, now be a good slut and suck me dry,” he said, pushing her head back down firmly.

Hermione continued to take him into her mouth with much concentration. She wanted to see how fast she could make him lose control. It didn’t take long before Draco was gripping her shoulder tightly and warning her that he was about to come.

After he exploded inside her mouth, it took several moments before he finally opened his eyes to gaze at her. He seemed surprised to find that she was still sucking in spite of his softening erection.

“Damn… stop…” he said in amazement.

She gave him a smile with her mouth still around him and released her hold, licking her lips.
Draco shook his head, apparently at a loss for words before glancing over at Ron and Harry.

Hermione looked back over her shoulder to see how angry they were only to see them holding their cocks in their hands, newly spent. They looked back up at her in embarrassment, fumbling with their wands and doing cleaning spells before hurriedly dismissing themselves and leaving the room.

Hermione giggled and looked back up at Draco who was not smiling.

“What do you say?” he asked.

Hermione looked up at him in puzzlement.

Draco sighed in frustration. “For someone so smart, you aren’t catching on too fast about how to mind your manners.”

“Thank you… Draco?” she asked.

He smiled at her. “Good girl.”

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Ron and Harry went into the bedroom next door and closed the door. Harry began pacing, while Ron stood still as he tried to process what had just happened.

Finally Harry stopped and sat on the bed.

“I can’t believe… Ron?” Harry asked shaking his head as if waiting for Ron to say something.

But Ron just stood in the middle of the room with his hands stuffed in his pockets, looking at the bed absently.

“Well, she did sort of tell us she liked rough sex,” he said cautiously.

“She didn’t tell us anything!” Harry said angrily.

“Well, it’s hard to be mad right now; I mean, we just got off to it.”

“Yeah, and I feel like shit because of it,” Harry said, putting his hands to his face.

“You started it!” Ron said in accusation.

“Yeah, I know I did. Why do you think I feel so bad?”

Ron shrugged. “I don’t know; I mean, she was enjoying it, and honestly, we were too.”

“I can’t believe you. You’re OK with what Malfoy did to her?”

“No, but only because it’s Malfoy; I mean, she looked… happy,” Ron said with a small smirk.

“It’s just a bit too freaky; I feel dirty,” Harry said, pulling a face.

“Harry, are you honestly telling me that you’ve never thought about doing anything like that?”

“It just seems wrong, you know? You don’t treat people like that,” Harry said, avoiding Ron’s eyes.

“Even when they want you to?”
“I don’t know. I don’t know if I can do that to her and still feel all right when it’s over. It’s disrespectful; it can’t be normal.”

“To tell you the truth, I’m not sure what’s normal anymore,” Ron said, scratching his head.

“You think she got off on it?”

“Well you saw that!”

“I mean all of it. You think she liked it when he was whipping her with that thing?”

“I don’t know.”

There was a knock on the door.

“Come in!” they both said in unison. Draco peeked in before stepping inside and closing the door behind him.

Harry’s eyes narrowed. “Where’s Hermione?”

“She’s making us lunch.”

Harry and Ron both looked at each other.

“Did you—”

“No! She volunteered. Honestly.”

They both looked at him suspiciously.

“I just wanted to talk to you two, especially you, Weasley, before you spend time with her tomorrow,” he said, looking at Ron warily.

Ron gave Draco a once over, waiting to hear what he was going to say.

“I’d wager after what you just saw that you’re going to try to your best imitation of it. The question is, can you do it without causing damage? Frankly, thinking about you with a whip in your hand makes me nervous,” he said with some condescension.

“I can do whatever you can do,” Ron snapped.

“Oh I doubt that. Look, Weasley, let’s take a walk before you try anything on her.”

“Fuck you.”

Draco sighed. “I just want to make sure you don’t injure her.”

“I’d never hurt Hermione!” Ron said, looking at Draco like he was stupid.

“Not intentionally, no, but have you ever done any like this before?”

Ron didn’t answer and glanced at Harry.

“And if you did, what would you use on her? A whip? A flogger? A paddle?” Draco asked.

“That’s none of your business!”
“It’s all of our business now. It obvious what she likes, what gets her off; are you going to sit here and tell me that you’re not at least considering it?”

They both stared back at him, not wanting to answer that question.

“Look, I don’t want you hurting her by accident, which tends to happen when someone who’s never done this before gets too excited.”

Ron looked back at him, unsure of what to say.

“C’mon then, tell me; what are you planning to do with her?”

Avoiding Draco’s eyes, Ron shook his head. “I’m not going to take a whip to her, I know that. I’d never use anything like that on Hermione.”

“So you like using your hands, then?” Draco asked, trying to coax him into talking.

Ron nodded. “I guess, and maybe my belt.”

Draco’s eyebrow went up and something like respect crossed his face briefly. “Do you know where not to hit her?”

“Well, I would never strike her in the face or anything like that,” Ron said matter-of-factly.

“There are other things, like kidneys, ribs, her spine that you have to be mindful of, too,” Draco said soberly.

“I know that!”

“Do you?” Draco asked, crossing his arms across his chest.

“Yeah, I mean, I know,” Ron said with less confidence.

“You know, but you don’t really know.”

Ron glanced away from his stare shamefully.

“It’s OK, Weasley, you have to crawl before you walk. Take off your belt; you’ll need it for practice.”

Ron slowly unbuckled his belt and slid it out of his trousers.

“Potter, come here,” Draco ordered.

Harry glared at Draco before rising.

“Turn around,” he said with a hint of a smirk as he took the belt from Ron.

Draco ran his hands along Harry’s back almost tenderly, causing him to shiver before striking him across the back with the belt.

“Fuck, Malfoy!!” Harry cried, turning around.

“Sorry,” he said insincerely, turning Harry back around. “Look Weasley, you can hit here, and here, and here, but never hit here and here.” He said pointing out to Ron that Harry’s kidneys, joints, and spinal column were generally off limits. You should start off light and work your way up in intensity.
to test her pain tolerance. And stop immediately if she says Filch.”

“All right,” Ron said, making mental notes.

“Very well, I’ll leave you to practice, then,” Draco said, opening the door. He gave Harry a wicked smile. “See you tomorrow, Potter,” he said as he shut the door.

Harry frowned. “Are you really going to use a belt on her, Ron?”

Ron shrugged. “Maybe… you’re not going to try anything like that on her?”

“I don’t know, but I know Malfoy has a good whipping coming to him tomorrow,” Harry said, looking determined.

“Are you serious, Harry? You’re gonna try and do that to him?”

“Yeah, I think I am, and I’m not going to use my hands or a belt; I think I’m going to use a real whip on him, see how he likes being on the other end of it,” he said with a strange smile.

“You’re a bit scary, you know that?”

Harry’s smile widened. “So, do you want to practice?”

“What do you mean?”

“On me.”

“What?”

“It’s a good idea. Malfoy’s right about one thing, we don’t want to hurt her.”

“Speak for yourself; she deserves more than a little bit of pain for lying to us,” Ron said, tightening his grip around the belt.

Harry looked back at him in concern. “Maybe a little, but we don’t want to do any real damage. Go ahead.”

Harry braced himself against the bedpost as Ron wrapped the belt around his hand. When Ron finally got the nerve to hit him, Harry sighed in frustration. “C’mon, Ron, you can do it a bit harder than that,” he said in annoyance.

Ron nodded and let the belt land on one of the places Draco had pointed out on Harry’s back. There was a loud slap, and Ron winced, worried he had used too much force, but Harry moaned and arched his back out.

Ron stared at Harry in surprised silence. “You really like that, Harry?”

“Yeah, actually, I do,” Harry said, turning his head to smile at Ron.

“Bloody hell, you really are a slag,” he said, casting the belt to side and pushing Harry back on the bed to climb on top of him.

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Hermione brought down a plate of sandwiches and was about to knock on the door of the bedroom where Harry and Ron had scurried off to after wanking, when she heard a sharp slapping sound
followed by a soft groan. She tensed, thinking she may have to enter to break up a fight when she heard Harry encouraging Ron to hit him harder.

Her mouth dropped open and she put the plate down at the door, grabbing two sandwiches for her and Draco.

When she entered the bedroom, Draco was lying on his back with his hands folded behind his head.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Nothing,” she said, shaking her head.

“Oh, that,” he said chuckling. “He’s just practicing.”

“Practicing?”

Draco flashed a mischievous smile, and Hermione’s eyes went wide with understanding. She tried to push whatever Ron was planning to do to her out of her head as she took a seat on the bed.

“Nothing to drink?” he said.

Hermione scowled. “I just fixed you a lunch and now you have the nerve to ask me for something to drink? You have legs; use them!” she said as she set his sandwich down at the end of the bed next to her, out of his reach.

Draco conjured up a serving tray with two glasses filled with juice.

“How did you do that?”

“I’ve been here before; I knew where they were.”

“I see,” she said, looking up at him inquisitively. “So, you and Snape… you’re close, then?”

“You could say that,” he said, avoiding her stare.

She nodded and handed him his sandwich. “You know you never did answer Harry’s question…”

Draco’s face went blank as he took the sandwich from her, glancing up at her quickly before taking a bite. When he didn’t respond she continued hesitantly.

“How long have you been working on this assignment?”

“Don’t ask questions you don’t want the answers to, Hermione. Besides, what does it matter? We’re all here now for the same purpose.”

Hermione watched him as she took another bite of her sandwich. Draco stared back at her as he ate his for a few moments before trying to change the mood.

“Thanks for making lunch; this is good.”

“You don’t have to patronise me,” she said with irritation.

“I’m not; it really is,” he said taking another bite.

“Feeling guilty about what you did to me?” she asked.

Draco shook his head. “No, not at all. You had it coming. Besides, I think you loved it. Most of it
anyway.”

“Most of it,” she said, smirking back.

“You’ll have to tell me which parts you didn’t like.”

“Right. So you can use them later as punishments?”

“You are a smart one,” he said, looking pleased.

“The smartest you’ll ever have,” she said, putting her chin up.

Draco sniggered. “Where was all of this confidence earlier?”

“It’s a lot easier to be confidence when you’re not bent over, showing your bits to the room”

Draco snorted.

After they finished eating, Draco put the tray on the floor and sat back, lying against the headboard.

“Hermione, do you remember my fantasy? The last one I told you?”

“Yes,” she said smiling at him.

He raised his eyebrows suggestively.

“Now?” she asked. “We just ate.”

“Yes, now. It doesn’t have to be so… vigorous.”

Hermione crawled across the bed to where he lay, pushing her body against his as she leaned in to kiss him. He slid his hands up around her neck and into her hair as she began to pull at his shirt. His hands moved quickly from her hair to her shirt, not taking care to unbutton it, but tearing it open with force, causing the buttons to fly as he went.

Hermione gyrated against him harder, enjoying the stiffness she felt beneath her. Draco pulled her shirt down around her and reached around to unclasp her bra. In the next second, his mouth was on her, sucking and lapping at one of her breasts.

She moaned as she fumbled with his belt. When it was clear she was struggling with it, he pulled his mouth off of her.

“Get up,” he breathed.

She wasted no time. They got rid of the rest of their offending garments quickly before Draco settled back to his position on his back, pulling Hermione down onto him.

She straddled him once more, grinding her wetness over his cock, sliding back and forth, teasing both herself and him. He grabbed her hips and resumed giving attention to her breasts.

“You fucking tease,” he growled as Hermione pulled away a bit, trying to give him a taste of his own medicine from earlier.

“You love it though, don’t you? The way I make you work for it,” she whispered before swiping her tongue against his ear and sucking on his earlobe. She pulled back up and leaned back to look at him as she continued to wiggle herself over the head of his cock.
Draco groaned and sat up to fold her arms behind her back. He loosely held her wrists behind her with one hand and grabbed the side of her hip with another as he pushed himself up to sheath himself completely inside of her.

“Oh, Gods!”

He watched her face as she cried out at the invasion, holding her closely for a moment, not moving. They both sat still enjoying the feeling of him finally being inside of her. She looked down at him to see him staring up at her with an openness she had never seen before. She decided to not think too much and go on instinct, kissing him fiercely as she began to move.

Draco allowed her to snake her tongue into his mouth and control the kiss as he urged her to rock forward onto him, his hand guiding her hip. She sucked on his tongue for a moment before coming up for air.

He let her wrists go and leaned back, bringing her with him. His hands moved from her hip to her arse as he assisted her with raising herself almost completely off him, so that she could impale herself on his cock over and over again.

“That’s it, Hermione, fuck me,” he whispered, staring up at her.

He let go of her hips, letting her completely take over. Hermione placed her hands on his chest, watching him as she continued to ride him. She was enjoying the various expressions she saw flash across his normally composed face. Draco was making no effort at hiding how turned on he was, his usual cool eyes were filled with lust and gratitude.

She paused to change her angle, twisting slightly to the side. Draco gasped and stared up at her with his mouth open until she moved.

“Oh… oh shit, that’s it, fuck me, oh,” he panted as he watched himself disappear inside of her each time her hips met his.

Hermione sped up as she felt his body beginning to tense; she wanted to reach her climax with his. Draco pushed his hips up to meet hers and Hermione’s moans grew louder as she began to lose control.

“Are you going to come for me?”

“Yes,” she moaned, feeling herself quickly approaching it as he hit a particularly sensitive spot inside of her.

“Do it. Come for me, Hermione; come for me now,” he urged as he continued to deliver the same stroke while his grip on her hip tightened.

Hermione’s body began to quiver, and she tensed, gripping his arms with her nails as her vision went hazy. She stilled, clenching herself tightly around his cock as she came. Draco let out a feral growl as he came. Hermione fell over onto him panting, and he held her as he tried to catch his own breath. They lay in silence for several minutes before she finally dismounted him and rolled onto her back.

Chancing a glance up at him, Hermione found Draco staring at her with an unreadable expression.

“So much for not being vigorous,” she said, causing him to snigger. She reached out and ran her hand along his arm.

“Are you up for a bit of cuddling?” she asked hesitantly.
Draco smiled a little. “Just a bit,” he said, pulling her close to him.

They lay together, holding each other for several minutes before Draco looked down at her.

“We really have to work on the way you beg.”

Hermione rolled her eyes as she nudged closer to him, rubbing her hands over his chest.

“Really, Draco, do you have to be such a slave driver? We just had really good sex, give it a rest.”

“You seem to be under the impression that just because we had one hell of a shag that you can sass me with that wicked mouth of yours. You will learn how to beg properly without being prompted, I promise you that.”

“And you seem to be under the impression that you can continue to order me around. Sorry to disappoint you, but I have no intentions of begging you for anything else today.”

“That’s fine, we have all night as well,” he said, smiling as he found her lips again.
King Me

You open your arms out to me
We can make love not war
I'm so in love with you
I'll be forever blue
That you give me no reason
You know you're making me work so hard
Don't you tell me no
Don't you tell me no...

-“A Little Respect” by Erasure

I've crossed the last line
From where I can’t return…
I only hope that I won’t disappoint you
When I’m down here on my knees
And sweet, sweet, sweet surrender

-“Sweet Surrender” by Sarah McLachlan

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Hermione awoke and opened her eyes to Draco’s serene face. He appeared to be deep in sleep and looked quite content; almost angelic. She snorted inwardly at that thought and slowly sat up, frowning at the soreness between her legs.

He had kept her up until nearly 4am, trying as many positions as he could imagine before finally finishing it off with a long, drawn out begging session. She was proud that she had passed with flying colours, and it had ended with him barely lasting once he had begun.

She crept upstairs to get her bag and brought it back downstairs to shower. When she emerged from the steaming bathroom she was startled to see Draco propped up on his pillow.

“Oh good, you’re all cleaned up for me; now climb back into bed,” he said in a cheery voice.

Hermione shook her head. “Oh, no you don’t. I’m spending today with Ron.”

She dropped the towel wrapped around her body and bent over to put on a fresh pair of knickers.

Draco bit his lip, admiring her curves and when she straightened up, he wore an exaggerated pout. “I’m hurt. I’m offering you a chance for more of my attention, and you’re thinking of the Weasel.”

“I had plenty of your attention yesterday, last night, and this morning, thank you very much, and I’m quite sore for it.”

Draco slid out of bed and walked over to her, pulling her close to him and kissing her languorously, as if trying to savour the feeling of it before the day began.

“And what if I offered to pamper you today to make up for it?” he asked in a saccharine tone.

Hermione smiled. “I’d have to see that to believe it.”

“Well, then, let me show you,” he said kissing her again. Hermione wrapped her arms around him...
and returned the kiss, enjoying the now familiar play between their tongues before withdrawing.

Draco straightened and looked at her regretfully. “Do we really have to do this switch thing? I could stay with you all day.”

“I think you’re just scared,” she said, walking over to the mirror to look at her hair.

Draco scoffed. “Just because I find girl bits more appealing doesn’t mean I’m scared. Besides, if anyone’s scared, it’s Potter.”

“You may make Harry a little nervous, but he’s definitely not scared of you,” she said.

“I beg to differ; he’s obviously quite taken with me, which is understandable really. As long as he does as he’s told, we’ll get along just fine.”

“You really don’t know Harry that well, do you?” she said with pity before leaving him alone to wait.

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Hermione knocked on Ron and Harry’s bedroom door and was immediately greeted by the sight of a fully dressed and alert Harry. He looked as if he had been up for quite some time.

“Morning,” she said almost bashfully.

Harry glared at her for a moment and said ‘good morning’ under his breath as he opened the door to let her pass into the room. Ron turned over in bed as if bothered by being awoken out of his sleep.

Hermione avoided Harry’s accusing stare, fixing her eyes on Ron as she offered an overly chipper ‘hello.’ Ron grunted and sat up, rubbing his eyes. He stumbled out of bed and mumbled something about needing a shower as he left the room.

“Harry, please stop staring at me; you’re making me feel bad!”

“I’m making you feel bad? Hermione I can’t believe you’d let Malfoy treat you like that… that you would let anyone treat you like that. And to think that you actually got off on it too!”

“I tried telling you before,” she said, still avoiding his glare.

“No, you didn’t!”

Finally, she looked up at him in aggravation. “Yes, I did. I said I liked rough sex.”

“That was a bit more than just rough sex! We said we would be open with each other. We made a pact!”

“Oh right, yes, the pact. And I suppose you lived up to your end of it?”

Harry looked away.

“Have you really told me about everything you’ve ever fantasized about or wanked to?”

“I hope you know what you’re getting into,” he said.

“From what I heard at the door yesterday, I’m not the only one getting into it.”
Harry blushed and looked up as Ron came back into the room. Ron didn’t look at either one of them as he walked past them to retrieve something from his bag. He disappeared into the bathroom again with a slam of the door.

“Well, I guess I’ll be leaving now,” Harry said, walking to the door. “Remember your safe word, Hermione, just in case things get out of hand,” he said with concern in his voice.

Hermione looked back at him curiously, but Harry was gone.

She closed the bedroom door, not sure what to do with herself as she waited for Ron to come out of the shower. When he finally emerged with a towel around his waist, he turned his back to her. He dressed in silence, putting on only his trousers before picking up his belt and folding it over the back of the chair. He stared at it for a moment and then took a seat on the bed.

Hermione stood against the door, watching him anxiously as he picked up the towel and ran it over his wet hair.

“Ron—”

“You lied,” he said, his back still to her.

Hermione lowered her eyes, feeling the tension between them, and for the first time, the weight of what she had done.

“I’m sorry, Ron. I know it was wrong.”

“What else did you guys do?”

“Nothing, I swear! We didn’t do anything other than what was said.”

“And I’m supposed to believe that?”

“I don’t blame you for being mad, but it’s the truth.”

“How could you? All this time…”

She couldn’t answer that question.

“If you needed something, we’ve always been there for you; you shouldn’t have gone behind our backs like that.”

“I know but, I didn’t think you two would understand.”

“I certainly don’t. I’m not sure I can trust you anymore.”

“Ron, I’m sorry!”

“You will be.”

Hermione’s froze as she stared at the back of his head, waiting for him to turn around. She needed to see his face, to see if his eyes revealed him to be as angry as he sounded.

“Come here,” he said.

She walked over slowly, coming around the bed to face him.
Ron leaned back, bracing himself with a white-knuckled grip on the edge of the bed, staring up at her. His glare was unflinching, and she knew if looks could kill, she would have ceased to exist right there.

“Get undressed,” he said without any emotion in his voice.

Hermione swallowed and slipped out of her clothing while he watched her, appearing unusually unaffected by the sight of her nakedness.

“I want you to lie across my lap.”

Hermione’s felt a knot in her throat as she nodded once again. Without saying anything, she climbed onto the bed and lowered herself over his lap.

She looked back over her shoulder to see what he would do. His eyes ran over her body for a moment and then he put his hand on her, caressing the soft flesh almost lovingly. Hermione relaxed a little until he pulled his hand back. She tensed her arse in anticipation.

“You deserve it, you know,” he said as if trying to make peace with what he was about to do.

“I know,” Hermione whispered, one hand gripping the mattress, the other gripping his leg.

A hard slap landed on her arse cheek, and Hermione bit her lip.

Another hard slap landed on her other cheek and she gripped the duvet harder.

Two more harsh slaps landed on the same spot, causing Hermione to whimper and squirm. She flinched, anticipating the next one.

“Ron, I’m sorry,” she said earnestly.

“No, you’re not; you’re just sorry that you got caught,” he said, anger finally creeping into his voice.

“No, I’m—”

Two more hard smacks struck her on the opposite cheek.

“Ron, I love you,” she said apologetically.

She couldn’t help but to cry out as a rapid succession of hard slaps hit her in the same place again and again.

It felt as if her arse was ablaze, and the stinging just got worse since he was not letting up, quite the contrary, the punishment seemed to grow more vicious as he continued, finally causing her eyes to water with reluctant tears.

“Shit!” Ron said in annoyance as he clasped his hands together, rubbing them to soothe them from the impact of the spanking.

“Get up!” he said crossly.

Hermione slowly rose to her knees, wincing at the throbbing pain ebbing and flowing across her skin.

“Give me my belt.”
Hermione paused to stare at the belt over the back of the chair.

“This is what you want, right?” Ron asked. “So, I’m going to give it to you. Bring it to me.”

Hermione walked over to the chair slowly in trepidation. She had let Draco whip her right in front of him, so if she refused him, it would only make things worse. And there was no proof he was going to hurt her, just fear.

Besides the fact that Ron was angry with her for betraying him and Harry, she also knew that unlike Draco, he had no real experience in using his belt to hit anyone. Then again, Draco had told her Ron had been practicing, so perhaps it wouldn’t be so bad. She tried to tell herself not to leap to any wild conclusions or give in to unsubstantiated fear.

She handed him the belt, searching his eyes for some compassion. Ron looked away and stood up.

“Turn around, face the bedpost, and count it out for me,” he said as he folded the belt in half and stretched it out with a quick jerk. It created an ominous snapping sound that made Hermione jump.

He swung, hitting the middle of her back so hard that the sound reverberated throughout the room along with Hermione’s pained whimper.

“One,” she choked out, inhaling sharply from the sharp stinging sensation. Before she could relax, the belt made contact with her skin once again, causing her to gasp.

“Oh…! Two,” she said with a shaky voice, trying to will away the pain of it as she gripped the bedpost tighter.

She unconsciously tensed as she waited for the third, and when it landed, she moved away from it instinctively, catching the edge of it on her side.

“Oww! Ron!”

“Count!”

Hermione pushed her head against the bedpost.

“Three,” she said softly to cover the sob she felt welling up in her.

The belt whipped through the air audibly before landing on her back with a sharp clap, causing Hermione to cry out.

The belt snapped loudly as Ron swung it back again.

“FILCH!” Hermione yelled, moving out of the way just before it landed against the bedpost with a loud smack. She stared at the spot where the belt had landed numbly; processing the gravity of the fact that it could have been her back.

Shaking with anger, Hermione grabbed the belt from him in one swift movement. “If you want to kill me for what I did, do it quick! Not. Like. This!” she said as she began strike Ron’s arm with the belt over and over again.

“Ouch! Hermione! Oww!” Ron cried as he tried to turn and shield himself.

She hit him once more for good measure and threw the belt down. Her heart beat wildly and she could hardly catch her breath as she stood glaring at him, waiting for an explanation.
Ron brought his hands up to his head in dismay. “I’m sorry, Hermione… I-I thought that was what you wanted.”

Hermione frowned, looking at him more closely. He was shaking. Her anger was quickly replaced with pity and she stepped forward to embrace him, hugging him tightly. As Ron returned her embrace, Hermione groaned; her back was on fire.

“This isn’t you,” she said, after they had stood holding each other for some time.

Ron pulled back from her and set his jaw. “I can do whatever he can do!”

“Ron, I want you, not you trying to be someone else.”

“But that’s just it, you want someone else!”

“No, I want you, and Harry and—”

“And him!”

“It doesn’t change how I feel about either one of you.”

“And that’s supposed to make me feel better?”

“Yes, it is, Ron. That’s all I can say.”

“This changes everything, Hermione. This is about more than some stupid prophesy! On top of being a Slytherin, he’s a Malfoy! For God’s sake, his family has known ties to You-Know-Who. They hate Muggle-borns. Even if there was a small chance he woke up tomorrow and decided to stop being a total prat, which I doubt will ever happen, we would still have to deal with all of the shit that goes with that!”

Hermione couldn’t help the tugging at the corner of her mouth, even though she knew it would only piss him off more.

He glared at her in warning. “What’s so funny?”

“You said we.”

Ron shook his head. “Well, I’m not going to just walk away from you because of him. It’d be our problem, not just yours.”

“If I were going to pick who I loved based on how little trouble they caused, I wouldn’t be with either you or Harry,” she said.

Ron narrowed his eyes. “You love him?”

“No, that’s not what I meant… I mean, I don’t know.”

“Geez, Hermione,” he said shaking his head.

“Look, Ron, every relationship has problems; if it turns out that he wants to be with me or… us after this is over, we’ll just have to face whatever comes along as it happens, just like we do everything else.”

“I wish you would stop and think about this the way you think about your schoolwork,” he said.
“You don’t think I have?”

“No, I think you’re thinking with other parts of your body,” he said disapprovingly.

“That’s rich coming from you, of all people.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You always say I think too much and that I need to just have more fun.”

“Oh great, now you decide to take my advice!”

“Ron, maybe you should take your own advice,” she said, wrapping her arms around his neck and reaching up on her tiptoes to give him playful kiss.

“This is insane,” Ron said.

“No more insane than sleeping with two of your best friends,” she said, pressing herself against him.

“Actually, that makes a bit more sense than what you’re proposing,” he said, trying keep still as to avoid responding to her.

“Tell that to everyone else,” she said, putting her head against his chest.

Ron pushed her back gently. “I’m still mad at you,” he said, looking at her with forced frown.

“I know,” she said, smiling. “And I’m mad at you too.”

Ron turned his head to hide his smile, but Hermione pulled his chin back and they both had to laugh at his failed effort to stay angry.

He lifted her up on his lap as he fell back on the bed, and she wrapped her legs around him and sat, straddling him.

They both began to kiss apologetically when Ron lifted her off his lap and rolled her over to lie on her back. Hermione winced, and Ron looked down at her with a worried expression.

“Turn over; let me rub your back.”

Hermione nodded and turned over slowly.

“Oh, shit, I’m so sorry!” he whispered, his fingertips touching her back carefully.

Hermione bit her tongue to keep from telling him he should be. It was obvious he hadn’t meant to hurt her, but she also didn’t want it to ever happen again.

“I know you didn’t mean to hurt me,” she finally said.

“I swear I didn’t! I’d never really try to hurt you. I guess I got carried away; it didn’t seem that bad when I was doing it,” he said, running his fingertips over the welts.

Hermione hissed at the contact, but Ron continued to rub his hands over it, determined to make her feel better. She slowly relaxed and began to enjoy the sensation of his hands massaging the sore spots.

“I don’t get it though, when he did it, you got turned on. I saw you, you liked it,” he said with a
question in his voice.

“I got turned on because I knew I was safe. I knew he was enjoying it; it was different. When you were doing it just now, I was really scared, and… you weren’t enjoying it, Ron, you were doing it out of anger,” she said, glancing up at him.

Ron bent over to kiss the tender flesh. Hermione exhaled.

“Are we okay?” he asked.

“I don’t know, are we?” she asked with one eyebrow raised.

“Of course!”

“Even if I want to see where things go with Draco?”

Ron softly groaned and sucked in air before speaking. “Yeah,” he finally said with a sigh.

“Can we start this day over again?” she asked.

“Yeah, I’d like that.”

Ron stopped rubbing her back and bent over to pick something up off of the floor. When Hermione saw that it was his belt, she looked back at him with trepidation.

“Relax. Do you trust me?”

“Right now? To tell you the truth, not really,” she said with a smirk.

Ron smirked back. “Well then, I’d say we’re even.”

She shook her head. “I trust you, Ron,” she said reaching out to put a hand over his.

He looked down at her hand and smiled. “Good, because that’s more important to me than any of this.”

He bent over to kiss her once more, taking care that it was soft and light. “Think you could handle turning over now?”

Hermione nodded and rolled over.

“Put your hands up.”

Hermione slowly raised her hands above her head, watching him expectantly. Ron leaned over to kiss her once again as he took her wrists into one hand and pushed them against the far left bed post, which caused Hermione to shift her body diagonally across the bed.

He took the belt and wrapped it around her wrists and the bedpost and then tightened it securely. With her wrists tied to the bedpost Hermione found herself becoming aroused, her body tingling with anticipation.

Ron kissed her forehead and then traced his lips over her face and down to a hardened nipple, teasing it with his teeth while squeezing the other. Hermione began to squirm under the attention he was giving her breasts, when Ron pulled back to look at her face.

“Don’t stop,” she pleaded.
“Yeah?” Ron asked.

“Yes, please…”

He smiled, running his fingers over her nipples and then sliding them down over her belly to her very wet centre to graze her clit before slipping a finger inside of her. She bucked up against his finger, trying to urge him to move it more, when he pulled it out.

Hermione groaned in frustration and her eyebrows furrowed at the pleased look on his face.

He bent down once more to resume attention to her breasts with his mouth as he put two fingers inside of her and curled them up as he pushed into her deeper. He began to finger fuck her, slowly increasing the pace. Hermione started to moan and grind herself against his fingers, spreading her legs wider as she worked towards coming.

He pulled out again, sucking on his fingers as he sat up.

“Ron!” she said huffing.

Ron smirked. “You thought you’d get off that easily? You still need to be punished,” he said as he stood up.

A slight wave of panic rose in Hermione as she watched him walk away. “Ron, what are you doing?”

“He can’t escape me,” he said as he opened the door. He turned to look at her and shook his head before closing it, leaving Hermione bound to the bedpost, aroused, and very frustrated.

Harry took a deep breath as he walked toward the other bedroom door. It was ajar and he cautiously stepped closer, pushing it open slowly. He didn’t know why he was trying to enter as quietly as possible, but he was. The door creaked open and Harry saw Draco sitting on the bed, in all his arrogant glory, with that annoying smirk on his face.

“Morning, Potter,” he drawled.

“Malfoy,” Harry said contemptuously.

They looked at each other for a long moment and then Draco stood up.

“How about some breakfast before we get started?” he asked.

Harry considered it for a moment and gave him a stiff nod.

“Come on, then,” Draco said, walking past Harry.

They searched the cabinets and refrigerator for breakfast food, and took seats at opposite ends of the table, eating in strained silence.

Once his breakfast was done, Draco drank the last of his juice and slammed the cup down on the table, staring boldly at Harry.

“Ready, Potter?”

“Sure, Malfoy,” Harry said as if accepting a challenge to a duel instead of sex. He finished up his
juice and rose from his seat, staring at him.

Draco extended his arm in mock courtesy. “After you.”

Harry rolled his eyes and descended the stairs to the bedroom.

As soon as he entered, Harry heard the door close behind him and lock. He quickly turned about face on his heel to stare at Draco, who was just inches from him.

“No, how shall we began?” he asked softly with a coy smile.

Harry was determined not to be shaken by the Ferret and steadied himself to hold the other boy’s stare. He surprised himself when he barely flinched as Draco reached out and ran a hand up his chest.

Harry could feel his heart beating rapidly, and he tried to hold his breath without notice, but his mouth was watering, and he had to take a big swallow before speaking.

“How about we start with a bit of kissing,” he said, doing his best imitation of Draco the day before.

Draco stifled a small laugh. “Sounds good to me,” he said, moving his hand up Harry’s chest up to his neck to pull him into a kiss.

Harry felt his knees go weak as his mouth descended onto Draco’s, whose lips were sweet with the taste of pumpkin juice. He couldn’t resist the urge to lick them. He lapped at the boy’s lips for a few moments before Draco possessively grabbed hold of Harry’s tongue, sucking it into his mouth. Harry hugged him tighter. Draco released his tongue, and snaked his own into Harry’s mouth, exploring, while trying to control. But Harry was doing his best to show his skill, and a tingle ran the length of his spine as a moan of appreciation filled his mouth.

Draco seemed to remember Harry liked having his hair pulled and moved to grab a fistful of messy black strands. Harry’s cock jerked as his head flew back, and he couldn’t seem to control pressing himself against Draco, only to discover he was just as affected. They began to walk back toward the bed, their lips still locked together.

Harry felt the back of his legs hit the bed, and he went rigid, not wanting to fall on his back and be on the bottom. Besides not wanting to send the wrong message to Draco that he was willing to surrender control, he was aware that he usually was the bottom when it came to Ron and wanted to be the taker for a change.

Draco appeared to sense his hesitation and broke the kiss. Before he could react, Harry felt himself being pushed back onto the bed and then being straddled. Draco’s body on top of his felt just right, not too heavy, but a force that demanded recognition in all of its slender, well-defined beauty. He couldn’t take his eyes away from the body weighing down on him.

Harry wanted to push Draco off of him, but didn’t put up any resistance as Draco kissed him once again. He could feel himself melting as he reached up with one hand to pull Draco deeper into the kiss.

For a moment, he surrendered completely and let Draco cover his body and pull his hands up on either side of his head, pressing them into the bed before he broke the kiss.

“Damn, Potter,” he said, staring down in approval.

“You’re not so bad yourself,” Harry said with a small smile, enjoying the feeling of being pinned for...
“Last I heard, I was gorgeous,” Draco said with a smug smirk.

Harry’s face became hot and Draco let go of his hold on his hands to run a hand over Harry’s chest.

“Take it off… all of it,” Draco ordered.

Harry frowned. “You’re not going to order me around like you did ‘Hermione. If anyone is going to give orders today, it’ll be me,” he said in what he hoped was a firm voice.

He waited for Draco’s rebuttal or a biting retort, but he was surprised to see pale lips curving upwards.

“Is that so?” Draco said, sitting up to get adjusted in his straddle over Harry.

“Yeah,” Harry said, trying to resist the urge to grab Draco's hips and push himself against him.

“All right, then; your wish is my command,” Draco replied, giving an exaggerated head bow.

Harry couldn’t tell if Draco was mocking him or was really willing to do as he was told. He licked his lips nervously as his mind raced about what to do next.

He could feel Draco’s stare as the boy waited for Harry to say or do something.

“Well?” Draco asked smartly, grinding himself into Harry. It was just the right response to rile up Harry’s nerve.

“Well… take off your shirt.”

Draco smirked and pulled his t-shirt over his head. Harry eyes slowly took in the spotless, creamy flesh and lean, toned muscles of Draco’s frame, and he had to force himself look back up at the boy’s face.

“You’d like me to remove the rest, I assume?” he asked.

“If I wanted you to, I’d tell you.”

“Right.”

Harry gave an aggravated sigh. “Yeah, take it all off.”

“Of course,” he said, still smiling.

He got off of Harry and pulled down his trousers, revealing he hadn’t bothered to put on underpants. Harry almost laughed. What was the point anyway? Harry had already seen his cock before, but now that he knew he would be touching it, he studied it more closely and couldn’t help the twitch of his own as he gazed at Draco’s impressive erection.

“Now what?” Draco asked, egging him on with a challenge in his eyes.

Harry stood up and threw him an irritated glance. “Now get on the bed, face down,” he said casting a blatant look at the cabinet by the bed, informing Draco of his intentions.

“Oooo, I’m scared. What are you going to do? Whip me, Potter?”
“Shut up, Malfoy.”

Harry watched as Draco gave him a cheeky smile and crawled up onto the bed to lie down on his stomach. He wiggled his arse up at Harry as he watched him.

Harry’s eyes danced over the various instruments in the cabinet, some of them were quite heinous looking. He realised that although the idea of punishing Draco sounded good in theory, actually doing it was another matter entirely.

“May I make a suggestion?” Draco offered.

“Did I ask you?” Harry said snippily.

Harry turned back to face the cabinet and then sighed when he realised he didn’t know anything about half of the things he was looking at. “Go on, then, what’s your suggestion?”

“See that medium black whip with the knotted strings over there?” he said, nodding toward the back of the case.

“Yeah,” Harry said looking at the whip curiously.

“That’s called a cat-o’-nine-tails. It’d be a good start.”

“It looks like it could hurt,” Harry said, eyeing the whip apprehensively.

“Isn’t that the point?”

Harry tried to hold his hand steady as he reached into the cabinet to retrieve the cat-o’-nine-tails whip. When he turned around, Draco was no longer lying down, but standing up, regarding him thoughtfully.

“Hold on, before you do anything, were you paying attention yesterday when I was instructing Weasley?”

“Yeah, you said not to hit here,” he said reaching out to touch Draco’s lower chest right over his ribs, letting his hand linger. Draco stepped forward, pressing his chest into Harry’s hand, gazing at him closely.

He reached around Harry’s back with both hands in a loose hug.

“I also said not to hit here,” he said sliding his hands along Harry’s lower back, pulling him closer.

“Or here,” he said running his hands up Harry’s back slowly until they rested on his shoulders. “You think you can remember that?” he whispered, pulling Harry closer to him.

Harry nodded slowly, trying to catch his breath once again. “Yeah.”

“You know, I could always show you by example first, and then—”

“No way! You’re not whipping me, Malfoy!”

“As I was saying, if you let me show you how to do it first, I’ll submit to whatever you want afterward.”

“Whatever I wanted?” Harry asked, his eyes narrowing in disbelief.
“Well, within reason, of course,” he said, letting go of Harry. “Give it to me,” he said holding out his hand.

Harry slowly handed over the cat to Draco.

“Now then, strip and walk over to the wall and put your hands up,” Draco said to him.

Harry watched Draco for a moment before taking off his clothes. He was blushing again, and couldn’t look at Draco; instead, he turned and walked over to face the wall. He put his hands up and braced himself against it, waiting in nervous excitement.

He heard Draco walking up behind him, and felt himself growing more anxious as minutes passed by. He nearly jumped when the strings of the cat touched his back. Draco was dragging the leather whip up his back slowly, as if trying to soothe him with it.

“Ready?” Draco asked quietly.

Harry nodded as he tensed his back in anticipation. He hissed at biting sting of the knotted ends striking his back and pushed his hands harder against the wall.

“Too hard?” Draco asked with what sounded like genuine concern.

Harry shook his head. “No.”

“Want it harder?” he asked, stroking Harry’s back where he had just struck.

“Yes,” Harry said clearly.

Draco raised the cat again, bringing it down harder in a different spot. Harry groaned and let his head fall.

“Harder?”

“Yes,” Harry said through clenched teeth.

Draco brought the cat down across Harry’s back again. Harry’s groan was louder this time, and he shook his head as if trying to clear it.

“Harder,” Harry said, turning his head to look at Draco as if daring him.

Draco looked at Harry in disquiet contemplation before dropping the whip. “No, that’s enough. You’re quite the pain slut, Potter,” he said, sounding more disturbed than pleased.

When Harry didn’t reply, he felt Draco inching up closer to him, pressing his cock against his arse.

“Aren’t you?” Draco asked as he grabbed a fistful of Harry’s hair once again to pull his head back. Harry heard himself moaning out a ‘yes’ as a hand reached around him and stroked his chest.

When he felt fingertips pulling at and twisting one of his nipples, he couldn’t help but push himself back as if begging for Draco to take him against the wall.

Harry was thrilled when Draco pressed himself more firmly against his arse as if considering it, letting his hand wander down Harry’s belly until reaching the hair between Harry’s legs. Draco paused momentarily as if he might withdraw his hand before quickly grabbing Harry’s cock tightly.

Harry let out a sigh as Draco began to stroke him while pulling his head back farther so that he could
talk into his ear. Draco stroked him fast and tight, just the way Harry liked it and Harry began to tense in anticipation.

“Are you going to come for me, Potter?”

“Yes,” Harry moaned.

“Turn around,” he said, letting go of both Harry’s cock and hair simultaneously.

Harry quickly did as he was told so that Draco could finish him off, only to see Draco smiling back at him with his arms folded over his chest.

“What?” he asked impatiently.

“You want to come?”

“Hell yes! What the fuck?”

“Ask me nicely, and I may let you.”

“What?”

“You heard me... Beg.”

Harry stared back at Draco in incredulity.

“Oh, piss off!” he said, pushing past Draco and going to the bed.

He fell onto his back and resumed stroking himself. He didn’t care that Draco was glowering at him in frustration as he got himself off. He pumped his hand furiously, moaning loudly as if he were being pleasured by some invisible presence, his come spilling over his hand.

He lay on his back panting and looking up at the ceiling, while Draco stood motionless against the wall, glaring at him.

“Come here, Malfoy,” he said.

“What?”

“You heard me, come here, or did you forget your promise?”

Draco grunted and walked slowly over to the bed.

Harry rolled his head to the side to look up at him. “Clean me off,” he ordered.

Draco shook his head and backed up.

“Just what I thought, you’re no better than your word,” Harry said with a disappointed sigh.

Draco balled his fists up. “I hate you,” he said through gritted teeth, staring down at Harry’s spent cock and the come gathered on his hand.

“I know,” Harry said, smiling up at the ceiling.

Hesitantly, Draco came closer to the bed and then slowly climbed onto it, hovering above Harry with a grimace on his face as he stared down at Harry’s softening erection and the mess he had made.
He dipped his head slowly toward Harry’s cock, and then paused and reached up and put a finger in the white creamy goo around Harry’s hand and brought it to his mouth, tasting it.

“It’s not really that bad, you know,” Harry said, still smiling.

“You would know,” Draco said snidely.

“And now you will, too… eat it.”

Draco’s face constricted as if he were about to vomit before he took a deep breath and inched closer to slowly stick out his tongue and flick it out at Harry’s hand. Tentatively, he began licking at the come covering it while Harry lay there, smiling down at him.

Draco had apparently decided to get it over with in due diligence, proceeding to lap at Harry’s hand with the same fervour of one given an important assignment. He licked and sucked until there was nothing left but saliva. He stopped to look at his work.

Harry let go of his cock and using two fingers he scooped up some come droplets that had landed on his hip and then pushed them into Draco’s mouth.

“You forgot some,” he said, smirking.

Draco didn’t seem to give any consideration to what he was doing and instead opened his mouth to suck on Harry’s fingers, licking the come away. Harry was more than a little surprised that Draco accepted his fingers so eagerly, allowing Harry to move them back and forth as if he were fucking his mouth. When Draco continued to suck on his fingers long after the residue had been cleaned off, Harry craned his head down to watch.

“Good boy,” he whispered, trying not to laugh at how it sounded coming from his mouth.

Draco looked up at him dangerously even as he continued to suck on his fingers.

Harry removed his fingers and grabbed a fistful of blond hair, pushing Draco’s face into his crotch. “You’re not done.”

Draco groaned and began to lick around the semi-hard cock before deciding to give it his full attention; licking it from the head to base with the same attention he had just given Harry’s hand.

“If I didn’t know better, Malfoy, I’d say you’d make a good humiliation slut,” Harry said teasingly.

“No more than you would,” Draco said pausing to look up at him before diving back down to resume his tongue bath.

“Lick my bollocks,” Harry said with amusement.

Draco rolled his eyes.

“No, I’m serious, clean them off,” he said as he tightened his hold.

Draco glared at him for only a moment before diving back down and taking him into his mouth once again, giving each testicle his full attention until Harry found himself hard again.

“I wonder… what your Slytherin friends would say if they could see you now?” he said with a fair amount of satisfaction.

Draco dug his fingers into Harry’s thighs as he continued to lick.
Harry moaned and rotated his hips, pushing himself up against Draco’s mouth. “You might as well lick my arse while you’re down there,” Harry blurted out.

Draco fought to rise against the hand on his head until finally Harry relented and released his grip. With a deadly stare, Draco lifted his head.

Harry held his breath, anticipating Draco cursing him and storming out of the room or perhaps something worse.

Instead, the boy gave Harry a small smile. “As you wish, Potter,” he said, lowering his head once more to kiss the head of his cock before sliding his tongue over it and down Harry’s length, each time inching lower, towards Harry’s arsehole.

Harry’s heart was beating fast in his chest. He didn’t really care if Draco licked his arse or not, but the fact that he was about to do exactly what Harry had told him to do, no matter how vile and disgusting, was extremely intoxicating. Fully hard again, he tugged on Draco’s hair.

“Stop!” he yelped, squeezed his arse cheeks together to guard against Draco’s approaching tongue. Draco lifted his head once again to look at him.

“What’s the matter? I’m just doing as I’m told,” Draco said with false innocence.

Harry shook his head. “I didn’t think that—”

“You didn’t think I would do it? Then why did you tell me to do it?”

Harry didn’t answer him, just stared up at the ceiling.

“You know what I think?” Draco said, raising himself up on his forearms and crawling up over Harry to hover over his body.

Harry stared up at him feeling something like a trapped mouse cornered by a cat playing with its food before the kill.

“I think you trying to control me because you’re scared,” Draco said, peering down at Harry.

“I’m not scared of you, Malfoy,” Harry said more to himself.

“Maybe not. Maybe you’re just scared of how I make you feel. It’s a lot easier to try and order me around than to just let go and feel,” he said.

“Yeah, and how do I make you feel?” Harry asked, his stare unwavering.

Draco seemed to be taken aback at the question, and stared back at Harry, not answering.

The sound of their breathing seemed loud as they both waited for the other to make the first move.

The uncertainty in Draco’s face was empowered Harry. He reached up and drew Draco into a deep kiss. Taking control of the kiss, Harry boldly explored the boy’s mouth as if he owned it while moving one hand from his neck down his spine to grab the soft flesh of his arse.

Draco moaned and began to grind, rubbing his hard cock against Harry’s. He seemed to enjoy the strange new friction it created.

Hearing Draco’s moans was heady as Harry realised that he didn’t have to take control, it was being given to him. He pushed up for more contact, rotating his hips while pulling at Draco harder to
increase the pressure and friction.

It wasn’t enough, and so Harry arched up, pushing Draco over onto his back so that he was now on top. He continued to grind into him insistently, while enjoying the view of Draco’s face, his eyes clenched shut, mouth open and desperate as he twisted his hips towards climax without a shred of self-consciousness about being underneath Harry in such a wanton state.

“Malfoy.” Draco kept his eyes shut and turned his head away.

“Draco,” Harry said, this time louder.

Draco turned his head back to face Harry as he opened his eyes.

“I want to fuck you,” Harry said cautiously.

“No!” Draco said, stiffening.

“I won’t hurt you,” he said looking down at him, stroking his hip, inching down towards Draco’s opening.

Draco tensed, but didn’t stop rotating his hips as he continued rub his cock up against Harry as if trying to beat him to his climax before it could go any further.

Harry pulled back, lifting Draco’s legs up and pushing his knees back to his chest. Draco whimpered looking up at Harry as if contemplating whether to stop him.

“Trust me,” Harry whispered.

Draco’s eyes sharpened as he stared at Harry who spat a gob of saliva into his palm and reached down to apply it to Draco’s arse when Draco squeezed himself together. Harry wasn’t surprised or annoyed by the reaction, and instead continued to stroke him there as he grabbed Draco’s cock with his other hand.

He was grateful when Draco slowly relaxed his strained hold on his arse cheeks as Harry caresses his flesh tenderly. Slowly, he worked his fingers deeper until he reached Draco’s arsehole. Once again, Draco tensed as Harry’s finger traced the outer ring.

He pressed his finger against it more, slipping in the tip of his finger when Draco once again tensed.

“I can’t…”

“You mean you won’t, because you’re scared.”

Draco bit his lip.

Harry leaned over and kissed the head of the cock before taking it in his mouth, causing Draco to groan and close his eyes. He continued to suck on him while pressing against the guarded ring that Draco was holding tense. Despite his persistent attention, Draco’s opening remained quite tight.

He let saliva slide out of his mouth and seep down to meet his finger to add to the lubrication as he pressed his finger forward a little further. Draco let him as he began to push himself into Harry’s mouth.

Harry’s finger was half way in now, and he could feel Draco quivering, going back and forth between relaxing and tensing as he moved against it. Harry started to slide his finger in and out slowly, stretching him until Draco was wiggling over it. Harry ventured to add another finger,
causing him to tense once again, but this time not as long.

Before long, Draco began moaning and pushing himself against both fingers, encouraging them to go deeper.

“Fuck me,” he murmured.

Harry let another massive amount of drool slide down before releasing Draco’s cock from his mouth. He sat up and pushing Draco's knees back to his chest once more before positioning himself at the slick entrance, waiting for Draco to open his eyes.

When he didn’t push forward, Draco did just that, looking at him impatiently.

“What did you just say?” Harry asked, looking down at him.

“I said fuck me!” Draco hissed.

Harry nodded as he rubbed the head of his cock against Draco’s entrance, leaning forward toward him. Draco let out a small sound as Harry pushed his head through the ring where his fingers had just been and paused to look at his face.

He had his eyes clenched shut again, and Harry felt something like sympathy for the anxiety he saw and bent down to lick at one of his nipples while he continue to push. Draco sighed as Harry took a nipple between his teeth and pushed himself up to take more of him, trying to get adjusted to the new feeling of being filled in such a way.

“Am I hurting you?” Harry whispered.

Draco shook his head and put his hands up around Harry’s back pulling him down. Harry took that as a signal to push on and so he did, driving himself low and steady until he was almost completely encased in Draco.

He withdrew carefully before pushing back into him, clasping his thighs as he tried not to lose control and begin pounding into him the way he really wanted to.

Harry began to thrust into him over and over with as much tender restraint as he could muster. He knew Draco would be okay when he saw the boy’s eyes fly open after he grazed his prostate. Draco cursed as he pushed himself up to meet Harry’s hips, appearing to abandon all fear.

“Harder,” he said, looking up at him.

Harry let go of his hold on Draco’s legs and fell into him, driving himself harder into him before pulling out and doing it again just as forcibly. He couldn’t believe how tight Draco was, and he found it exhilarating that his body was open and surrendering to Harry’s every movement. Harry took pleasure in the control he was being given, and letting go all consideration of self-control, he began to pound into Draco until sweat was dripping from his brow.

Draco began to thrash, and he called out Harry’s name as he came, clutching Harry’s arm tightly and spilling come over his abdomen. Feeling the hot, sticky release between them and hearing Draco say his name in the heat of passion was what sent Harry over the edge, and he came hard, holding himself still inside of Draco as he groaned.

He fell on top of him, wiping his sweat on the pale chest under him. Slowly, he slipped out of him and rolled over onto his back. He looked over at Draco to see how he was dealing with what had just occurred.
“What are you looking at?”

“You,” Harry said, smiling.

“That was…”

“Fantastic?”

Draco wrinkled his forehead. “I was going to say ‘not bad’, but I understand if you thought I was fantastic.”

Harry rolled his eyes.

“Of course, I may have to try it once more to be sure it wasn’t a fluke,” he said with a small smile.

“Careful, you may start to like it,” Harry said with a smirk, pulling Draco closer to him.

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When Ron came back in, he was greeted with a very irate Hermione, pouting and scowling at him. She had struggled in her bind to the bedpost, leaving a very raw ring around her wrists.

He brought over a plate of toast along with a large glass of juice and set them down beside the bed.

“Hermione, look what you’ve done,” he said, reaching up to untie his belt to free her wrists.

When he removed the belt and went to soothe her wrists, Hermione pulled her hands away from him and folded them across her chest.

“That wasn’t funny, Ronald,” she said harshly.

“It wasn’t supposed to be,” Ron said, looking back at her seriously.

“Are you hungry? I brought you some toast and juice.”

“No thanks,” she said stubbornly, still looking quite put out.

Ron shrugged, as he had been expecting such a response, and leaned over to take a piece for himself to eat.

“What do you think Snape is doing at Hogwarts?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” she said curtly, rubbing her wrists.

“I still can’t believe he’s letting us do this here, in his house. It’s mental.”

“Well, if it works it’d be worth it.”

“I suppose, if you really believe in it.”

“You don’t?”

“I don’t know, I guess we’ll see,” he said taking another bite.

Ron could see that she was eyeing his toast was thinly veiled interest, and even licked her lips as she watched him eat. Finally, she rolled her eyes and reached over to grab a piece of toast.
Ron slapped her hand away. She snapped her head back staring at him.

“I see you haven’t learned your lesson,” he said looking at her, waiting for a sharp retort. Hermione didn’t let him down.

“Oh, and what lesson was that, how much of a git you are?” she scowled.

Ron sighed. “I already offered you some toast, and you were rather rude to me and said you didn’t want any. But now, you want some… it’s the same problem as before… you think you can just take whatever you want, when you want, while disrespecting me,” he said in an uncharacteristically calm voice.

“Ron, you’re so hyper-sensitive!” she said, throwing her hands up.

Ron continued chewing long after the taste of toast in his mouth was gone. He was sick of it; she was always accusing him of being sensitive and too self-conscious all while constantly putting him down, scolding him like a child, and trying to tell him what to do.

He sat looking at her appraisingly for a few moments before smiling unkindly. “You know what? Maybe I am a little sensitive… and maybe you’re a rude and bossy little bitch who needs to be taken down a notch.”

Hermione’s mouth dropped open.

“So now you want to eat? It’s always all about you, isn’t it? But today is going to be about me,” he said as he grabbed the plate and put it on the other side of him before turning around to face her again.

“You’re going to show me some respect before you get anything you want.”

Hermione stared back at Ron as if he had grown another head before shaking her head. “I’m not in the mood for this, Ronald. I thought we discussed this – stop trying to be something you’re not.”

“I heard you. But this is me, Hermione. This is me telling you to get up and get down on your knees and extend me some fucking courtesy for a change.”

Hermione stared back at him, stunned. Ron raised his eyebrows and looked to the floor, signalling where she needed to be. He could tell that she was both aroused and hesitant about whether to follow his order, but he held his posture and gaze, conveying that he would accept nothing less than obedience. She sat up and threw her legs over the bed before slowly falling to her knees in front of him.

“Now, what do you say?”

“I’m sorry?”

“Are you asking me or telling me?”

“I’m sorry,” she said plainly.

Ron nodded. “Sorry what?”

“I’m sorry, Ron?” she said uncertainly.

“No, right now, I want you to address me as sir,” he said, waiting for her to object. But she didn’t. Instead looked up at him in surprise before nodding slowly.
“I’m sorry, sir.”

Ron let out a nervous sigh as if he were relieved she didn’t put up a protest. “All right, so you’re sorry. How are you going to make up for it?” he asked.

Hermione scooted closer to his lap and began to undo his trousers, reaching in to grab his semi-hard cock. She bent down and took it in her mouth eagerly; it grew harder under her oral ministrations.

Ron gave her mouth a few more thrusts before he pulled her off of him and ordered her to get onto the bed on her hands and knees.

She quickly obeyed and waited on all fours for him as he took his position behind her. He took a moment to enjoy the sight of her in that position, for him, at his command, feeling something like a sense of accomplishment. He turned around and sat behind her, enjoying the view.

Reaching out to touch her, he relished the feel of her as he ran his hand over her back and down between her arse cheeks. He picked up the belt again, and tapping it up her back playfully but then felt her tense as the leather brushed against the welts that it had left from before.

He felt guilty for a moment but quickly resolved to push it away as he laid the belt on her back, and leaned over her to kiss the welts. When he felt her relax again, he sat up to position himself at her entrance. She was very wet, undoubtedly from being controlled, and that it was from being controlled by him, not anyone else, made him very excited. He pushed her hair to the side and bent over her to whisper in her ear.

“What do you want?”

“I want you… sir,” she said, looking back as much as she was able to.

“How much?”

“Very much, sir,” she said, pushing herself back against his cock in invitation.

Ron sat back up, gripping her hips tightly with one hand, as he stroked himself with the other before moving himself into her wet heat completely. Hermione spread her legs farther apart and pushed back insistently, and he shook his head at the gesture. She was still trying to run things.

He smacked her arse firmly, making her still instantly.

“This is for my pleasure, not yours,” he said sternly.

He smiled to himself in satisfaction when she nodded in understanding.

When he picked up the belt resting on her back he immediately noticed her apprehension in the way her body tensed. But this time, instead of allying her fear, he played on it by folding it in half and snapping it with a quick pull. Once again she jumped at the sound as she seemed to brace herself for him to strike her again. He quickly made it clear he had no intention of doing such a thing and instead, he gathered her hair in his hand, pulling it away from her face.

“Open your mouth, Hermione,” he said firmly.

He waited a moment before wrapping the belt around her mouth, pushing her mouth wide around it as he began to pull back. He was happy to see she was complying, trying to accommodate the full width of it so that he could fix it between her lips securely.
“Bite down on it,” he ordered.

She opened her mouth wider, letting the belt wrap around her face as she sunk her teeth into it.

“You’re my whore, ‘Mione, first and foremost, mine. You remember that,” he said as he pulled the belt back towards himself as he propelled forward, driving his full length into her.

Seeing her submit herself to this treatment so willingly lit a fire in his groin, and Ron couldn’t help but drive himself into her hard and with increasing zeal. He pushed himself into her harder as he pulled back on his makeshift rein; bringing Hermione’s head back with it.

Hermione moaned loudly around the belt in her mouth as she bucked back onto Ron, begging him for more with her body.

She gripped the mattress as Ron began to smack her arse while using his hold on the belt to pull her back onto his cock again and again. He had to will himself not to come when he heard a muffled scream as her first orgasm washed over her. He didn’t want it to be over and was determined to make it last as long as possible. He fought with himself as she continued to moan loudly and whimper, coming several more times as he continued to fuck her hard and steady.

When he couldn’t hold back any longer, he pulled back on the belt one last time and he came with a loud groan. He tried to calm himself, falling over on her back to rest for a moment before kissing it again. He let go of the belt, lifting it over her head and then turned her over.

She licked at the sides of her mouth where the belt had dug into her skin and then swallowed, wiping up drool that had run down her chin. He reached up and began to wipe it off before leaning in to kiss her.

He could see her still trembling from the experience of it, and he placed a hand on her arm to calm her down.

“You all right?”

She looked up at him with a big goofy smile on her face. “More than all right,” she said.

Ron blushed and reached over for the plate of toast.

“You want some toast?” he asked with a snigger.

Hermione shook her head, smiling, “Yes, sir, I’d love some, thank you.”

“You’re always welcome,” he said as he broke off a piece of toast and brought it up to her lips.

When she opened her mouth and accepted it, it made Ron smile.

“You don’t have to call me sir now that we’re done,” he said, embarrassed.

“So, is that how this is going to work?” she asked once she finished chewing.

“I guess; you scratch my back and I’ll consider rubbing yours,” he said with a smirk.

“I think I can live with that,” she said, accepting another piece of toast from his hand, licking teasingly at his fingertips.

“Good, because I have something else I’d like to do before we do anything else today.”
“Oh, and what is that?” she asked as he fed her the last piece.

“Go back to sleep, you woke me up way too early.”

“I can definitely do that,” she said, sounding relieved.

Ron was glad to hear that she agreed and snuggled up to her. They held each other close as the fatigue from their most recent exercise took over, sending them into a long peaceful rest.
The Learning Curve

I wanna know you like I know myself,  
I’m waitin’ for you, there ain’t no one else,  
Talk to me baby, scream and shout,  
I want to know you inside out.
I wanna dig down deep,  
I wanna lose some sleep,  
I wanna take my time,  
I wanna know your mind…

-“Inside Out” by Bryan Adams

Harry woke to find Draco turned over, hugging himself in a fetal position in his sleep. When Harry brushed his hand over the pale-skinned back in front of him, he felt cold clamminess. He heard Draco mumble, “Please, no,” and punch at the air before turning over to face him. Draco’s eyes were still closed in sleep. Harry took the opportunity to examine him closely while he didn’t have to worry about being scrutinised in return. He considered touching his face, but decided against it.

Disentangling himself as gently as possible, Harry sat up on the edge of the bed to gaze at the spectrum of light coming in from the small window from across the room. Judging from the faint way it lit the room, it had to be just past dawn. He turned his head to consider Draco for a few more moments.

They had had sex a few more times the previous day and once more the previous night, and it had left Harry feeling more confused than anything. He couldn’t exactly continue thinking of Draco as an enemy, but it didn’t seem as simple as just establishing a sexual bond for the ritual. There had been a lot of awkward silences in between their sexual encounters before it had finally settled into a kind of comfortable silence.

What Harry did know was that it felt good to hold Draco, to penetrate him, and to be inside of him, but did that make them lovers? Something had certainly changed, but Harry was unsure exactly what.

He climbed back into bed and threw an arm around Draco, who murmured and then slid closer into his body. Harry watched him sleep for a while and then fell back into a light sleep of his own.

In the next room, Hermione was stirring but trying to be as still as possible. She wasn’t sure how early in the morning it was because the room they were in had no windows, but she knew it was really early.

She was still reeling from her long night with Ron. He had alternated between taking her completely, experimenting with different ways to bind and gag her, to doting on her with food, massages, and hugs. She knew that their relationship had made a significant shift, but she wasn’t sure how it would actually play out when they weren’t in the bedroom or were around other people. It made her feel slightly uneasy, not knowing where the boundaries stretched in terms of their bedroom games and their real relationship, but she didn’t really want to have a formal discussion about it, either. She wanted to see how he would treat her publicly before deciding that she had made a mistake in giving
him so much control.

She was also anxiously trying to think of another way to get him and Draco to bond sexually—if they couldn’t manage to find a civil way of doing so on their own. She had doubts about their ability to make such an effort. She even seriously considered the possibility that she may have to discourage them from being alone in a room together, for fear it might lead to violence.

Sliding out of bed, Hermione went to the small bookshelf over the desk to pull a book she’d been dying to read ever since she laid eyes on it, happy that she could immerse herself in it without interruption for a few hours. However, she finished the book rather quickly, in less than an hour, and found herself becoming restless as she lay back down, trying not to fidget or disturb Ron for what felt like hours.

Finally, when she felt enough time had passed and could take no more, she shook him awake.

“Ron… Ron,” she said, nudging him.

“What, Hermione?” he said under his breath, his eyes still shut.

“I think it’s time to get up,” she said.

Ron grunted and turned over.

“Ron, I’m serious. You’ve been asleep long enough!”

“Since when did we have a schedule?”

“Since none of you want to take the initiative to complete this assignment properly, especially when it comes to each other.”

“There’s a reason for that, you know,” he said irritably.

“I know you aren’t fond of him, Ron, but you made a promise to at least try,” she said, rubbing his back.

“I can’t believe this!” Ron said, burying his face into the mattress.

“Well believe it. Now, are you going to go over there, or do you want me to?” she asked firmly.

“Do you seriously think having me and Malfoy in a room full of torture devices is a good idea?”

“They aren’t torture devices, well not really, but I see your point. I’ll go tell Draco to come over,” she said as she got out of bed.

Ron huffed and pulled the pillow over his head.

Hermione softly knocked on the door to the other bedroom and heard Harry say ‘come in.’

When she entered, she was shocked to see Harry with his arm wrapped around Draco and couldn’t help but stop in her tracks to stare at them. They looked so peaceful and comfortable; it was surreal.

“Can I join?” she asked, wriggling her eyebrows.

Harry gave her an amused shake of the head and then waved her closer. Hermione climbed onto the bed sliding in between them.
Draco stirred and then groaned before opening his eyes. “And just what do you think you’re doing?”

“Trying to get a sense of what this will feel like,” she said, sliding her hand up his chest.

“Well, what do you think?” he asked, putting his arm around her, touching Harry.

“I think I like it,” she said, looking up at him as she wiggled her arse against Harry.

“You’re a slag,” he said with a smile.

“More woman than you can handle is what you mean,” she said, wrapping a leg around Draco’s leg.

“We’ll just have to see about that,” he said, pushing himself against her suggestively.

Harry cleared his throat. “Hermione…”

“Yes, Harry?” she asked as she reached up to pull Harry down to kiss her.

He resisted, pulling back to give her a grave look as he ran his hands up her lower back, which was exposed from her t-shirt riding up.

“What’s this?” he asked.

“Harry, please…” she said, trying to pull down her shirt.

“What the fuck?” Harry asked, anger in his voice as he traced the fading lines of a bruise, lifting her shirt higher to expose three more fading bruises.

“It’s nothing, Harry, really!”

“What do you mean it’s nothing! Did Ron do this?”

Hermione glanced back at Draco, who was staring at her, waiting for her to answer.

When she didn’t, he slid his hand up her back, pushing Harry’s out of the way. “Did he hurt you? I mean, really hurt you?” Draco asked, his expression changing sharply.

Hermione shook her head. “We had a nice day together; it just started out a little rough,” she whispered, avoiding his eyes.

“Let me see; turn around,” he demanded.

“It’s nothing, Draco!”

“Let me see, now!”

Hermione took a deep breath before rolling over to face Harry, whose nostrils were flaring.

“Hmm, it’s not so bad,” he said, sounding relieved, which earned him an icy stare from Harry.

Draco rolled his eyes at Harry’s glare and fixed his eyes on Hermione’s back.

“Did you enjoy it?” he asked, brushing the bruises with his fingertips.

“What?” Hermione and Harry asked in unison.

“It’s a fair question,” he said, looking up at Harry. “If she really is a pain slut, it’s not a big deal. I’ve
seen far worse. Some subs even like the marks; they consider them souvenirs to remember the experience by."

“That’s completely mad!” Harry said, looking at Draco like he was mental.

“You didn’t answer the question; did you like it?”

Hermione shook her head slowly.

“Well, that’s not good. It looks like Weasley doesn’t know how to follow directions, but that’s not really shocking, is it? But I think you’ll live,” he said as he pulled down her shirt.

Hermione didn’t know whether to be hurt that Draco didn’t seem bothered by the bruises or relieved that he wasn’t angry, which could have lead to more tension between him and Ron. She decided that she felt a bit of both, and ignored Draco completely as she gave Harry a tight hug.

“Harry, don’t be mad. I want you in a good mood for our day together,” she said, stroking his cheek.

“Oh, I see, that’s why you came in here then?” Draco asked.

“Of course,” she said, giving Harry a slow lingering kiss.

Draco frowned. “Well, I guess that’s my cue,” he said, waiting for her to turn around.

When Hermione didn’t turn around or answer him, he sighed.

“Who knew Gryffindors were so sensitive,” he said in annoyance. “A Slytherin witch would know what to do with two wizards in her bed,” he said.

“Been there, done that,” she said, turning her head to give him a dismissive look before turning back around to lay her head against Harry’s chest.

Draco snorted and reached over Hermione to pull Harry into a passionate kiss.

Hermione gasped when he did, and when the kiss ended, he looked down at her and chuckled, then slid out of bed and went to the bathroom.

Once he closed the door and they heard the shower turn on, Harry looked down at Hermione and let her go, putting some space between the two of them.

“What was that all about?” he asked.

Hermione folded her arms.

Realisation dawned on Harry’s face. “You’re mad he wasn’t mad about the bruises?”

“Why would I care?” Hermione asked, looking aggravated.

“Oh, I don’t know, maybe because you like him?” Harry suggested.

“When he’s not being a prat,” she said in frustration.

“I think that’s a part of his charm, actually,” Harry said with a smile.

“Oh, and when did you come to that conclusion?” she asked with an eyebrow raised.

Harry shook his head. “I’m not having this conversation with you; right now I want to know what
happened between you and Ron,” he said, staring at her like he wouldn’t take no for an answer.

“Harry, please drop it,” she sighed.

“No, just because you’ve suddenly lost your sense of reason doesn’t mean I have. What the hell was Ron thinking?”

“He was upset and went a bit too far; it really was an accident.”

“He hasn’t seen upset yet,” Harry said, staring at the door as if he were contemplating going over to confront Ron.

“Harry!”

“No, he’s going to have to answer for this; I should have known better than to let him use a belt,” he said.

“It’s over now, all right? Ron and I have an understanding,” she said, smiling.

“Oh? And what is that?” he asked with sharp interest.

Hermione shook her head, smiling.

“I take it that you’re pleased with it?” he asked.

“I think so; we’ll see how it plays out, but now you really have to tell me how it went yesterday. How did you and Draco get along?”

“All right,” Harry said, not looking at her.

“Just all right? Looked like a lot more than that,” she teased.

“Don’t push it, Hermione,” he said tightly.

Hermione continued to stare at him anyway.

Harry shook his head. “It was okay, not what I was expecting.”

“Did you enjoy it?”

Harry shrugged. “Yeah, I guess… okay, yes,” he said, narrowing his eyes at Hermione. “What are you smiling about?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” she said, looking down.

“Ah, I think I know… you’re probably fantasising about us being a happy foursome. Hermione, you should know better,” he said, looking at her and shaking his head.

“I’m not saying we will all get a big house together or anything like that, but you can’t say you aren’t excited to see what comes of it?” she asked, looking at him with hope in her eyes.

“What do you mean comes of it? Once this prophecy thing is over with, all of this will end. You don’t honestly expect Ron to accept Malfoy, do you?” he asked with amusement.

“Ron doesn’t control what I do. I do, and for your information he said he was fine with it!”

“You’re lying again.”
“No I’m not! You can ask him!”

Harry scrunched up his face. “I can’t believe Ron would say that; he must have been really randy.”

“Ron’s full of surprises,” Hermione said, getting a dreamy look in her eyes.

Harry sniggered. “Oh? What exactly did you guys do?”

“A lady never kisses and tells,” she said coyly, running her fingers over his forearms, inching her way up to his biceps.

They heard the shower cut off and waited for Draco to emerge. He came out still slightly wet, fully nude, running the towel around his head. Both Harry and Hermione stared at him in admiration. He smirked as he dropped the towel to put both hands behind his head and rotated his hips to a non-existent drumbeat, which made Hermione and Harry laugh.

“Thought you might like that,” he said, smiling as he began to dress.

“Oh, get over yourself,” Hermione said, grinning. “Why are you even getting dressed? Just go over like that; Ron might even appreciate it.”

Draco’s smile turned to a grimace. “I’m not walking over there starkers; the longer I can put this off the better.”

Hermione shook her head. “We’re here to work on something, remember that.”

“How can I ever forget?” he said bitterly as he finished dressing.

“Have fun,” Harry said, trying not to laugh at his obvious apprehension.

Draco scowled at both of them before leaving the room and slamming the door.

They both looked back at each other. “So…” Hermione said hesitantly.

“So?” Harry asked, waiting for what she was going to say.

“This has certainly been an eye opening few days.”

“It has,” he said.

“Are still angry with me?”

“A little,” he said.

Hermione nodded solemnly.

But then Harry smiled. “But not much.”

Her eyes lit up. “I’m sorry I lied to the both of you; I really am, Harry.”

“I wasn’t even that mad about that part; I think I’ve known about you and him all along. I saw the way you two looked at each other. And I think I even understand why you didn’t tell us.”

“Then why were you angry?”

“Because Hermione, you’re just… perfect. You’re brilliant, proud, and strong. I never thought I’d see the day when you would allow someone to tear you down, and then for you to get off on it. It
was just… shocking I guess.”

“You really think I’m being torn down?”

“That’s what it looks like to me,” he said, looking at her in concern.

“Harry, I’m choosing to do this; I control what happens to me. Do you really think Draco would be able to say and do the things he did to me if I didn’t let him?”

Harry didn’t reply.

“Do you think I had to give him my wand? Do you think I had to beg him for anything?”

“I guess not,” he finally said.

“And the only reason why Ron got as far as he did with the punishment was because I trusted him enough to let it go that far, and it got out of hand.”

“I’ll say,” he said.

“That’s not the point. Give me a little more credit and stop treating me like I’m not in control of what’s going on. Remember our conversation in the dungeon when you were mad at Ron?”

“Yeah,” Harry said. “That seems like such a long time ago.”

“Well, it’s the same thing; this turns me on… it’s really that simple. Harry, don’t make this complicated.”

“I don’t want to feel like shit if I do something like that to you.”

“So this is more about you.”

“I guess I just don’t know how to be okay with it.”

“Maybe if you stop thinking about what you’re supposed to feel like, it may help.”

“I don’t want to end up hurting you like Ron did,” he said, caressing her back.

“Well, how did it feel when Ron hit you?” she asked hesitantly.

Harry blushed and turned his head.

“Harry,” she said, pulling his face back to look at her. “How did it feel?

“I don’t know… it felt good, like it clears my mind or something,” he said, looking embarrassed.

“Or something,” she said, smirking.

“Did you let Draco do that to you?”

Harry nodded slightly.

“And you’re giving me grief about it?!”

“I’m used to pain, Hermione, I’ve dealt with it for as long as I can remember; only now, it feels like I’m in control of it. I don’t know why, but it feels good. But I can’t understand why you would like it.”
“I think you do,” she said.

They looked at each other in silence for a few moments, and then Harry reached out and traced her jaw line with his knuckles. He pulled her toward him to give her a tender kiss. Hermione moaned softly into his mouth and leaned into him. When he finally pulled back, he looked down at her, smiling.

“I want to make love to you, is that all right?”

Hermione smiled up at him. “I’d like that very much.”

“Good. Want to join me in the shower?”

“Are you trying to say I smell?”

“Yeah, Hermione, you stink; that’s why I’m rock hard right now,” he said, looking down at his erection.

Hermione looked down at his erection and gave it a good squeeze before sitting up.

“I hope you don’t mind… I brought strawberry scented soap.”

~*~

After taking his sweet time eating breakfast and cleaning up, Draco slowly, as slowly as he ever had in his life, walked back down the stairs to go step into the room where Ron was lying in bed.

He took a big breath before closing the door and held himself up against it, staring at the bed where Ron was hidden under the covers and pillow.

“Get up, Weasley!”

Ron groaned and rolled over, staying buried.

“Well, at least take a shower,” Draco said with a disgusted look.

“Why? What would be the point?”

Draco softly tapped the back of his head against the door staring up at the ceiling. For once, the ginger git was right. He couldn’t believe he was here right now, faced with the repugnant task of shagging Ronald Weasley.

He shook his head. “Right, how about we just pretend we shagged and then you tell them how good it was.”

He heard soft muffled laughter coming from the bed, which made him relax a little.

“Well, we have to do something,” he said, staring at the massive lump on the bed.

Ron took the pillow off his head and slowly sat up staring at him for a fair amount of time.

“You want to play chess?”

Draco put his hands to his temples and began massaging them. “What?”

“Like you said, we have to do something; playing chess is something.”
Draco couldn’t help but smile, feeling relief that Ron seemed just as intent on prolonging what they were supposed to be doing a little while longer.

He nodded in approval. “Alright, Weasley, chess it is, but first, clean your arse, just in case you get the understandable urge to touch me.”

Ron wrinkled his face at Draco before heading toward the bathroom.

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Harry turned on the shower, waiting for the water to warm up before stepping inside pressing his back against the wall, giving Hermione room to step inside. It was a small shower, and with the two of them, there was not much room to move around.

He let the water run over her, not minding the small draft he felt, feeling warmed by the sight of her luscious curves and the way the water made her skin glisten.

He took the strawberry scented soap and lathered it on a washcloth and started on her shoulders, rubbing in small gentle circles while she looked up at him with a small grin on her face.

He kissed her as he wrung the cloth over her, letting the suds run over her body. She lifted her arms and he moved the washcloth up the underside of them before slowly sliding it down to her sides. She tried to grab the washcloth from him and he jerked it away and kissed her. “No, not ‘til I’m finished,” he whispered, moving it up to slide over her breasts.

After lathering each one, he moved the washcloth down her belly slowly and then dropped it onto the shower floor. He scooped up the lather on her belly and began to work his way down to her pussy, working his hands over her mound and finally sliding them between her folds, pausing to gently play there for a while before moving his hands down to her narrower opening.

She moved against his fingers, trying to urge him to penetrate her when he stepped aside and let the water beat down on her, washing away all of the suds.

Hermione reached out to grab Harry’s hard cock and began to stroke it. He reached up to slide his hands up her body, and began playing with her breasts once more, enjoying the slick and slippery feel beneath his hands. His hands wandered down to her sides and traced her hips before reaching around and giving her arse a firm squeeze. Hermione tightened her grip on him, urging him forward.

He allowed her to guide him closer toward him until his body was pressed against hers. He sighed as she moved against him, loving the feel of her pert, wet breasts pressed next to his skin as the water streamed down between them.

He covered her body again with his own as their bodies slid against each other. Her warm, wet body felt good against his hardness and he let his cock rub against her belly until it found a slicker wetness between her thighs. They kissed again, this time Hermione wrapping her arms around him, her mouth needier than before as she pulled him into her.

Harry lifted her up and wrapped her around himself, holding her up against the shower wall firmly. When he found that he probably could not maintain the position for too long, he let her slide back down and bent his knees so that he could position himself.

Hermione hoisted one leg up around him so he could slide himself easily inside of her. With the water from the shower beating on his back, he held her leg as began to move. He stared into her eyes, taking care to try to make sure every stroke communicated how much he adored and needed her. Hermione stared back at him appreciatively as she moved her hips to match his slow thrusts.
“I love you, Hermione,” he said in her ear, holding her tightly as he continued to move inside of her.

Hermione held him back tighter. “I love you, too, Harry,” she said before gasping as Harry pushed deeper inside of her and paused before quickening his pace and pushing deeper until hit a particularly sensitive spot, making her open her mouth in a silent gasp. She let her head fall back against the shower wall and let her fingers slip over his wet back in a desperate attempt to hold onto him as her orgasm approached.

“Oh, Harry!” she cried out as her climax overtook her and her leg held on tightly to his waist. The feeling of her clamped along his length made his balls tighten with his approaching climax. As she rippled along his length in her orgasm, he couldn’t help but let go and shoot his release deep inside of her.

They stayed against the wall for several moments, letting the water wash over them, until it began to turn cold.

“Oh, Harry!” she cried out as her climax overtook her and her leg held on tightly to his waist. The feeling of her clamped along his length made his balls tighten with his approaching climax. As she rippled along his length in her orgasm, he couldn’t help but let go and shoot his release deep inside of her.

“Okay, I’m getting cold,” he said, smiling.

“Yeah, but don’t you still need a shower?” she asked, laughing.

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After changing in the bathroom to avoid any uncomfortable nakedness in front of Draco, Ron came out and went over to pull a chessboard out of his bag.

Draco looked at him oddly. “You carry a chess board around with you?”

“When I can,” he said as he proceeded to set up the board on the bed. “Since it’s my board, I get white.”

Draco narrowed his eyes. “I prefer black anyway.”

“I’m sure you do,” Ron muttered.

Draco climbed onto the bed where Ron had laid out the chessboard.

Ron studied the board for several minutes to Draco’s annoyance and called out, “Pawn to E4.”

Draco immediately said, “Pawn to E5.”

Ron looked at him curiously before staring back at the board for a several minutes again before directing another piece, after which Draco immediately ordered his next move.

Ron looked up at Draco with a frown. “If you’re going to play, play right.”

“I’m playing just fine!”

“You can’t possibly be taking this seriously; you’re not even thinking about what you’re doing, just shouting out moves.”

“I know what I’m doing,” Draco said confidently.

“You haven’t even studied how I play. Every game is different depending who you play with; it takes a bit of time to learn your opponent. Haven’t you ever played before?”

Draco looked intently back at Ron. “You might want to follow your own advice when it comes to
people.”
“What?”
“I saw Hermione’s back; did you remember anything I said?”
Ron shook his head. “That was an accident.”
“That was no accident; you didn’t even think about what you were doing or what she needed before you started wailing on her.”
“What she needed? Now you’re going to try to tell me you know what she needs?”
“Not yet, but I’ll learn soon enough. If you really care about her, you’d do the same.”
“I don’t need advice from a pervert.”
“I’m not the one who left bruises on my girlfriend’s back.”
“No, you just humiliated her in front of all of us.”
“In case you missed it, she loved it,” he said proudly.
“I think love is a strong word… she didn’t hate it is more like it.”
“Whatever helps you sleep at night, Weasley,” Draco said indifferently.
Ron gave Draco a hateful stare and then directed his eyes back to the board, considering his next play again for several minutes and then called out his next move.
Instead of directing his next move, Draco sat staring at Ron face for a long moment.
“What are you looking at?” Ron asked in an unsettled voice.
“What does she see in you?” Draco asked with a frown.
“I was going to ask you the same thing,” Ron replied.
“It’s obvious, isn’t it?” Draco said, flipping his hair out his face, and putting his nose in the air.
“The only thing that’s obvious is that you use more beauty products than she does,” Ron said with a sneer.
Draco stared at Ron thoughtfully for a moment. “I know what your problem is, Weasley; you’re threatened because I just screwed the only people that really give a shit about you.”
“I’d watch my mouth if I were you, Malfoy,” Ron said, balling his fist.
“Oh, yeah; why’s that?” Draco asked looking back at him un-phased.
“That pointy little nose of yours is at risk of being flattened, that’s why.”
“You know what I’m starting to realise about you, Weasley?”
Ron stared back at him, waiting.
“You’re all bark and no bite; I’m not scared of you.”
“You should be,” Ron said, straightening his posture in a manner that emphasised his clear physical advantage over Draco.

Draco remained unperturbed. “You think just because you’re bigger than I am, you have the upper hand? Think again; I pulled you down once, I’ll do it again.”

“You caught me off guard, Ferret.”

“That’s not hard to do when it comes to you,” Draco said.

They stared at each other for a few more moments until Ron broke eye contact to look down at the board.

“Your move, prat,” he said his posture visibly relaxing.

Draco realised that he had gone tense, anticipating a physical altercation of some sort. He found himself briefly confused by Ron’s response to his taunt; it was unexpected. He kept his eyes on him for a few more moments before finally dropping his gaze to look at the chessboard.

This time he took several minutes to give the board careful consideration before calling out his next move.

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When they stepped out of the shower, Harry quickly dried himself off and then turned toward Hermione and began drying her off, stopping every few moments to kiss her in the places where the towel had been.

She put her hands over his. “What do you want, Harry?”

“What do you mean?”

“If I could please you in anyway right now, what would you want?”

“Just being here, you make me happy.”

“That’s it? I’m not letting you off the hook that easily,” she said, following him out to the bedroom where he began dressing.

He sat on the bed, thinking. “I just want to be happy. To feel loved,” he said looking up at her.

“You know I love you,” she said, sitting down beside him.

“I know, but you asked.”

“Can I ask you something else?” she said bashfully.

“Sure,” he said.

“Well… have you ever thought about me while wanking?” she asked softly.

Harry nodded, smiling diffidently.

She smiled. “And what did you think about?”

Harry turned his head. “Hermione, please.”
“No, tell me.”

“Nothing out of the ordinary, really,” he said a little too hastily.

She looked at him doubtfully. “Tell you what, you tell me yours, and I’ll tell you mine.”

Harry considered it for a moment and then nodded. “All right,” he said.

Hermione clapped her hands, excited that she would be finally able to confide all of her fantasies to someone. “Now, some of them I’m not sure of; I’ve only read about them, others I’m pretty sure I would like.”

“Wow, how many fantasies are we talking about?”

“Well, approximately fifteen, well, actually sixteen but I’m not sure if one of them qualifies as a fantasy, more like an idea. It doesn’t really get me hot, but I want to try it, you know?”

Harry smiled. “No, Hermione, but I can’t wait to hear about it.”

“Well, you first… go on,” she said pulling up a pillow and getting comfortable.

~~~*~~~

They had been playing chess for almost two hours, when Ron’s stomach made an unpleasant sound, which caused both of them to look up.

“Are you always hungry?” Draco asked.

“No! I didn’t have any breakfast; I’m starved,” Ron said, holding his stomach.

“I guess I could use a bite as well,” Draco said.

“Let’s take a break and get something to eat,” Ron said.

“All right,” Draco agreed, hopping off of the bed.

They ascended the stairs and raided the cabinets and refrigerator for any and everything that looked pleasing.

“Let’s just bring it down so we don’t have to keep coming back. I hate climbing the stairs,” Ron complained.

“There aren’t that many of them,” Draco said, giving Ron an annoyed glance.

Ron ignored him and grabbed a small bucket, putting in all the food he had pulled out; Draco dropped a few items in it as well and then disappeared for several minutes.

When Ron noticed he had vanished, he groaned. “I’m not your house-elf, Malfoy, get your own—”

He paused in mid-sentence when Draco came back into the kitchen with a large bottle of vodka.

“Where did you get that?” he asked.

“He has a pretty large bar. He thinks it’s hidden, but I know where it is,” Draco said, proud of himself.

“Snape drinks?”
Draco laughed. “Does he?”

“Then he’ll probably notice; didn’t you learn anything from that party?”

Draco smiled.

“You didn’t get in trouble, did you?”

Draco shook his head. “Not really.”

Ron gave him the once over. “Perks of being the teacher’s pet, I suppose.”

Draco narrowed his eyes. “I earn all of my marks in Potions, Weasley.”

“Right, whatever; does he have any rum?”

Draco nodded. “I think so.”

“Grab a bottle of that, too.”

“All right, you take the bucket down.”

Once they got in the room, they ate in silence for a good while before Ron became very comfortable and began smacking his lips. Draco looked up at him in disdain.

“Why do you chew with your mouth open?” he asked.

Ron shook his head. “I don’t know… what are you doing looking at my mouth?”

“I’m trying not to, but you don’t make it easy.”

Ron looked down embarrassed and closed his mouth as he continued to eat.

Draco watched him a few more minutes.

“Want to bring the chessboard to the floor?”

“’K,” Ron said, pulling out his wand to Levitate it over, letting it hover in the air for a moment and then lowering it steadily until it touched the floor.

“Not bad, Weasley.”

“Why are you surprised? We learned how to do that in first year.”

“Most of us; there are still a fair amount who can’t do it properly, and to be honest, I figured you for one of them. I mean, you still have problems Transfiguring simple things.”

“So what? It’s not my favourite subject, doesn’t mean I’m dumb,” Ron said irritated.

“Any pure-blood worth his bloodline should know Transfiguration like the back of his hand; it’s crucial magic,” Draco said.

“Yeah? Well, any pure-blood worth anything at all wouldn’t need to prove his worth to anyone,” Ron replied.

“Typical blood-traitor response, that is,” Draco said, shaking his head at Ron.
Ron smirked. “And shagging a Muggle-born and a half-blood makes you just as much of a ‘blood-traitor’ as I am.”

Draco ground his teeth. “I had no choice.”

“Oh? I don’t recall Snape putting a wand to your throat,” Ron said.

“I don’t have to explain myself to you, not that you’d understand anyway; some things are too complicated for that thick skull of yours,” he said defensively.

Ron noticed how agitated the subject was making Draco. He cast his eyes back down to the chessboard and called out his next move before pouring himself a drink.

“Have you been keeping up with the Cannons?” he asked, changing the subject. He saw Draco let out a small breath clearly understanding that he wasn’t going to pursue the previous line of discussion.

“Of course,” Draco said. “Did you hear the last match?”

“Yeah, that was completely foul! It’s obvious the coach is going loopy, letting a new Seeker play instead of starting Strasburg. He should always start! It’s no wonder they bombed; I bet they won’t make that mistake again,” Ron said.

“I don’t know about that; I hear Strasburg is looking at other options.”

“Who told you that?”

“Oh, you hear things,” Draco said.

“I haven’t heard anything like that.”

“You don’t have the connections I have,” Draco said with no condescension in his voice.

“Oh get off your high horse!”

“Weasley, I didn’t mean it like that… I’m just saying, I heard that Strasburg may be leaving, so it might be a good idea for them to let the new guy get his feet wet.”

“Well if that’s true, those box seats of yours won’t be worth much for long,” Ron said.

“It wouldn’t matter to me, I don’t care how badly they do; I’m a Cannons fan for life, no matter what,” Draco said.

Ron smiled and nodded, looking at Draco with esteem.

“To the Cannons, no matter what,” he said, raising his glass of rum in the air.

“To the Cannons, no matter what,” Draco said, clicking his glass of vodka and pumpkin juice against Ron’s.

They both took a big gulp of their drinks before setting them back down on the floor.

“Actually, I kind of hope they suck for awhile,” Ron said.

“Pardon?”
“It’ll make it easier for me to get a spot on the team when I leave Hogwarts,” he said half-laughing.

“You want to play for the Cannons?” Draco asked, looking at Ron sceptically.

Ron shrugged, looking up at Draco as if bracing himself for an insult.

Instead, Draco gave him an approving head nod. “You know, I actually think you’d make a fair Keeper, if you’d just relax a little.”

“Er, thanks,” Ron said a little taken aback. “I uh… well; I guess you’re a pretty good Seeker, just a tad overconfident.”

“There’s no such thing, Weasley, and I’m not pretty good, I’m damned good,” Draco said, pouring another drink.

Ron shook his head. “Definitely overconfident.”

“Here’s to being damned good,” Draco said raising his glass. Ron didn’t raise his glass.

Draco sighed. “Come on, Weasley, this is your problem, not enough confidence; it screws up your game!”

Ron sniggered and raised his glass to meet Draco’s. “To being damned good,” he said softly.

“No, say it like you really mean it!”

“To being damned good!” he said louder, feeling his chest swell with a sense of self-respect and he gulped down the entire contents of the drink.

Draco smiled. “Now we’re getting somewhere,” he said before knocking back a large swig of his own.

~*~

After Harry had told Hermione about just about everything he had ever imagined doing with her, Ron, and even Draco, Hermione shared her fantasies of trying out everything she had read about and a few things she had thought of on her own.

“Interesting,” he said, considering her carefully after she finished talking.

“What?”

“It’s just peculiar, you say you’re in control of everything that happens to you, but all of your fantasies are about giving up control.”

“Yeah, but even when I give up control, I’m in control of how it happens,” she said.

“And that’s what you want?”

“Yes.”

Harry shook his head.

“What?” she asked.

“Well, it sounds fake, if you ask me—more like role playing.”
“I suppose it is, in a way,” she said shrugging.

“Are you scared of what it would feel like to really give up control?”

Hermione dug her hand into the mattress. “I have no problems with someone taking over, within certain limits,” she said stiffly.

“And what are those?” he asked inquisitively.

“I don’t know… I don’t want someone to make me do something mental or that would really hurt me,” she said, beginning to fidget.

“Mental like what?” he asked.

“Like taking a piss on me or drawing blood,” she said, looking disturbed.

“Anything else?” he asked, putting his hand on his chin considering her.

“Harry, you’re scaring me,” she said, looking at him apprehensively.

“I’m just asking questions,” he said softly, watching her.

Hermione didn’t know what to make of the way he was looking at her, but she knew it made her nervous.

“Why, what are you planning to do?” she asked insistently.

A slow smile spread across Harry’s face. “Wouldn’t you like to know.”

“Yes, I would!” she said, getting agitated.

Harry chuckled. “Too bad, so far it sounds like you’ve had entirely too much control, even when Malfoy was playing with you; you didn’t seem that uncomfortable… this is all a game to you,” he said as if he had figured out a puzzle.

“And what’s wrong with that?” she asked.

“Nothing’s wrong with it, if that’s what you want, but I don’t think it is. I think you want someone to really take control, and you’re too proud to ask for it,” he said, waiting for her reaction.

Hermione swallowed as she looked back at Harry in anticipation.

He stood up, looking down at her. “You know, I think I’m ready to punish you now,” he said with a serious look.

“I thought you said that you weren’t really mad at me,” she said, looking up at him, feeling herself becoming anxious and aroused.

“I changed my mind… I’m furious,” he said with a dark smile.
Saviour Worship

Is there anything I can do for you?
Just ask… sometimes you won’t have to.
I’ll be happy just to make you happy,
And that’s true,
Whatever you want me to do…

-“Whatever” by Jill Scott

And I like the dirt that’s on your knees
And I like the way you still say please
While you’re looking up at me
You’re like my favorite damn disease
And now I know who you are
It wasn’t that hard,
Just to figure you out…

-“Figured You Out” by Nickelback

~~~*~~~

“What are you going to do to me?” she asked a bit breathlessly as she stared up at Harry.

Harry stood regarding her for a few moments and then looked away. “Nothing.”

Hermione frowned. “What? What do you mean? You just said that you were going to punish me.”

Harry looked back at her silently.

“It’s all right, I deserve it,” she said a little too quickly.

“Yes, you do,” he said as he made his way over to the far corner of the room to retrieve his bag.

He brought it back to the bed and began digging through it, pulling out his DADA book, and a
checked-out Potions book on the Protective Shielding Charm.

“What are you doing?” she demanded.

“Reading,” Harry replied. “I just realised that I haven’t read a thing over break, and I was a bit
behind when we left.” He scooted up to the head of the bed and opened up the DADA book.

Hermione stared at him, perplexed and frustrated.

“Harry, we just shared our deepest darkest sexual secrets and you’re going to read?”

“Yep. Didn’t you bring any books?”

“Yes, but I read them all! Besides, I don’t feel like reading!”

“Snape has a pretty nice collection upstairs, perhaps you should go and check it out,” he said,
glancing up at her before returning his eyes to the book.

Hermione huffed and glared back at him for several minutes. Harry didn’t seem to notice and
managed to get considerably far in his reading before she stood up dramatically and stomped out of the room.

~~~*~~~

Ron was on his third glass of rum, and he had a slight buzz, while Draco was working on his fourth glass of vodka and pumpkin juice, and his words were beginning to slur.

“Where did you learn all that stuff?” Ron asked.

“What stuff?”

“You know…”

Draco shrugged. “No, what?”

“That freaky stuff with the whip and all,” Ron said.

Draco smirked, taking another sip and looking at Ron over his glass. “Started early.”

“How early?” Ron asked, staring at him.

“You first,” Draco said.

Ron eyed him warily for a few moments. “Last year,” he admitted softly, taking another sip.

Draco sniggered.

“What’s so funny?” Ron asked, growing red in the face from embarrassment.

“Don’t tell me… Potter was your first?”

“Yeah and if I’m not mistaken, yours as well,” Ron said, smirking.

“My first bloke, Weasley,” Draco said defensively.

Ron smiled. “So, you did get your cherry popped!”

Draco scowled.

“Just be happy it wasn’t me; you wouldn’t be able to walk right now,” Ron said with a sly smirk.

“Ha! I knew you wanted to fuck me!” Draco said smugly, holding his glass in the air as if it were something to toast.

“Yeah, I’d fuck you, make you my bitch,” Ron said with a sneer.

Draco laughed. “Weasley, keep your fantasies to yourself. Besides, you can forget that one; you’ll never fuck me.”

“And you’ll never bugger me, Ferret!” Ron said.

“Well, I guess we have a little problem then,” Draco said.

“I guess so,” Ron replied, taking another sip of his drink. “And you didn’t answer my question.”

“Twelve.”
Ron gasped. “Shit, that’s not natural.”

“It’s not uncommon in old pure-blood families,” he said with a haughty tone.

“My mum and dad don’t believe in all of those traditions; a lot of them are stupid and some of them are downright freaky.”

Draco frowned. “Your mum and dad are too concerned with Muggles and what they’re doing to keep up with their own.”

“Say one more thing about my family, Ferret,” Ron threatened.

“Or what?” Draco said, slamming down his glass.

“You’ll see,” Ron said ominously.

They glared at each other for a few more moments.

“What’s your real problem with me?” Ron asked.

“Hmm, where do I start?” Draco asked sarcastically.

Ron used his fingers in a dramatic manner to count out the reasons. “So, you don’t like me because I have red hair, you think I’m poor, and I hang out with people who aren’t ‘pure’, anything else?”

“I don’t know, Weasley; why do you care?” Draco said with irritation.

“I don’t, but I care about her; can you say the same?”

“Yeah, I care about her,” Draco replied quickly.

“How much?” Ron asked.

“I don’t know,” Draco said uncomfortably, averting his eyes from Ron’s.

“Well, figure it out,” Ron blurted out.

“Mind your business, Weasley, that’s between me and her,” Draco said, looking back up at Ron hard.

“Malfy, if you hurt her, I swear I’ll—”

“You’ll what? Make a face and more empty threats? You’re full of shit!” Draco said, leaning over into Ron’s face.

“Try me,” Ron growled, putting down his glass and balling up his fist.

“Go on, then,” Draco said, sitting up straight and cocking his head to the side to give Ron a clear target.

Ron drew his fist back and swung.

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Hermione came back downstairs and plopped down hard at the end of the bed, causing the mattress shake.
“Are you quite done?” she asked, looking at Harry impatiently.

“No, actually, I’m re-reading the section on banshees. Did you know that they aren’t necessarily seen right before death? Their appearance can occur almost a year before someone dies.”

“Yeah, read it already,” she said grumpily.

“Do you remember that banshee Hagrid caught in the forest back in September, the one Seamus said knew him by name?”

“Yeah,” Hermione said as if she didn’t care.

“Well, do you think it may mean something, like maybe his life or someone else’s is in danger?”

“I don’t know, Harry!” she said, throwing her hands up.

“What’s wrong with you?” Harry asked curiously.

“Nothing!” she said, folding her arms across her chest.

Harry looked at her sceptically. “Did you see any good books upstairs?”

“Harry!”

“What?”

“I was hoping we could… you know,” she said, biting her lip in a sexy pout.

Harry’s face hardened. “I told you were being punished.”

Hermione narrowed her eyes. “So, this is your punishment? Reading a book?”

“Yeah,” he said with amusement in his voice.

She rolled her eyes. “Funny, Harry, I get it; you got your point across. I’m sorry,” she said, jumping onto the bed near him.

Harry pushed her away. “Don’t touch me Hermione.”

“Harry, you’re being silly!”

“No, I don’t want you touching me or talking to me unless I ask you something. Now you can go upstairs and get a book and bring it down to read, or you can just sit in the corner and pout, it really doesn’t matter to me, either way, just leave me alone.”

She stared at him, let out a frustrated groan and then stomped back upstairs.

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When Ron’s fist connected to Draco’s jaw with a loud smack, Draco only faltered a little, since he had been bracing himself for it.

He winced, put his hand up to his jaw to rub it and looked back at Ron as he drew out his wand.

“Scared to fight me with your hands, pretty boy?” Ron taunted.

“You mean like a Muggle, you stupid blood traitor,” Draco snarled.
Ron dove at Draco and smacked at his wand.

A bit of a magic left its tip and sent Ron back, falling on his arse; Draco pointed his wand down at Ron who immediately kicked up at Draco’s arm, knocking it out of his hand. Ron pushed himself back up to take another swing.

The pain of having his wand kicked out of his hand momentarily stunned Draco and as he looked around him to find it, another punch caught him on the side of his head. This time he wasn’t prepared for it and was knocked over to the floor.

He shook his head to get his bearings straight and then looked up to see Ron standing over him, ready to strike him again.

“Get up, I’ll wait,” Ron said, staring down at him.

Draco slowly rose, until he was almost standing up, but instead of standing up completely, he drove himself fully at Ron’s chest, bringing Ron down to the floor once more.

Ron was temporarily caught off guard by Draco rushing at him and fought to throw his weight back to get Draco off of him. He tried to try to anchor himself so that he could wrestle Draco onto his back and get advantage.

They began to struggle, and Draco climbed into Ron’s body pushing his forearm against the other boy’s neck, trying to pin him. He found that Ron was too strong to be held down from that position and that he had to keep moving against him to try to find a vantage point. Before he could though, Draco found himself being pushed off and onto his back, Ron’s body falling on him, threatening to crush him.

Ron settled his full weight onto Draco’s legs, holding him down. Finding his legs of little use, Draco tried to scratch and swing with his arms. He managed to land two punches into Ron’s chest and gave him an ugly scratch on his left cheek. Finally, Ron caught both of Draco’s wrists in a tight grip and slammed them back against the floor, pinning him completely.

Ron stared down at him triumphantly, his breath laboured from the struggle and his eyes gleaming with the rush from the fight. He shifted his hips over Draco’s, causing both boys to pause and consider the other use of their current physical position.

Draco stared back up at him, trying to catch his breath, his own eyes searching the face of the one hovering over his.

“Go ahead, do it!” he said, raising his head slightly from the floor as he squirmed underneath Ron.

Ron looked down at Draco with a confused expression as if he didn’t know whether he was being told to hit or kiss the boy underneath him.

Draco’s found his own expression changing, mirroring Ron’s confusion as he became aware that he, too, was unsure of what he really meant.

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Hermione brought down two large volumes on rare potion ingredients and opened one to read. She barely made an attempt to read it though, and it wasn’t long before she crossed her arms in protest.

She began to glare at Harry and make loud noises with every movement, making it clear that she was not pleased. He continued to ignore her until she threw the volume as far across the room as she
Harry finally looked up and sighed. “If you’re going to be such a bitch about your punishment, I’ll have to choose another.”

“Thank you! By all means, do your worst!”

“Fine,” he said, smiling wearily as he stood up and walked over to her. “I want you to clean the house.”

“What?” she asked, looking up at him.

“Here, leave your wand,” he said, pulling her up roughly and pulling her wand out of her back pocket.

“Harry!”

“Let’s go see what needs to be done,” he said, roughly grabbing her hand. He pulled Hermione along up the stairs into the living room.

“It’s dusty in here, could use a wipe down,” he said, looking around before heading back toward the kitchen.

“Dishes need to be done, floor needs to be swept,” he said, looking down at the floor before rejoining Hermione in the living room.

“Oh yeah, and then there’s dinner. Why don’t you figure out what you’re going to make us all tonight,” he said, looking back at her, waiting for her reply.

“You have to be kidding,” she said in disbelief.

“No, I’m not. Didn’t you tell me that you deserved to be punished?”

“This is not what I had in mind!” she said in exasperation.

“Since when is punishment supposed to be up to the person being punished?” he asked, looking at her in irritation.

“I don’t want to do this!” she said with a scowl.

“I see, so you want me to punish you by giving you what you want?”

Hermione glared at him and then walked off toward the kitchen.

They both were locked in what seemed to be an endless staring contest, neither one of them wanting to lose, not quite sure about what that would mean. Their breathing was heavy and it was the only audible thing except for their own heartbeat.

Ron moved first, shifting his weight on top of Draco.

Draco eyed him guardedly as if he still wasn’t sure if he was about to get pummelled into the floor or if Ron wanted something completely different. He held himself very still as he started up at Ron.

Finally, Ron loosened his grip on Draco’s wrists, who could have easily lifted his arms and reached
out to punch him or push him off of him; instead, Draco kept his wrists firmly against the floor.

When it became apparent that Draco wasn’t going to put up a fight, Ron began to inch in closer, leaning over carefully and slowly as if he were approaching a caged animal that could rise up and turn on him at any minute.

When he was finally nose to nose with him, blue eyes staring into grey, Ron’s mind began racing in a jumbled maze of alcohol, adrenaline, and confusion, wondering at what point the boy beneath him would resist if he kept leaning in.

“Go on,” Draco said softly.

The smell of soap, sweat, and vodka and pumpkin juice drifted into Ron’s nostrils as he let his mouth brush against Draco’s. It was slight, only light enough to tickle, and Ron drew back as soon as he did it.

Draco let out a small laugh. “Confidence, Weasley,” he said with a slight smirk.

Ron narrowed his eyes and then ground himself forcibly into Draco, eliciting a grunt before he leaned down swiftly and kissed him hard. It was bruising, more of an assault than a kiss, and when Draco opened his mouth to accept Ron’s tongue, it felt like a dare more than anything.

Ron pushed his tongue through Draco’s lips like he meant to invade and violate as he pressed his hands harder into Draco’s wrists. Draco continued to grunt and squirm against him defiantly.

When the kiss broke, Ron immediately dove down and began to attack Draco’s neck, sinking his teeth into the smooth flawless skin, making Draco whimper with reluctant passion.

Ron released his hold on Draco’s neck and began to rub his growing erection against the body beneath him as he felt for evidence of the same.

“Stop,” Draco croaked out.

Ron stilled on top of Draco, afraid to look at him, his head buried in the crook of his neck, his hands still firmly planted against his wrists.

“What are we doing?”

“What do you think, Ferret?” Ron said in the crook of his neck.

“I mean… what’s next?” Draco asked cautiously.

“I don’t know,” Ron mumbled.

“You’re not fucking me, Weasley,” Draco said, shaking his head.

“I suppose you think I should let you fuck me?” Ron asked, raising himself up to look down at him.

Draco didn’t answer.

“Not going to happen,” Ron said.

“Get off of me,” Draco said, pushing against the hands holding down his wrists.

“Fine!” Ron said, letting go and rolling off of Draco. “I’m tired anyway,” he said, staggering over to the bed and falling onto it face down. The effects of the alcohol and exhaustion of the fight over took
him quickly, pulling him into a deep dreamless sleep.

Harry reappeared upstairs to watch Hermione finish up the last of her cleaning. He looked over the kitchen and the living room before taking a seat in one of the chairs, watching her as she fell into the love seat in relief. She looked rather put out, but didn’t say anything.

“All done?” he asked.

“You tell me,” she said snippily.

“Looks like it,” he said, looking around.

“Great,” she said sarcastically.

“How do you feel?” he asked, stopping and looking her over.

“I’m tired, I think I’m going downstairs to go to sleep,” she said, rising.

“No, you’re not,” he said quickly.

“Harry, that’s enough! I don’t want to play this game anymore. I’m tired!”

“Well at least we’re being honest now,” he said.

“What do I have to do to end this?” she asked, walking over to him and sitting on his lap.

Harry shook his head looking at her.

“Get undressed,” he said.

Hermione gave him a smug expression, as if she had finally gotten what she wanted. She stood up and began undressing slowly in front of him as if to tease him. When she was finally naked she stood before him, looking at him expectedly.

Harry rose from his seat and went over to the bookshelf, peering at the many books there, and finally pulled one out and then sat back down.

“What are you going to do to me now?” she asked seductively.

“Get on all fours, right here,” he said, pointing to the area of the floor right in front of him.

Hermione lowered herself on all fours, twisting her hips invitingly and then arching her back so that her arse was sticking up in the air as she looked up at Harry with a knowing smile.

“Make sure your back is even,” he said, using his foot to push her arse back down until her back was
straight.

She looked up at him curiously.

Harry proceeded to prop his feet on her back and recline in the chair.

“Harry?” she asked looking back at him in confused shock.

“Yes?”

She looked up at him, waiting for him to explain.

“You don’t mind, do you?” he said, glancing at her as he opened up his book to read.

~~~*~~~

Ron was snoring loudly, and Draco awoke to find himself in bed beside him. He thought he had fallen asleep on the floor; how had he ended up in the bed? As Draco tried to think on it, a big freckled arm wrapped around him and pulled him close, causing him to tense.

“C’mere, Harry,” Ron murmured, roughly pulling Draco back against him.

Draco froze as Ron began to rub himself against him. He slowly rolled over to face the redhead. Ron snuggled closer to him and gave him a lazy wet kiss. Draco’s eyes went wide.

“You smell like soap,” he murmured. His breathing became more laboured before returning to his former snore.

It occurred to him that Ron really was rather large, his body was hard and his muscles were quite apparent, especially against Draco’s smaller frame. He thought of the way he had been pinned and wondered briefly if Ron had been lifting or if it was just all from Quidditch.

He studied Ron’s face for several minutes, trying to count how many freckles he had before letting his eyes venture down Ron’s body, wondering if he had freckles everywhere. Draco felt himself blushing when he realised he was trying to picture if Ron’s cock matched the rest of his body and whether or not it had freckles on it.

Ron’s snore broke, and he tightened his hold on Draco, moving his face up again. Draco didn’t know if he should try to push him off or try to slide out.

But before he could decide, Ron was kissing him again, that same slow soft lazy kiss, only this time it was wetter. Draco kept his eyes wide open, watching and waiting for Ron to wake up. When he didn’t, Draco groaned against his lips. Ron opened his eyes a little and then much wider when he realised he wasn’t kissing Harry—but he didn’t stop.

They watched each other, eyes wide open, in a mixture of disgust, confusion, and curiosity as they allowed the kiss continue. After a few moments, Ron cautiously slipped his tongue out to slide against Draco lips. Draco drew back a little before relaxing again, allowing Ron’s tongue to enter.

Draco swiped his tongue over Ron’s and then curled it up to suck on the redhead’s lips. Ron moaned when he did and pulled Draco tighter against him, pressing his erection against Draco’s leg. Draco whimpered when he felt Ron’s hard length against him. As he suspected, the redhead was large all over, and he felt himself shiver to think how such a thing would fit inside of him. Not that he would ever let Weasley bugger him anyway! He pushed back from Ron and broke the kiss for air.
They both stared at each other trying to catch their breath, frozen and unsure of what to say.

“Trying to take advantage of me in my sleep I see,” Ron said.

“You kissed me!”

“I thought you were Harry; you could have stopped me anytime!”

“Not when you’re wrapped around me like a lovesick pup,” Draco said.

“You liked it,” Ron said, smirking.

Draco didn’t reply, but reached down and squeezed Ron’s hard cock, causing Ron to yelp.

“How do you fit this up Potter’s arse?”

“Do want me to show you?”

“You’ll never fuck me, Weasley, especially with this,” he said, running his hand up the length showing through Ron’s pajama bottoms, looking down at it once more.

“Are you having fun?” Ron asked, looking at Draco strangely.

“Are you?” Draco asked gripping it harder with a smirk.

Ron grunted as Draco began moving his hand back and forth over Ron’s cock through his pajama bottoms, studying his reaction.

“Fascinating, if you had more brains, you’d know how to work such an endowment to your advantage.”

“I have everything I want,” Ron said, trying not to moan but steadily losing his cool as Draco continued to pull on his cock. “And if you’re going to play with it, at least wank me properly,” Ron said, pulling out his cock and grabbing Draco hand.

Draco watched as his seemingly small hand was guided over the large hard length in front of him, instructing him by example just how the redhead liked to be stroked.

“Like this,” Ron rasped.

Draco looked up to see half-lidded eyes, and he found himself pushing Ron’s hand out of the way so that he could take hold of his cock just like he’d showed him. He began to work his hands over the cock at a steady pace as Ron pushed his hips to help him along.

“Fuck, just like that, yeah,” he moaned.

And although Draco’s hand was getting tired from the movement, he felt he had gone too far to stop. It almost seemed as if it would be rude not to see it out ‘til completion, and so he kept the pace up.

Ron reached out and gripped Draco’s chest as he spilled himself over his hand. Draco looked down at his hand with a blank expression and then reached with his other hand for his wand to clean up the mess.

When he was done he raised himself on his elbow to stare down at Ron, who was laying on his back, eyes closed in contentment. Ron opened his eyes and looked bothered that he was being stared at.
“What? You want a biscuit or something for getting me off?”

“I expect you to return the favour, or don’t you have any manners?”

Ron groaned and reached out to grab Draco’s crotch, when Draco slapped his hand away.

“I had something different in mind,” he said.

Ron looked at him doubtfully. “Like what?”

“Suck me off.”

Ron laughed. “I’m not sucking your dick, Malfoy.”

Draco huffed and pulled out his hard cock and began stroking himself. Ron was clearly uncomfortable, not knowing what to do as his eyes darted from Draco’s cock to his face as if considering what or if he should do anything.

Draco continued to pump his hands over his cock, his eyes still shut and his face flushed with arousal. He groaned when he felt a strong hand close over his own and opened his eyes to see Ron looking at him with a mixture of arousal and apprehension. Draco slipped his hand from under Ron’s and let out a sigh as the hand holding his cock began to stroke him with a firm grip at a pace he approved of.

Ron moved up and over to rest on his elbows to get comfortable as he continued to pump his hands. When Draco opened his eyes, he saw the redhead watching him with fascination, breathing heavy in his own arousal.

“You want to fuck me don’t you, Weasley?”

“Shut up, Ferret, or I’ll stop,” Ron said, licking his lips, his eyes resting on the cock in his hand.

He began to inch closer to Draco’s cock, and Draco began to buck his hips up trying to urge him on. Ron’s mouth was inches away from the head of his cock.

“Come on, please…” Draco whimpered.

“What did you say?” Ron asked, continuing to stroke the smooth hardness in his palm.

Instead of answering him, Draco placed his hand on top of Ron’s head, pushing his face down closer. Ron only halfway resisted before finally succumbing to the pressure of Draco’s hand and taking him into his mouth.

Ron sucked on Draco with slow tentativeness at first, watching as if he were expecting Draco to say something degrading. When he didn’t, Ron closed his eyes and began to suck Draco with the same fervour of a lover intent on pleasing his partner.

As soon as Draco felt Ron’s hot wet mouth drawing him in, sucking on him willingly, he lost control. He placed both hands on Ron’s head and started rotating his hips and jerking erratically until it he felt his bollocks tighten and began to pump the redhead’s mouth with short harsh movements. Ron immediately removed his mouth from Draco’s cock and not a second too soon as Draco erupted, spilling himself over his belly and trousers.

When Draco opened his eyes, Ron was looking down at him with new curiosity, studying him. Draco quickly recovered his cool composure, wiping himself off with the bedspread, looking around
for his wand.

“You knocked it on the floor,” Ron said.

“Right,” Draco said, climbing out of bed to pick it up. He climbed back into bed slowly keeping his eyes on Ron as he did. “You know, you’re almost bearable; if you grew your hair out, I could pretend I was kissing an uglier version of your sister,” he said with a smirk before doing a cleaning spell on himself and the bedspread.

Ron narrowed his eyes. “And if I squint my eyes just right, you’d look like Luna with short hair, only much prettier. Maybe next time you could wear a sexy nightie for me…”

“Fuck you, Weasley,” Draco said as he moved down to far end of the bed to try to get some sleep.

Harry shifted his feet so that the weight was evenly spread out on Hermione’s back, and then put his book down in his lap to consider her.

“How are you doing?” he asked.

Hermione only nodded, not turning her head to look at him.

“Hermione, look at me,” he said.

Hermione slowly turned her head to the side, still avoiding his eyes. He reached over and pulled up her chin to see tears in her eyes.

“Why are you crying?” he asked.

“You hate me,” she choked back.

“You know I don’t,” he said.

“Then why are you treating me like this?”

“Why are you letting me?”

“Because you said this was punishment.”

“Then you agree that you deserve it?”

“Maybe,” she said, turning her head, staring ahead.

“You want to hex me right now, don’t you?” he asked.

She shook her head slowly.

“No?”

“I just want to make you forget what I did. I want you to know that you can trust me,” she said, turning her head to look at him.

“Do you trust me?” he asked.

“Of course, Harry,” she said.
'Then why did you feel the need to lie?'

'I thought that you said you understood why I did it.'

'I do, but also understand that you want something from me that you aren’t willing to give,’” he said.

‘What do you want me to do, Harry?’

‘What do you care? This is all about you, right?’

‘No, it isn’t; I’ll show you it’s not, whatever it takes,’’ she said, looking up at him.

‘Whatever it takes? What if I told you I wanted total control right now; would you trust me enough to let me have it?’ he asked, watching her closely.

Hermione let her eyes fall as she considered what he was saying before looking back up at him and nodding slowly.

‘Yes? Even if I wanted to whip you? I mean really whip you, would you let me?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’’ she said softly.

‘And what if I told you that you didn’t deserve to sleep with me tonight, that you should sleep on the floor beside me?’

She looked at him silently, and nodded slightly.

‘What if I told you to crawl around for the next day for me?’

She stared back at him cautiously before nodding once more.

‘And if I wanted to shave you?’

‘Yes.’

Harry lifted his legs off of her back.

‘Let’s go downstairs,’’ he said, standing up and leading her down the stairs.

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Once they got downstairs, Hermione tried not to show her apprehension as Harry moved around her to lock the door.

He stood looking thoughtfully in the direction of the chain with the shackles hanging from the ceiling in the corner by the bed. He turned back to face her.

‘Go over there,’’ he said.

She nodded and walked over to the corner.

‘Raise your hands… there you go,’’ he said as she raised her hands above her head to touch the shackles.

Hermione felt herself shaking, not from fear but anticipation.

She felt the cold metal of the shackle surround her wrists and for a brief moment felt a wave a panic
rise in her, but then she looked down to see Harry looking back up at her with concern.

“T’m fine,” she said, giving him a small smile.

“All right,” he said, fixing her other wrist in the other shackle.

He ran his hands over her body slowly, still staring at her face as he did so and then pinched a nipple, and then twisted it, still studying her face.

When she whimpered and then moaned he repeated the same on the other and then moved his hand down to brush his hands over her pubic hair.

“I think we’re definitely going get rid of this before we leave,” he said and sinking his fingers into her mound cupping it and waiting.

Hermione began to grind herself against his hand, trying to get her clit closer to the palm of his hand, which Harry teasingly made sure did not happen.

“Mmm, Harry, please,” she begged.

“You’re being punished, remember?” he said, smiling this time.

Hermione pursed her lips as Harry took his hand away. He began to kiss her, first on the lips, then moving down her chin to her neck, letting his lips linger before pulling away.

“So,” he said as he began to circle her, running his hand over her every few moments and removing it whenever she seemed to get comfortable or began to enjoy it, “let me get this straight, help me out here, all right?”

“All right.”

“You enjoyed it when Malfoy was whipping you with the flogger?”

“Yes.”

“But you didn’t like Ron using the belt?”

“No.”

“But not because you didn’t like being hit with the belt?”

“No, that wasn’t the problem,” she said.

“I see; so was it because you were scared or did he hit you too hard with it?”

“Perhaps a bit of both,” she said considering it.

Harry nodded. “And when Ron did whatever he did, did he talk to you?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know, like Malfoy did.”

“In his own way, I suppose.”

“What did he say?”
“I don’t know Harry, why?” she said, blushing.

“Did he call you names?”

“Yeah, one…”

“What?”

She looked at him for a moment before reaching up to muttering it under her breath.

“Why can’t you say it out loud?”

“I don’t know,” she said trying to look past him and not at him.

“Say it,” he said moving directly in front of her forcing her to look at him.

“Harry,” she whined.

“Say it…” he said more firmly.

“Whore… happy now?” she said quickly.

“Does that excite you? To say it?”

“Sort of,” she said, blushing.

“I think it’s more than sort of,” he said reaching out to pinch an erect nipple.

“You’re embarrassing me, Harry. Why are you smiling like that?”

“Tell me you’re a whore.”

“Harry,” she said giggling.

“Do it.”

“I’m a… I can’t.”

“You did it for Malfoy.”

“That was different…”

“Why?”

“Because he made me feel like…”

“His slut?”

She nodded.

“Well, I’ve known you a lot longer, and we’ve been fucking for over a year now, so you’re really my slut… not Malfoy’s. Isn’t that right?” he asked twisting her nipple, making her whimper. “Say it Hermione… tell me what you are.”

“I’m your whore.”

“You know what else I want you to be for me right now?”
“What?”

“My fucktoy. You think you’d like that?”

“Yes.”

“Tell me,” he said sharply.

“I want to be your fucktoy, Harry,” she said, looking back at him.

“You know fucktoys do as they’re told; they don’t get to control anything,” he said, watching her.

Hermione’s breath became short as she stared back at him. They stared at each other for several moments before Harry started to say something before stopping himself.

“What?” she asked.

“You know what I want my fucktoy to call me when we were all alone?”

Hermione shook her head. He leaned over to whisper in her ear, which made Hermione blush.

“What do you think of that?” he asked.

“Whatever makes you happy… Master,” she said softly.

Harry smiled.

“You know, Ron’s going to be pissed if he hears me call you that,” she warned.

Harry’s smile disappeared. “Ron’s not here, and he really can’t say shit to me after what he did to you. Now, are you ready to really pay for what you’ve done?” he asked sternly.

“Yes, Master,” she said, tensing up in anticipation.

Hermione could feel her breathing and realised she was panting for what was coming next, and squirmed her wrists against the metal confines of the shackles.

Harry walked over to the cabinet and took down a riding crop that Hermione recognised from her knowledge of horses. She held her breath as he walked back over to her. He stared at her for a moment before holding it out to her.

“Kiss it,” he said bringing it to her lips.

She nodded briefly before puckering her lips to touch the leather.

“Ask me,” he said.

“Please punish me… Master,” she whispered.

Harry drew back the riding crop and let it land across the middle of her back softly.

Hermione sighed in relief.

The next lash was a little bit harder but still barely felt. Harry continued, each lash growing firmer, until she had a thin sheen of sweat covering her body. Hermione felt herself floating, and she distinctly heard moaning but wasn’t sure if it was coming from herself. All she could feel was the leather hitting her back, and every time Harry touched her, it sent shockwaves along her skin,
causing new goose bumps to rise. Her eyes rolled to the back of her head.

“You all right?” she heard him asking.

She remained quiet until the last few stripes, when she could only hear herself crying out in pleasure as the surprise of an orgasm shook her senses, the evidence of it seeping down her inner thigh.

He rubbed her back and leaned over to give her a chaste kiss before reaching up to release her arms from the shackles. Hermione almost lost her balance as she was released and fell against him, letting him hold her up.

“Hermione?”

She felt both humbled and in awe that Harry had just taken her mentally to a sexual place she had never been before without engaging in sex. She felt compelled to sink to her knees before him.

“How did I do?” he asked, stroking her hair.

She didn’t have words for how he was making her feel so she decided instead to show him how much she appreciated what she was feeling. She bowed her head even further until her face was pressed against his feet and began to slowly shower his left foot with soft kisses.

Harry looked down at her, startled.

He backed up away from her and took off his clothes, watching her and she waited in silence. When he was done, he resumed his place before her.

Hermione resumed bathing his feet, using her tongue to lick and alternating between kissing and licking his toes working her way up his legs until she reached his sacs; she kissed them, taking one in her mouth, holding it in before rolling it around along her tongue. She looked up at him and was pleased to see him smiling down at her in his own pleasure. She started to lick along the length of his cock when he pulled it away from her mouth with a smirk on his face.

“Do you think you deserve it?” he asked, looking down at her.

She nodded.

“Hmm, I don’t know,” he said teasingly, stepping back with a wide step.

She fell to the floor and began to crawl until she reached his feet once again.

“Please…” she said, looking up at him, waiting.

He nodded, and she straightened up to meet his cock with her mouth. She began to kiss it, holding it reverently as she slid her tongue over it slowly.

She began to suck, but only got so far before Harry pulled her back off of it by her hair. He was holding her face back so that she was staring up at him. He held her hair tight within his grip as he took hold of his cock with his other hand and began to wank over her face. Hermione stuck out her tongue to try and taste him again, but he kept his cock just out of her reach, causing her to whimper.

“Don’t worry, got something else for you,” he said in a ragged breath as his fingers pulled tighter on her hair. Hermione closed her eyes as he spilled himself onto her tongue, chin and cheeks. He rubbed himself all over her face, spreading his come as he did until her face was completely covered.

She swallowed and licked what she could and remained on her knees as she absorbed what he had
just done, feeling both aroused and thoroughly used.

“Wait, don’t open your eyes,” he said.

She heard him walk away and then come back. She could feel him standing over her for several moments not saying anything before uttering a cleaning spell.

When she opened her eyes, he was smiling down at her.

“What took you so long?” she said.

“I don’t ever want to forget that,” he said.

“It’s not like we won’t do it again,” she said.

“Good,” he said.

“So… do you want to help me make dinner?” she said, standing up.

“Not really,” he said with smile.

Hermione suppressed a scowl.

“I’ll help you on one condition,” he said, looking at her with some apprehension.

She quirked an eyebrow.

“You remember that fantasy we both share about you being on a leash?”

Hermione felt her knees go weak as she nodded slowly.

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“Guys it’s time for dinner!” Hermione yelled.

It took Ron and Draco all of five minutes before they were climbing the stairs. They were greeted by the delicious smell of beef stew with potatoes, carrots, onions, and celery.

They both stopped in their tracks.

Their bowls had already been filled and Harry was sitting down with Hermione beside him on the floor, starkers, with only a collar and leash around her neck.

“Here you go,” he said holding out a piece of a roll for Hermione who kissed his hand before opening her mouth to accept it from him. She smiled up at him as she chewed, and Harry smiled back down at her, stroking her hair.

Ron and Draco both had their mouths open in shock.

“What the…?” Ron said in bewilderment.

“I didn’t know you had it in you,” Draco said looking at Harry in admiration.

“There’s a lot you don’t know, Malfoy,” he said, pulling on the leash, signalling her to rise and take a seat beside him.

Ron and Draco both took their seats, and began to eat slowly, watching Harry and Hermione with
strange fascination. Harry and Hermione continued to eat as if nothing were out of the ordinary until Harry paused to look up at her.

“Do you want something to drink?” he asked with a sly smile.

“Yes, Master,” she said with a smile, trying not to laugh at the gasp coming from across the table.

“Master?” Ron asked.

Harry smiled at Ron who started stabbing at his food.

Draco snorted. “OK, you two, playtime’s over.”

“Who says we’re playing?” Hermione asked, looking at him as if she were offended.

“Believe me, you are. Neither one of you have any idea what you’re doing.”

“We’ll figure it out,” Hermione said, putting her hand on top of Harry’s.

“Accepting someone’s collar or calling yourself someone’s Master is a serious matter,” he said looking back and forth between them.

“Please spare us the lecture, oh great sex god,” Harry said mockingly.

Ron sniggered. Draco ignored him. “Whatever, Potter,” he said before turning to talk to Hermione. “When you’re ready to stop playing and do the real thing, let me know,” he said winking at her.

Harry rolled his eyes.

“So, how are you two coming along?” Hermione asked, looking at the bruise on Draco’s cheek and the deep scratch on Ron’s face.

Ron and Draco both glanced at each other before continuing their meal, not looking at Harry or Hermione.

“Have you two even tried to do anything but fight?” Hermione asked.

“Yes, we have, and… things occurred,” Draco said with some difficulty.

“Things? Have you done the thing?” she pressed.

“Sort of,” Ron said with a look of confusion on his face.

“What’s that mean?” Harry asked.

“That means we’ve done as much as we can do for the moment and it will have to be enough,” Draco said in irritation.

Hermione whispered something in Harry’s ear.

Harry smiled and nodded approvingly.

“Do you two want to spend the night with us?” Hermione asked. “The bed is more than big enough.”

“You sure you’re ready for that much attention, Hermione? You can barely handle me by myself,” Draco said with a smug smirk.
Hermione scrunched up her face. “You haven’t seen what I can handle. Besides, who said anything about me being the centre of attention? I think today should be about Harry.”

They all looked up at Harry, and he blushed, looking down at his food. It was going to be a strange night.

They watched as Hermione undressed him, pulling down his trousers, and sinking to her knees before him, taking him into her mouth. Harry let his head fall back and then he sat down on the bed to get comfortable, twisting one hand through her hair, and the other around her leash.

He looked up at Ron who was visibly aroused from the scene in front of him and smiled. “Come here,” he said.

Ron walked over slowly, standing behind Hermione, and leaned over. Harry sat up and reached up to pull Ron into his mouth. They kissed for several moments before Ron pushed Harry down onto his back and climbed onto the bed beside him to continue the kiss. Harry removed his hand from Hermione’s hair and reached up to twine it in Ron’s, moaning into his mouth.

Hermione stopped sucking and climbed onto Harry, straddling him, and leaned down to move her mouth in for a three-way kiss with Harry and Ron.

Draco stood watching with a look that waivered from arousal to embarrassment as he watched the three. Hermione broke the kiss and turned to look back at him, nodding toward the bed. Draco took a deep breath and walked over, standing at the edge watching all of them.

Hermione rolled off of Harry and curled her finger, motioning for him to come onto the bed with them. Draco smirked at her and climbed between her legs, kissing her passionately.

When Ron and Harry’s kiss broke, Harry looked over at Hermione and Draco kissing and then turned to gauge’s Ron’s reaction.

Ron rolled his eyes and gave the couple a displeased glance and lay on his back. Harry raised himself up on his elbow to watch the couple more closely. When Draco broke the kiss he looked over to see Harry smiling back at him.

Hermione reached to push Draco towards Harry. She seemed to enjoy watching as they began to kiss over her. She slid out from under Draco and he fell onto Harry next to Ron, who watched them with a strange expression on his face. Hermione slid down and resumed sucking on Harry, glancing up at Ron.

Ron watched her, growing aroused at the scene in front of him, and when she looked up at him and pulled on his leg, he couldn’t help but slide down to join her. They kissed over Harry’s cock and began to take turns sucking him, until finally Ron took over and Hermione dived lower to lick.

Harry felt warmth spread all over him, and his head grew light as if he were about to faint as Draco continued to explore his mouth, their tongues locked in a now familiar dance. Harry moaned into the mouth covering his as Ron continued to suck on him. He opened his eyes as he felt Hermione’s tongue leaf his balls and her body slide up beside him. The attention they were giving him was overwhelming, and it felt like he was going to pass out. He broke his kiss but Draco continued to nip and suck along his neck, running his hand over Harry’s chest. Harry looked over at Hermione who was grinning up at him.

“Is this enough love for you?” she whispered, running her hand under Draco’s and snuggling against
him firmly.

Harry stroked his cheek against her, and ran his hand through Ron’s hair lovingly before Draco lifted his head and leaned over to take his mouth again.

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There was a loud pop as Snape and the other Apparated back into the room he had set up to keep watch over them. The last few days had been gruelling and dangerous, but he had finally gotten what he wanted after relentless hours spent picking, prodding, and debating with the one who was on his arm.

The other let go of his arm immediately and sat down, looking stunned that he was here with him. The one-way mirror bewitched to survey the two bedrooms had been carefully mounted in the wardrobe. Snape opened the wardrobe’s doors, pushing apart the clothing there to see what was going on.

He was a bit taken aback to see that they were all in one room, in one bed.

Finally.

Snape couldn’t help but smile to himself and looked back at the other who looked as if he were going to be sick.

“They’re doing well,” Snape murmured, staring at the mirror.

“That remains to be seen,” said the other, only glancing up before turning away.

“We must remain hopeful, what other options do we have?” Snape asked, turning to look at the other.

“Severus, did you ever consider that he is still here for one singular purpose—to die for us?”

“I don’t believe it; I won’t,” Snape said, keeping his eyes from the other. “And I won’t let that happen. I swore the rest of my life away to make sure that it doesn’t,” he said stiffly.

“Very well, but if it doesn’t work, that will be our only hope,” the other said before standing back up again. Snape gave the other a curt head nod, and the other turned to look at the scene in the bedroom with distaste one last time before Apparating away.

Snape stared back at the four, trying to suppress his rising arousal from watching the scene playing out before him in the mirror. He slammed the doors of the wardrobe shut, and went upstairs to fix himself a drink.
Tightened our belts, abused ourselves
Get in our way, we'll put you on your shelf...
I knew right from the beginning
That you would end up winnin'
Round and round
What comes around goes around
I'll tell you why...

-“Round and Round” by Ratt

You met you your match
When you play with my affection
You met you your match
When you tried to make me walk the line
When you decided you would hurt me
That’s when your grape fell off the vine

-“You Met You Your Match” by Stevie Wonder

Hermione awoke with the realisation that she had fallen asleep with the collar on. It suddenly felt restrictive and tight around her throat, and she could feel the cold metal of the leash between her legs. They were all lying naked together in a tangled pile. Her body was covered in arms, legs, and her hip was in the firm grip of someone’s hand, whose she wasn’t sure.

She was grateful that she had deflected attention from herself the previous evening onto Harry. She wasn’t sure if she was ready to take all of them on at once. The thought of even taking two of them at the same time, which she had only done once, still overwhelmed her.

She was about to move to remove the collar when she heard whispering nearby. Feigning sleep, she listened.

“I don’t know, that’s a bit harsh,” she heard Harry whisper.

“Come on, Potter, he has it coming to him; you saw her back,” Draco whispered back.

“I thought you said it was no big deal!”

“It’s the principle of the matter; she obviously didn’t enjoy it. He needs to be taught a lesson.”

“Maybe, but what you’re talking about is no better,” Harry replied.

“Ah, Gryffindor principles kicking in. Where I come from, it’s an eye for an eye.”

“More like a head for an eye.”

“That depends…”

“On what?” Harry asked.

“How you lost the eye,” Draco said.
There were several moments of silence, and then she heard Harry sigh.

“You’re just doing this because he punched you.”

“Do you seriously think I’m that petty?” Draco asked, sounding offended.

Harry didn’t respond.

“So you’re going to let it go, then? It’s as good as saying he can do anything he wants to her whenever he feels justified!” Draco continued.

“Hermione isn’t a doormat; knowing her, she probably hit him back.”

“And what about you? Have you said anything to him about it?” Draco asked.

Harry huffed. Hermione knew he was frustrated he hadn’t yet said anything to Ron about the welts on her back.

“Fine, but don’t do anything mental; if things get too out of hand, I’m putting a stop to it.”

“Of course,” Draco said, sounding pleased.

“Hermione, we know you’re awake,” Harry said, reaching over Draco to pull her leash from between her legs.

Hermione squinted as if awoken suddenly. “What?”

“You snore you know, and you haven’t been snoring for the last five minutes,” Harry observed.

She opened her eyes fully to stare up at Draco, who turned over to peer at her. He leaned in and kissed his forehead affectionately.

“I do not snore!” she protested.

“Yeah, you really do; it’s rather cute though,” he remarked.

“What are the two of you up to?” she asked suspiciously.

“Just a little payback,” Draco said with a sly smile.

“Harry,” she said with a warning in her voice.

“Oh, I’m Harry now? What happened to Master?” he said, giving the chain a good yank.

Draco sniggered. “I told you she wasn’t serious,” he said with a smirk.

Hermione looked up at Harry in irritation. “You’re not acting like a Master right now,” she said in a harsh whisper.

“It’s okay. We just want to make sure that Ron understands that what he did is unacceptable,” Harry explained.

“We already talked about this; he understands!” she said.

“Well, we just want to make sure that he never forgets,” Draco said firmly.

“Don’t you think that talking to him about it might be a more reasonable approach?” she suggested.
“Sometimes it’s best to learn by experience,” Draco said, glancing at Ron, who was curled up against Hermione’s back, his hand gripping her hip possessively.

“I don’t know,” she said, looking back at Ron in concern.

“Hermione, you know he’s hard-headed,” Harry reminded her.

“Yes, but he’s not going to take well to whatever you two have planned,” she said anxiously.

“That’s why you’re going to help us,” Draco said.

“I most certainly am not!”

“We won’t hurt him, not too much, promise,” Harry said earnestly.

She looked at both of them, narrowing her eyes at Draco, who looked like he was just barely restraining his excitement.

“All right, what do you want me to do?” she sighed.

“Just take our lead,” Draco said, giving her a devious wink.

She inclined her head quickly and began chewing on her lip like she always did when she was unsure of something.

Draco pulled Ron’s hand off of Hermione’s hip, causing him to stir. Hermione slid down the bed to give Draco full access as he rolled over to straddle Ron.

“What the hell?” Ron yelled.

Draco quickly grabbed Ron’s forearms, holding them up. He struggled to hold on to him and seemed about to be overpowered when Harry came over and cuffed each of Ron’s wrists.

“Harry! What are you doing?” Ron asked, staring at the metal restraints with wild eyes.

Hermione jumped out of bed as Harry and Draco both moved to pull Ron up.

“Ron, this will be much easier if you cooperate, okay, mate?” Harry pulled Ron toward the dangling chain and shackles hanging in the corner as Draco pushed the redhead from behind.

Ron didn’t put up too much of a struggle because he saw that Harry was involved, but he stared back at his friend with a mixture of confusion and fear.

“What are you doing, Harry?” he asked.

“Just wait, I’ll explain,” Harry said, pulling him along.

Once they reached the chain, Harry struggled briefly to bring Ron’s arms up and fasten them in the shackles.

“All right, I’ve played along… now do you mind telling me what the hell you’re doing?!”

“Sorry, Ron, but this is for your own good,” Harry said regretfully.

“What? Let me out of these things,” Ron protested.

Draco pointed his wand at Ron’s face, causing the redhead to whimper. He muttered something and
Ron gasped.

“I can’t fucking see! What did you do to me, Ferret?!”

“Nothing yet, Weasley,” Draco sneered.

Harry threw Draco a warning glance. “Don’t worry, Ron; it’s temporary. You’ll be able to see again soon.”

“Harry, you’re going to let him get away with this?”

“Actually, we all agreed on it,” Hermione chimed in.

“Hermione?”

“Yes, Ron?”

Ron was speechless.

“Aww, Weasley, don’t worry, it won’t be so bad; we just need to make sure you understand a few things,” Draco said.

“What I understand is that you’re an unbelievable git!” Ron said.

“Besides that…” Harry said with amusement, earning an elbow jab from Draco.

“Hermione, do you mind helping us calm him down a bit,” Draco said.

“Sure,” she said before kneeling down before Ron to grab his cock.

Ron groaned as her tongue began to slide over his length and toyed with the head, taking him into her mouth slowly.

She sucked him for a few moments until he had relaxed and was moving his hips as much as he could in sync with her mouth.

When she abruptly pulled back, he made a disgruntled noise.

“Whatcha stop for?” he asked hoarsely.

“Because she’s finished,” Harry said in a cold tone as his hand closed around Ron’s erection.

Ron sucked in air as Draco slid a rubber ring like object over his cock and pushed it all the way up to the base.

“What the hell is that?” Ron asked in a frightened whisper.

“It’s called a cock ring, Weasley,” Draco said.

“What’s it do?” Ron asked in a panicky voice.

“It’s more about what it doesn’t do…or allow, I should say.”

“What?”

“You won’t be able to come until it’s removed, Ron,” Harry said.
“Get this fucking thing off of me! Harry!”

“Sorry, Ron, fair is fair. This is your punishment,” Harry said plainly.

“At least the beginning of it,” Draco said.

“For what?”

“For what?” Hermione said indignantly.

“I thought we moved past that?” Ron said, addressing Hermione in a hurt voice.

“Maybe she forgave you, but you still have to pay for losing control like that; you could have seriously hurt her!” Harry admonished.

“I said I was sorry, Hermione; you know I didn’t mean it!”

“I know, Ron, but honestly, you scared the shit out of me, and I don’t want that to ever happen again,” she said.

“And it won’t! You know I wouldn’t hurt you on purpose,” he said in a pleading tone.

“That’s all well and good, Weasley, but this is just a little insurance to make sure,” Draco said.

“Come on, Ron, can you honestly say you don’t deserve something for what you did?” Harry asked.

“I guess you have no problem with punishment, except when it comes to yourself,” Hermione said, folding her arms over her chest.

Ron set his jaw and then gave a loud sigh. “Oh, all right! Just get it over with, then!”

“Now that doesn’t sound too enthusiastic,” Draco said.

“You’re pushing it, Malfoy,” Ron growled.

Harry slapped Ron’s arse hard.

“Ouch! I’m sorry, okay?”

“Yeah? I don’t want to punish you if you’re not going to appreciate it,” Harry said seriously.

Ron rolled his eyes.

“I, on the other hand, have no problem with making you appreciate it as we go along,” Draco said.

Ron jerked in his shackles as if he wanted to lunge at Draco but found himself only twisting in his bonds and let out a frustrated groan.

“Ron, did you see her back?” Harry asked.


Hermione pursed her lips and then looked at Harry anxiously.

“You’re right; fair is fair. Go on, give it to me, Harry,” Ron said tensing up.

“He used a belt, right?” Harry asked Hermione.
Hermione nodded slowly, turning away.

“How many lashes was it?” he asked.

“Three,” she said.

“He should get twice as many; he’s much bigger than she is,” Draco said.

“He won’t need twice as many because I’m going to do it,” Harry said motioning his head to Draco, who bent over to pick up his trousers. He slid the belt out and handed it to Harry.

“I don’t want to watch this,” Hermione said, heading for the door.

Draco glanced at her and shrugged, while Harry looked up at her one last time before she opened the door and walked out.

Harry turned around and circled Ron until he was standing up against the wall, behind him. Ron visibly tensed before Harry struck him across the back with the belt, hard.

“Fuck!” Ron bellowed.

“Hmm, let’s start over, shall we; count it out,” Draco said, nodding to Harry.

The leather hit his back once more.

“One!” Ron shouted.

Harry wasted no time giving him another a little higher up on his back, the sound of the belt striking his skin ringing out in the room. They heard Hermione shriek around the corner of the open door.

“Owww! Two! Geez, Harry! Alright, okay, just give me a minute here,” Ron begged, balling his fists in the shackles, trying to brace himself for the next one.

Harry quickly struck him once more in the same place.

“Three!”

Harry dealt a final blow across Ron’s back just as the redhead had exhaled.

Ron’s eyes went wide and he let out a strange sound like animal caught in a trap that was close to a sob.

“Just to make sure,” Harry said.

Hermione reappeared at the door once it was done. “Is it over?”

“That part is,” Draco said.

“Are you happy now? Take me down!” Ron demanded.

“Not quite, Weasley,” Draco said, pointing his wand at Ron’s face as he ended the blinding charm from his eyes.

Harry let the belt drop and came around to look Ron squarely in the face. He reached up to touch his shoulder, which made Ron jerk back as much as he could.

“Don’t touch me!” Ron said bitterly.
Harry gave him a shake of his head and turned around to regard Draco, who had pulled Hermione into his arms. Draco turned Hermione around so that he could look up at Ron as he began to kiss on her neck. Ron grunted and tried to look away.

“Draco, you’re so bad,” she moaned.

“You love it,” he said loud enough for Ron to hear before pulling back to look down at her. He slipped his hand around the base of her leash, pulling her face up roughly to look at him.

“There’s so much we haven’t done yet,” he said mischievously. He moved away from her until his back was against the wall.

“Crawl over here,” he said, stroking himself.

Hermione sank to her knees and began a slow crawl toward Draco. When she reached his feet, she looked up and rose to a sitting position before darting out her tongue to swipe the head of his cock. He stroked her cheek as she took him into her mouth.

Ron let out a frustrated groan as Harry walked over to position himself behind her.

Harry pulled her hair back to encourage her to push back against him as he began to press his erection against her back opening.

When Harry spread her cheeks open and said the lubricating spell, she tensed.

“Still not used to it?” he asked.

She shook her head slightly, as Draco placed his hand on her head and began to pet her. He looked down at Harry, who leaned over to sink his teeth into her shoulder to distract her as he pushed forward. Hermione moaned loudly over Draco’s cock, causing Draco to grunt and grip her head.

When Ron began to whimper, Hermione looked up to see him, red all over, his own body flushed, his cock the hardest she had ever seen it, and a miserable expression contorting his face.

She gave him a half smirk, half pitied expression before closing her eyes once more and gripping Draco’s thighs, as she continued to pleasure him. Draco let his head fall back against the wall and turned to look at Ron before closing his eyes.

Ron was alternating between opening his eyes and moaning helplessly to closing his eyes and cursing. He finally settled on watching the scene in front of him, despite his growing discomfort as the ring seemed only to tighten as his erection remained painfully engorged.

Harry began to develop a steady rhythm, gripping her shoulders as he worked himself into her before moving his hands down to her hips. He began to pull her with every thrust, making Hermione squeal and moan as she struggled to continue sucking on Draco with the same concentrated attention as before.

Draco used his hand to slow down her mouth’s movements, and he seemed to be making an effort not to come. Hermione pushed back, taking her mouth off of Draco as Harry started to drive into her hard and fast. She gripped Draco’s thighs harder, holding on as Harry let out a loud groan, spending himself inside of her.

She quickly looked up and moved her mouth forward to finish Draco off when he shook his head and moved to the side.
Hermione looked at him curiously. “You don’t want to finish?”

“Yeah, but not right now,” he said, glancing at Ron. Hermione looked up at Ron and then back at Draco with one eyebrow raised.

Harry lay on top of her panting, and so she and Draco stayed there in their positions for a few more moments before Harry pulled out and rose to his feet. He did a cleaning spell and then walked over to Ron. He reached out as though he were going to remove the cock ring when Draco pulled Harry’s hand back.

“Hold on, Potter; we’re not done,” Draco said quickly.

“Yes, we are, Malfoy; I think Ron’s learned his lesson.”

“Well, I’m not done,” Draco said, giving Harry a determined look.

Harry narrowed his eyes.

Draco balled his fist. “Let me talk to you outside,” he said, nodded towards the door.

Harry gave Draco a wary look and led him out of the door, closing it behind them.

Hermione was left with Ron who was glaring at her.

“Don’t look at me like that!” she said.

“I can’t believe you’re letting them do this to me!” he said accusingly.

“Oh, Ron,” she said walking over and touching his hard cock, causing him to wheeze. “Is it really so bad?”

“Yeah, it is! This is the worst case of blue balls I’ve ever had!”

Hermione tried to hide a small smile, which made Ron scowl even more.

She rose on her tiptoes, kissing him first on the cheek, then on his nose and then finally on his lips. When she pulled away, his mouth was twisted into a pained half smile, half grimace.

“When I get out of these things, I’ll make it up to you, yeah?”

Hermione smiled. “Yeah.”

Draco and Harry returned to the room.

“Hermione, let’s give Draco and Ron some privacy.”

Ron’s breath hitched while Hermione’s eyes darted nervously from Draco to Ron.

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“Yeah, they still have something to accomplish,” Harry said, wiggling his eyebrows.

“Oh, right,” she said. Ron shook his head furiously.

“Come on,” Harry said, grabbing her arm and leading her out.
Once Harry closed the door, Draco went back to lock it before turning around with a smirk on his face.

Ron groaned. “If you touch me, I’ll scream.”

Draco smiled. “I’m counting on it,” he said, walking closer to him.

“Listen, Ferret, test me if you want, but eventually these things are coming off, and I’m not going to have anything holding me back; you might want to keep that in mind.”

Draco shook his head as he drew even closer to Ron. “More threats, Weasley? I hardly think you’re in a position to be making any right now,” he said as he reached out to place his hand on the back of Ron’s lower thigh.

Ron suppressed a moan at the contact. He was still aroused from the sexual scene they had played out in front of him. He didn’t know how much more stimulation he could take. It was almost painful to be so erect and not be able to achieve release.

“What are you doing?” he asked with a shaky voice.

“Nothing, just touching,” Draco said, smiling up at him.

“Get away from me,” Ron hissed.

“I’m not hurting you… am I?” Draco asked in an innocent voice, running his hand along Ron’s thigh. Ron twitched and balled up his fists.

“NO… just don’t… please,” he whined.

“Please?” Draco repeated, peering up at Ron with new interest.

Ron seemed embarrassed he had uttered the word and blushed. “Stop it, Malfoy,” he growled as Draco continued to stroke his leg, inching towards his inner thigh.

“Stop what? I’m just admiring your skin… I’ve never seen so many freckles before,” Draco said, brushing his hands over a particularly sensitive spot. Ron gasped, hating his vulnerability. He could feel his ears burning.

“Yeah? Well, take a picture or something… Oh… damn it, just stop touching me! Oooh…”

“Do you like that, Weasley?” Draco asked, letting his hand brush over the head of Ron’s cock before returning to his thighs.

“You slimy git!” Ron snarled.

“Oh, now, you shouldn’t be calling me names,” Draco said with the hint of a threat in his voice. “What do you want, Weasley?” he asked, fingering Ron’s pubic hair.

Ron grunted and tried to look at the wall, mumbling under his breath.

“What’s that?” Draco asked, cupping his ear as if he wanted to hear better.

“I said I want you to get me off!” Ron barked.
“And what if I wanted to come first?”

“Fine…” Ron said, trying to shrug.

“I’d like to do that buried balls deep in your arse,” Draco said, smiling up at him.

“Malfoy…” Ron said, scowling.

“Yes?” Draco asked, tracing his fingers over Ron’s length.

“Damn it!” Ron said, staring down at his cock.

“You seem unhappy with your options; perhaps I should just leave. Can’t say when anyone will return, though. I suppose we’ll probably let you down for dinner,” he said, removing his hand and turning his back as if about to leave.

“No! Don’t go…” Ron pleaded.

Draco turned around slowly, but remained silent.

“Please…”

“There you go again… please… mmm. I really do like the sound of that word coming out of your mouth,” he said, walking back up to Ron, this time much closer.

“Quit it!” Ron said, trying to sound stern, his arousal betraying him. This time Draco wrapped his hand around the redhead’s erection tightly, pulling on it.

“Oh… Malfoy…” Ron groaned letting his head fall as he tried to find the words. He had never wanted to get off so badly in his life. The ring around the base of his cock suddenly seemed like the cruellest joke in the world.

“Yes, Weasley?” Draco drawled.

Ron moaned. “What… what do you want?”

“What makes you think I want anything? Maybe I just want to hear you beg all day,” Draco said in a low sultry voice that made Ron push himself into the boy’s unbelievably smooth hand.

Ron felt Draco’s hand grip him tighter, and then Draco began to stroke his length. He looked up to see Draco staring down at the cock in his hand, completely captivated, his face flushed, his breath ragged, and his cock as hard as Ron’s.

He licked his lips and looked up at Ron. “Are you going to beg for me, Weasley?” he asked breathlessly.

Ron stilled, taking in the effect all of this was having on Draco, and couldn’t help the smirk creeping across his lips. “You want me to beg, eh?”

Draco resumed to stroking him as he inched even closer, pushing his own hard cock against Ron’s thigh suggestively.

“Yeah, beg for me,” he said, his voice laced with wanton desire.

Ron felt a rush to his groin at the sight of the boy’s need and the feel of his cock against Ron’s leg.
“Please,” he said softly, studying Draco’s reaction.

Draco swallowed, and reached out to touch Ron’s chest.

“Please what, Ron?”

Ron felt the throbbing increase at the sound of his name coming from Draco’s mouth. He began feeling something like intoxication from the control he held by simply doing as he was told. He had never seen the ferret so affected by anything he had ever done and Ron wanted to see how much further he could push Draco.

“Please get me off,” he said.

“Get you off? Anyway I want?” Draco asked.

“Would that make you happy? To have me any way you wanted?” Ron asked with a small smile.

Draco narrowed his eyes, as if suddenly aware that Ron was wielding a certain amount of power over him.

“I can always take what I want,” he said threateningly.

Ron’s smirk grew. “Yeah, you could, but that wouldn’t be any fun. You want me to give it to you, don’t you?”

“I can make you give it to me,” Draco said defiantly.

“Is that right?”

Draco looked as if he were struggling, somewhere between strangling Ron and breaking down and asking him to let him have his way.

Ron took it all in, savouring the feeling that the boy in front of him was slowly unravelling.

“Come on, Malfoy, tell me what you want,” he pressed.

Draco glared at him in frustration.

“You want me to beg you to fuck me, yeah?” Ron asked with unveiled amusement.

“Are you going to or not?” Draco asked, trying to sound aloof.

“I’d consider it,” Ron said smugly.

“Yes or no?” Draco asked through gritted teeth.

Ron slowly nodded.

“What’s that?” Draco asked, drawing closer, his eyes boring into Ron’s as he reached up to run his hand down Ron’s jaw line, his fingertips brushing over the Adam’s apple and down Ron’s chest slowly.

Ron swallowed and his breathing became short as he felt his cock jerk. The effect Draco was having on him couldn’t be denied since it was jutting out, hard and aching.

Draco smirked as he let his hand move down Ron’s stomach, tracing the trail of red hair that led to
Ron bit his lip as the boy’s hand once again lightly traced his length, studying it.

He didn’t care anymore. His shame was outweighed by his need. He should have come twice over already and Draco’s hands on him were maddening.

“Yes,” he said finally.

“What do you want, Weasley?”

“I want you to fuck me, Malfoy, and take this fucking thing off of me so I can come,” he said plainly.

Draco let out a small, satisfied sigh, not quite as cocky in his victory as Ron would have expected. He hastily unhooked Ron from the shackles and removed the restraints from his wrists. Ron looked down at the ring briefly and quickly grabbed Draco’s face with both hands, kissing him fiercely.

Draco returned the passion of the kiss, pushing his tongue in Ron’s mouth and giving Ron’s cock a firm squeeze.

Ron groaned in his mouth. “Fuck me,” he said against Draco’s lips, pushing his hardness against Draco’s. They began grinding their erections against each other as they moved closer to the bed.

When the kiss broke, Draco grabbed the back of Ron’s head and held it steady, staring into his eyes, “As you wish,” he said before pushing Ron back onto the bed hard.

“Careful,” Ron said, wincing.

“What?”

“I’m in pain here,” he said glancing down at his swollen cock.

Draco chuckled. “No you’re not.”

“Well, almost,” Ron said in strained whisper.

Draco leaned over him, climbing onto the bed. “I want to see your face while I’m fucking you,” he whispered harshly, staring at Ron. “You have a problem with that, Weasley?”

Ron shook his head and pulled Draco down by the head to devour his mouth. They both moaned as the kiss deepened.

Draco finally broke the kiss and Ron found himself more aroused than ever; it was driving him mad, his senses felt overloaded. He impulsively began stroking his cock. He didn’t care anymore, he was turned on and wanted Draco to do whatever he wanted. More than anything, Ron needed to come.

“Let me do that,” Draco said, reaching between them and grabbing hold of the large throbbing erection sticking up, poking into his stomach. Ron moaned when Draco touched it and rotated his hips, urging him to continue.

“Now, ask me again,” Draco commanded.

Ron opened his eyes and gave Draco a small smile. “Ask you what?” he asked defiantly.

Draco grunted and squeezed his cock, pausing.
Ron felt as if he were about to explode and couldn’t help but push his hips up against the hand gripping him to create more friction. “You promise to let me come?”

Draco nodded, squeezing Ron harder. “But first you have to ask for it.”

Ron smirked. “You need that, don’t you? Gets you off?”

Draco removed his hand from Ron’s cock. “Weasley…”

Ron groaned in frustration. “Oh, alright, please bugger me, Ferret,” he said hastily.

“No, funny,” Draco said, holding his hand just above the head of Ron’s cock.

Ron let his head fall back and closed his eyes. “Please fuck me, Malfoy,” he said softly.

Draco grabbed Ron’s cock and leaned over him to give him a rough kiss. “That’s better,” he said when the kiss broke. He sat up, gripping Ron’s thighs and spreading them before picking up his wand and saying a lubricating spell.

Ron moaned as he felt his backside becoming slick, but he couldn’t help but tense up, as he wasn’t used to being taken.

Draco reached down and grabbed his cock again, causing Ron to whimper and push himself into the boy’s hand, urging him to get on with it.

When Draco entered him, it wasn’t slow or gentle, and Ron let out a loud groan at the rough intrusion. Draco paused for a second before continuing to plunge into him, staring down as he held himself over Ron.

Ron looked back at him with determination and pushed up against him in spite of the pain. “Fuck yeah, fuck me, arsehole,” he commanded hoarsely.

Draco’s eyebrow rose in mild surprise as he gave Ron a particularly brutal stroke. “Yeah? You like that?”

Ron suppressed a moan and pulled on Draco’s hips encouragingly. Yeah, I do,” he said stubbornly. “Do it harder; come on, fuck me!”

“Harder? Mmm, like that?” Draco asked, spreading Ron wider so he could move in at a different angle at the same pace.

Ron let out a strangled moan and reached up to grip Draco’s arm as hard as he could. Yeah, you bloody prat, give it to me. You can do better than that!” he taunted.

Draco made a low rumbling noise in the back of his throat and stilled. “Oh, yeah? I’m going to fuck you good, you brainless ginger git!”

Ron smirked. “Then shut it and do it!”

Draco nodded and began a ruthless assault, pushing as hard as he could, watching Ron’s face as if expecting to be asked for mercy at any minute.

But Ron remained stoic and only allowed himself to wince a few times, resolved to keep his gaze steady on the eyes staring back at him. “Oh, yeah, fuck… that’s more like it,” he grunted.
Draco smirked. “I knew you wanted it. How long have you wanted it?” he asked, panting as he tried to keep up his furious pace.

“Damn it, Malfoy, shut it, and just keep doing what you’re doing… Uh! Ooooh, bloody hell!”

They continued to push against each other hard, skin slapping, clenching each other, each waiting for the other to scream out, admitting weakness. Finally Ron began to roll his head from side to side and whimper. “Take it off me… please, let me come.”

Draco slowed down and reached down between them, to grip the base of Ron’s cock, causing the redhead to shout out. “Malfoy, you promised!”

“All right, all right, I’m taking it off… but I want you to remember who made you feel… this… good,” he said, giving Ron two more hard thrusts before removing the ring and jerking his cock in his hand.

“Holy shit! Malfoy!” he shouted as he spilled himself over Draco’s hand and onto his belly.

Ron’s climax set Draco off, and he began to moan, thrashing spasmodically within the boy beneath him.

“Oh, you’re going to make me come,” he said, panting.

“Yeah?” Ron said his eyes closed in relief from his orgasm.

“Yeah,” Draco grunted, working furiously to find his own.

“Go ahead, then,” he said egging him on.

“Your arse is mine now, Weasley; I’m going to shoot my load in it,” he groaned, burying his face in Ron’s neck.

“Stop talking and just do it then, fucker… come for me,” Ron said moving his hands to Draco’s hips and gripping his arse.

“Oh… Oooooh, shit!” Draco cried as he tensed before falling, exhausted, on top of the redhead.

Ron closed his eyes again and chuckled.

Draco pulled his face out of the crook of Ron’s neck and stared at him closely. “What’s so funny?” he asked, setting his jaw.

Ron shook his head and slapped his forehead. “What the fuck did you just do to me?”

Draco rolled off of him and perched himself up on one arm. “Blew your mind,” he said with a smug smirk.


“In your case, Weasley, that’s pretty much the same thing,” Draco said with a snigger.

Ron punched his shoulder playfully and gave him a small smile before closing his eyes again with a sigh of contentment.

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When Draco woke he looked over at Ron and shook his head, hardly believing their last exchange. He felt a bit unsure about how he was going to interact with the boy now. He stood up and went upstairs to get something to eat, only to find Harry and Hermione in the kitchen finishing their lunch. They were laughing and giving each other bedroom eyes, which made Draco frown.

The thought that he would never be *that* close to her flittered across his mind, but he pushed it away. He wasn’t even sure he wanted to be that close to her. Still, he found himself staring at Harry with a twinge of jealousy at their apparent closeness.

He wondered if Harry had a place in Hermione’s heart that perhaps even Ron didn’t know about, which made Draco curious about the true nature of their triad. Did they even know themselves?

“How goes it?” Harry said, apparently confused by Draco’s blank stare and apparent inability to hear him calling him.

“What? Oh yes, how goes it?” Draco said, clearing his thoughts.

“So, did you—?” she began.

“Yeah,” Draco said quickly, going to the refrigerator to look for something to drink.

Hermione smiled and open her mouth. Draco whipped his head around before she could even start.

“Don’t ask,” he said.

“All right,” Hermione said, trying not to appear too excited.

Harry wrapped his hand around her leash and pulled on it playfully as Draco walked around the table to take a seat opposite of her.

“So, you really do want to be a slave, then? I seem to remember someone saying they would never really consider such a thing,” Draco remarked as he poured himself some juice.

“I said that?” Hermione replied, feigning ignorance.

“Hmm-hmm.”

She smiled at Harry. “Well I wouldn’t call this slavery.”

“Me, either,” Harry said smiling at her.

“Perhaps you need a lesson in real service; how about making me some lunch for starters?” Draco said.

Hermione’s posture straightened as she put her hand on her hip. “I think we need to make some rules. You can’t tell me what to do all of the time! None of you,” she said. Harry, who wrinkled his brow.

“And you can’t tell me… or us, when to tell you what to do; it makes a farce out of the whole thing, doesn’t it?” Draco asked.

“Well, I could if I wanted to; it’s really *my* choice. You can’t make me do anything if I don’t want you to,” she said, crossing her arms.

“Ah, next you’re going to tell me submission is a gift,” he said with an eye roll.
“It is!” she said.

Draco smirked. “Perhaps it is, but it’s not really real if you take it and give it at will. You either give it, or you don’t.”

Ron came up stairs, and they all looked up at him.

“Hey,” he said sheepishly, glancing at Draco before taking a seat beside him.

Harry and Hermione watched them both curiously.

“What are you guys talking about?” he asked.

Draco turned to Ron. “The gift of submission. Hermione here thinks she should be able to control when she gives it and when she doesn’t.”

Ron shrugged. “Sounds good to me,” he said, giving Hermione a small smile.

“It sounds fake to me,” Harry said.

“That’s because it is,” Draco said, giving Hermione a pointed look.

“You’re both wrong! Who knew Ron would turn out being the voice of reason out of you three,” Hermione said as she removed her collar.

Ron gave her a scathing look and then shook his head. “Well, what should we do now? I think we’re all shagged out.”

“I know I am,” Harry said in agreement.

“How can you ever get tired of shagging?” Draco asked.

Harry shrugged. Ron looked at him. “I just came, ‘member?”

“Yeah, I do,” he said, giving Ron a secretive smile. Ron tried to hide a smile as his eyes fell to the table and his ears turned pink.

Harry wrinkled his nose at their interaction.

Suddenly, Draco turned his attention to Hermione and licked his lips.

Hermione shook her head. “Oh, no you don’t! I’m done for the rest of the day!”

“There you go trying to control things again, maybe you are un-trainable,” he said disapprovingly.

“You can try to arouse me if you like, but I’ve had enough sex to last me for the rest of the month!”

“I would have thought with two boyfriends, you’d be used to getting nailed like this?”

Hermione frowned. “Tell you what, you let three people bugger for three days straight and tell me how you feel on the fourth day,” she said snippily.

Draco rolled his eyes. “Oh, all right, fine, then.”

They all sat, unsure of what to do or say when Ron spoke. “Anyone up for a game of chess?”

“Nah,” Draco and Harry said together.
“I want to fly,” Harry said, staring off.

“Yeah, that would be nice,” Draco said.

Draco stared at Harry for a moment. “How do you do that diving manoeuvre you always do when the Snitch gets below the post?”

Harry shrugged. “Which one? I dive a lot.”

“You know the one… the one no one else can do,” Draco said with some bitterness.

“I don’t really think about what I’m doing when I’m doing it.”

Draco stared back at him with a jealous look. “Come on, I see you practicing on the pitch.”

Harry scoffed. “Why would I tell you how I do anything, when I’ll have to play you in a few weeks?”

“Scared I’ll be able to use your moves against you?”

“I’d like to see that!”

“If you showed me that move, you would,” Draco said with a challenge.

“Fine!” Harry said as if he had accepted it.

“Fine,” Draco said sitting back satisfied.

“I just need a broom,” Harry said, surveying the room as if one would become available. He seemed to recognise the ridiculous nature of the conversation as he quickly realised that even if he Conjured up a broom, he couldn’t leave the house!

He let out a frustrated groan and grabbed the top of his head. “It’s like we’re trapped here; we can’t even go outside to walk around!”

“Well, I’m sure a quick walk wouldn’t hurt much,” Ron said.

“Professor Snape told us to stay put,” Hermione said firmly.

“And for good reason,” Draco said.

They all looked at him curiously.

“Yeah, and what reason is that, Malfoy?” Harry asked suspiciously.

Draco just shook his head. “Look, I trust Professor Snape; if he says stay inside, then it’s for our own good.”

Hermione and Ron seemed to accept that as a reasonable answer, but Harry continued to study Draco sceptically. Tired of Harry staring in his face, Draco rose from his seat. “I’m going to go shower, and perhaps I’ll be up for a game of chess,” he said. Ron looked up at him and smiled, then went to the stairs to dress and get his chessboard.

For the next few hours, they all showered, dressed, and then returned to the living room, where Ron and Draco played chess, while Hermione began reading another book she had pulled from Snape’s collection. Harry ended up pacing in bored anxiousness before falling asleep on the couch.
After several hours, it grew dark and Draco was just about to suggest they make dinner when Hermione let out a loud shriek, startling all of them.

Harry awoke with a jerk, while Draco and Ron looked up at her to see what was wrong. Snape was standing at entrance to the kitchen, glaring at them.

“Is this what you call working on your assignment?” he said.

“Professor!” Hermione said in astonishment.

“Where the hell did you come from?” Ron asked.

“Pardon me, Mr. Weasley?”

“Oh, I-I mean, when did you get back?” he said quickly.

“I just got back,” he said, moving to take off his cloak. “Why don’t you all go wash up and get ready for dinner,” he suggested.

“I thought you said you didn’t cook?” Ron said.

“Who said anything about me cooking, Mr. Weasley? I expect dinner in no less than one hour from now,” he said before turning to disappear down the hall.

They all looked at each other, incredulous, and rose slowly to make their way toward the kitchen.

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They ate dinner in absolute silence, watching Snape from the corner of their eyes. He seemed to be ignoring them completely.

Finally, Harry paused to looked at Snape directly. “Where did you go?”

“On business,” Snape said, not bothering to look at him.

“What kind of business?” Harry pressed.

“I hardly think it’s any of your concern where I go, Mr. Potter,” he said, curling his lip as he finally met Harry’s stare.

Harry narrowed his eyes. “When did you get back?”

Snape sighed in irritation. “Pardon me, but I believe you were there when I returned.”

“Well then, why didn’t we hear you come in?” Harry demanded.

Before he could answer, Hermione interrupted. “Professor, were you aware of that you left some things laying around in the bedroom downstairs?”

“Some things, Miss Granger?”

“Yes… I mean, toys…”

Snape smirked. “Yes, I’m very aware of everything in my home.”

Draco could hardly contain a snigger.
“You have quite a collection,” Ron mumbled.

“Thank you, Mr. Weasley; did you find any of it useful?”

Hermione gasped.

“Um… sure,” Ron said, his ears turning pink.

“Professor,” Hermione started again.

Snape pursed his lips the way he did whenever she got on his nerves. “Yes?”

“I’ve been wondering about something,” she said. “Prophecies are only supposed to be able to be read by those who they are intended, correct?”

“Usually,” he said, cutting his food once again.

“Usually?”

He rolled his eyes. “Some prophecies have no clear intended person in mind, and there may in fact be a constellation of individuals who would be well suited for the role. It could apply to more than one person across time.”

“Across time?” she asked.

“Are you going to repeat everything I say, or do you have a real question?” he asked in disdain.

“I’m sorry, I-I’m just wondering how it is that you were able to read the prophecy?” she stammered.

They all looked up at him, waiting for his answer.

“That is a complicated answer; suffice it to say that I may have been among the constellation of individuals for whom the prophecy could have pertained to at one time.”

“Across time?” she asked.

“Are you going to repeat everything I say, or do you have a real question?” he asked in disdain.

“I’m sorry, I-I’m just wondering how it is that you were able to read the prophecy?” she stammered.

They all looked up at him, waiting for his answer.

“That is a complicated answer; suffice it to say that I may have been among the constellation of individuals for whom the prophecy could have pertained to at one time.”

“What are you saying? No, let me rephrase that. What aren’t you telling us?” Harry asked, dropping his fork in obvious frustration.

“Mr. Potter, watch your tone,” Snape said in warning.

“Excuse me, sir, but I think it’s only fair you tell us everything,” he demanded.

Snape tightened his jaw and appeared as if he were restraining himself from exploding. “Fair? Don’t talk to me about what you think is fair, Potter. I’m not obligated to explain any more to you than what you need to know.”

“What we need to know? We need to know everything if we’re risking our lives on your word!” Harry said angrily.

“You think you’re risking your life?” Snape said mockingly.

“It is dangerous; if the wrong people found out, this could turn ugly,” Draco said, speaking up in Harry’s defence.

Snape refused to look at Draco and kept his eyes on Harry. “No more dangerous than fighting a troll on your own, or risking your neck to protect a full grown werewolf, or organising an illegal student organisation and teaching other students how to fight Dark Magic against Ministry law; really Potter,
I'd thought the thrill of the risk would be the most appealing to you,” he said, glaring at Harry.

“You were a part of the prophecy? Who were the other three?” Harry pressed, not breaking eye contact.

“I think that’s a conversation for another night,” Snape said, wiping his mouth and putting down his napkin, indicating he was finished as he pushed away from the table.

“Well, we’ve been working on it for a few days now. Can you at least tell us how the ritual works?” Hermione asked.

“Yeah and when are we going to do it?” Ron asked.

“And where?” Draco asked.

Snape sighed. “You’ll find out all you need to know in good time. For now, you should concentrate on working on making sure the bond is solid.”

“That’s all we’ve been doing!” Harry said.

“So you have all been intimate together then? At the same time?” Snape asked, ignoring the frustration in his voice.

“Well, sorta,” Ron said.

“What Ron means is that we all slept together last night,” Hermione said.

“Just slept?”

“This is so inappropriate,” she said, her cheeks flushing as she looked away from him.

“Just make sure that you’re able to complete what we agreed needs to be done in preparation for the ritual,” Snape said.

“Professor…” Hermione said cautiously.

Snape threw up his hands. “What?”

“You said you’d tell me why you took the locket from me. Do you still have it?”

“No, I do not,” Snape replied.

“Well, what did you do with it?” Draco asked.

“I gave it back to its owner,” he said, finally looking at Draco.

“And who was that?” Ron asked.

They all looked at him with anticipation.

“The headmaster,” he said.

Harry looked back at him in confusion. “Dumbledore?”

“What? Why would he give me a locket?”

“It said it was from an admirer,” Ron said.
“It was the headmaster’s way of watching over you.”

“Because he knew you would propose for us to do this?” Harry asked.

“No, because he knew that other people might think someone would,” Snape replied.

“So why did you steal it from her?” Harry asked.

“I didn’t. I said I gave it back to the headmaster,” Snape said, almost rolling his head at Harry.

“So he knows about this now, does he?” Harry asked.

“I didn’t say that,” Snape said.

“There’s a lot you’re not saying!” Harry snapped.

Snape glared at Harry one last time and pushed back from the table. “Goodnight. Make sure you clean up before you turn in,” he said, rising and turning to walk down the hall.

When he was out of sight, they all looked at each other pensively.

“Well, that was weird,” Ron mumbled.

“Why do I have the feeling he’s hiding something?” Harry whispered.

“Because he is; he said as much,” Hermione said.

“That’s unacceptable. He can’t expect us to do this and go on keeping secrets. What the hell did we get ourselves into?” Harry asked, obviously distressed.

“Calm down, Potter; I’m sure he has a good reason for not telling us everything. We’ve come this far. I think we should trust him more,” Draco said.

“Easy for you to say, you have nothing to lose; he always looks out for you,” Harry said to Draco dismissively.

Draco grabbed Harry’s shirt, pulling him half way across the table. “I have everything to lose! More than you’ll ever know!”

They all stared back at Draco with wide eyes. He let go of Harry’s shirt and quickly rose from the table, turning toward the stairs.

Harry made to go after him, when Ron grabbed his arm. “Give him some space, mate. He’ll talk when he’s ready.”

Hermione looked up at Ron in surprise and stared in concern at the chair where Draco had been sitting.

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After the trio had cleaned up the kitchen, they ventured into the right bedroom; the door of the left bedroom was shut.

They sat around talking for a bit when Draco opened the door and came to sit down against the wall, staring at the floor.
“Care to tell us what that was all about?” Harry asked.

Draco sighed. “Not really.”

“Malfoy, why are you doing this?” Ron asked. “Wouldn’t your dad kick your arse if he found out what we were up to?”

“I’m doing this for my father and my mum… and me,” Draco said, finally looking up at them.

“Do they know?” Hermione asked.

“Of course not,” Draco said with a guilty expression.

“What kind of trouble would you be in?” she asked.

“The worst kind,” he said gravely.

They all let the meaning of what he was saying sink in and Hermione got up to sit beside him. He gave her a small, embarrassed smile as if he thought that their concern was silly.

Harry got up and sat in front of Draco while Ron moved over to sit next to him.

He looked up around them in apprehension. “If you guys pull me into a group hug, I’m going to sick up.”

Ron’s brow furrowed. “We just want to know you a little better; I mean, we don’t really know anything about you.”

“Right,” Draco said.

“Like… why do always you smell like soap, even after sex?” Ron said, causing them all to laugh.

“Seriously, tell us the truth, when did Snape tell you about all of this?” Harry asked.

“I found out the same time you guys did,” he replied.

“So all of that stuff, you stalking me on the Quidditch pitch and inviting Ron to Cannon games was your idea? Or did Snape put you up to it?” Harry asked.

“I wasn’t stalking you, Potter.”

Harry looked back at him doubtfully.

“Well, not exactly,” Draco said uncomfortably.

“So you knew about the prophecy?” Ron asked.

“No, I didn’t. I just knew I had to get to know you better; I didn’t know why,” he said.

“I don’t get it,” Hermione said. “I mean, I understand Snape pairing us up, that makes sense, but why wouldn’t he just tell us all at the same time. Why the secrecy?”

Draco shrugged. “Do you guys always sit around like this and play detective?”

Hermione and Harry grinned at each other, while Ron shook his head. “Yeah, they do.”

“Are we done here?” Draco asked.
“Not so fast, I have a few more questions,” Hermione said thoughtfully as she considered which one to ask him next.

“Can we save it for another time, Hermione?” Draco asked wearily. “We should probably be working on our assignment,” he said with lewd leer.

Hermione looked at him in disgust. “Actually, that was my next question. Are you a sex addict?”

“Only when I’m around you,” he said. Harry and Ron groaned together, and Hermione rolled her eyes.

“Well, we did make an oath,” Draco reminded. “We have to work on it; there’s only two days left and we haven’t all been… intimate with you at the same time.”

Hermione drew in a nervous breath. “Well, I’ve been thinking about that. We all know how dodgy prophecies are, and it doesn’t specifically say—”

“Hermione!” Ron and Harry said together.

Draco sniggered.

“Fine, but I’m so not turned on right now,” she said.

“Well, we can fix that,” Harry said, leaning over to nibble on her earlobe. When she sighed, Draco moved in to nibble on the other one.

“So, um, how exactly do you see this happening?” Ron asked.

“Well, I think Hermione should be sitting on one of us like this,” Harry said, pulling her up into his lap.

“No, Hermione, straddle him, yeah, like that,” Draco said, positioning her legs wider around Harry.

“Harry, lie down,” he ordered, to which Harry complied.

“Okay, now what?” Harry asked.

Ron frowned as he peered down at them. “I think it would be easier if she were leaning all the way over like this,” he said pushing Hermione over so that her body was flush against Harry’s.

Hermione frowned.

“No, Weasley, she should be sitting up straight like this,” Draco said pulling her back up.

“Have you even ever had a threesome, Malfoy?” Ron asked in annoyance.

“Sure, plenty of them,” Draco said boastfully.

Ron scoffed. “Well, we’ve definitely done this before, and it would be much easier if she were leaning over like this,” he said pushing Hermione back over.

“You forget that this is a foursome now, she’ll have to accommodate all of us,” Draco said, pulling Hermione by the hair so that she was sitting up again.

“Stop it, both of you!” Hermione said standing up to glare of the two of them.
“All right, let’s just try to think through this,” Harry said, rubbing his temples.

“He’s going to tell us how to do this,” Hermione reminded him.

“Well, we should at least practice a few positions in the meantime,” Draco said.

“Fine,” she said, sitting back down and straddling Harry.

“If she spreads her legs more,” Draco said as she lifted her bum up slightly. “It’ll be easier for me when I enter from behind.”

“Why do you get to enter her from behind?” Ron asked.

“Ron!” Harry and Hermione said together, shutting him up.

“This is uncomfortable,” Hermione whined.

“Just relax,” Draco said.

“I’m trying,” she said.

“And what will you be doing?” Harry asked Ron.

“I don’t know, I guess I’ll be standing over you guys like this?” he said coming around to face Hermione.

Hermione laughed.

“What’s so funny?” Ron asked self-consciously.

“This is ridiculous, it’s so… mechanical!” she said.

Draco ignored her and moved her hips up higher off of Harry. “All right, Hermione, you’ll have to squat over Harry like this, so I can get in position like this,” he said, squatting down behind her.

“How’s that, Hermione?” Ron asked.

“Wait,” Harry said adjusting his legs.

“I don’t see how I can remain in this position for any reasonable length of time; it’s too uncomfortable!” she said with a pained look on her face.

“Well, that’s too bad, majority rules,” Draco said firmly.

“Geez, Malfoy,” Ron said disapprovingly.

“What? What did I say?” Draco asked.

“Should we give this a go naked?” Harry asked.

They all looked at each other and burst out laughing.

“I suppose that’s a big fat no,” Draco said after gaining his composure. “We’re going to have to really do this though, sooner or later.”

“Yes, well, not right now; there was nothing remotely sexy about that. I felt like a ragdoll,” Hermione said with a pout.
“Aww, c’mere,” Ron said, pulling her close to him.

“You know what would make me feel better though?” she asked.

“What?”

“If you told me what that trick alarm said about me back in September.”

Harry and Ron sniggered and Draco looked at them inquisitively.

“Trick alarm?” he asked.

Ron smirked. “My brothers made a trick alarm that alerts you of approaching intruders. Kicks in at about fifty meters.”

“That’s brilliant,” Draco said.

“Yeah, comes in handy, too; anyway, it gives a rather cheeky description of the person approaching.”

“Yeah?”

Ron nodded.

“Oh, you have to tell me,” Draco said, leaning over. Ron whispered it in his ear, which caused him to chuckle and look over at Hermione. “That is so true.”

“Yeah,” Harry and Ron said.

Hermione’s face turned bright red. “If you don’t tell me what that damned thing said right now, I’m telling Snape you broke into his liquor cabinet!”

Ron gasped. “How did you—”

Hermione smirked and folded her arms over her chest, waiting.

“Oh, all right,” Ron said in exasperation. “It said that you were Hogwarts’ hottest swot.”

“I’m not a swot!” she protested as they continued to laugh. “Well at least it said I was hot,” she grumbled.

“That, my dear, you are,” Draco said.

Ron rose and ran up the stairs and came back down with the chessboard, carefully sitting it down in front of Draco.

“Want to watch me kick his arse in chess?” he asked Hermione.

“This I have to see,” she said, drawing closer to the board in interest.

“I think you’ve got that backwards, Ron,” Draco said, sitting up, his face growing serious as he studied the board.

Harry felt himself swoon as he moved to watch as well and Hermione looked up at him in concern.

“Harry, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” he said.
“You don’t look well, you actually look rather green,” she said. Ron and Draco looked up to study him.

Harry shook his head. “I’m fine… just a little lightheaded,” he said, trying to recline back on his forearms unsuccessfully.

“Do you need to lie down, mate?” Ron asked.

“Nah, it’s probably your cooking,” he said teasingly to Hermione, who slapped his arm and smiled.

They all returned their eyes back to the chessboard as Harry rose to stand. None of them saw him falter on his feet and fall against the wall. As he looked down at them, he felt a glimmer of hope that that perhaps whatever they were attempting to do was actually possible.

Another wave of nausea washed over Harry as the same light-headed feeling he had the previous night returned, only this time the feeling that he might faint was distinctly stronger. He willed himself to push it down as he braced himself against the wall. Although he felt sick and lightheaded, Harry couldn’t help but grin at the three of them sitting, talking, and looking quite relaxed around each one another. It was the second night in the row that he recognised the feeling of genuine comfort in their presence and something distinctly more intimate than he had ever felt in his life.
The End of Play

Can we play the game your way?  
Can I really lose control?  
Just once in my life,  
I think it’d be nice,  
Just to lose control, just once…

-“Lose Control” by Evanescence

When I find out who I am  
I’m gonna know just what to do  
When I pull myself together again  
I’m gonna give myself to you

-“Give Myself to You” by Train

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Hermione woke, lying against Draco’s chest. Opening one eye, she saw that Harry and Ron were cuddled up against each other on the other side of him. Draco ran his hand down her back and murmured affectionately as he pulled her tighter against him.

She lifted her head to look at his face. He really did look angelic in his sleep, and it was almost a crime how perfectly his hair laid, especially when she couldn’t do a thing with hers during her waking hours.

As she lay there watching him, she began thinking about their time together and what a dramatic change she had seen in him over the past few days: he was more open, courteous, affectionate, and even funny, when his walls had dropped.

And he hadn’t even called her a Mudblood since that first day.

Despite of all these things, she found herself inwardly sighing. A part of her recognised the change as good, but she was disturbed that another part of her was disappointed. The way he had commanded attention from her and humiliated her on that first day had stirred something dormant inside of her that she longed to feel again. She was also beginning to come to terms with the fact that hearing him call her derogatory names, depending on the context and the way he said them, left her aroused and wanting him to exert control over her.

But she wasn’t ready to admit any of that out loud, not just yet.

Her brow furrowed as she thought about the Muggle psychology book that she had tried to forget about. This whole week had been liberating, her past fears about her normality had finally been put to rest. Knowing that Snape had toys, and that the boys shared her sexual interests was reassuring. But, it wasn’t quite enough; Hermione wanted more, and she wasn’t sure if that was normal.

She had revealed her deepest fantasies to Harry, but was she ready to actually have them played out? What kind of changes would it bring in her relationship with all of them? What would she be giving up if she pushed for more? She wasn’t sure she was ready to face the answer to those questions.

She recalled with frustration how Draco and Harry had both said that she was being fake because she wanted to control when and how she submitted to them. She wanted to prove them wrong, but
she was reluctant to give them complete control over her body. She’d be damned if she were going to be treated like a dog or worse, Pansy. She thought of the party in Snape’s classroom and how Draco had disrespected her. And while the thought of crawling for him and being caressed like a pet sent quivers to her core, she also understood that unconditional submission could quickly deteriorate into abuse.

She began to think of how she could negotiate something in between complete submission and limited control, when she was startled out of her thoughts as Draco stirred.

“Morning, darling,” he drawled.

She stared back at him for a moment. “Darling?”

Draco looked at her strangely. “Yes… you don’t like the term?”

“It’s fine, I suppose.” She sighed.

Draco asked, “What is it?”

“Why are you being so…” She stopped, searching for the word.

“So what?”

“Nice.”

Draco huffed. “Would you rather me be the prat you’re always complaining about?”

“No… it’s just this really doesn’t seem like you, all of the sweet stuff, I mean.”

“Oh, you prefer the prat now? I’m not like that all the time, you know.”

“Well, it is a nice change, but I thought you said you were going to break me… or at least try,” she said with a teasing smile.

Draco’s eyes narrowed and his lips tightened. “Well, you’re obviously disappointed. I’m sorry I can’t be on for you all the time,” he said, shaking his head. “Just when I thought we might be able to get on all right, you go and open your mouth,” he said with disappointed weariness in his voice.

She had obviously touched a nerve and immediately regretted being honest and asking for what she wanted. She ran her hand over his chest, trying to think of something to smooth things over.

Draco pushed her hand away. “I still need a few hours of sleep,” he said, rolling over.

She stared at the back of his head, frustrated and a bit sorry for what she had said, although not entirely sure why he had reacted so strongly to it, before turning over and going back to sleep.

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When she woke, she thought she heard the sound of faint muffled grunting. She rolled over slowly and quietly. Draco was beside her and he appeared to be asleep, but she looked closer and saw that he had his eyes slightly open and that he was carefully breathing so as to appear asleep.

His head was tilted to the side to improve his view, and he turned to look at her, putting one finger up to his mouth to signal that they should be quiet. They both remained still in their positions as they looked over to Draco’s left.
Ron was straddling Harry and his face was in the crook of Harry’s neck. Harry’s face was buried in the pillow and Ron’s hands were covering both of his on either side of his head, while he moved slowly against Harry as if trying not to shake the bed.

Every few minutes Hermione heard faint grunts coming from Ron as he tried carefully to pick up the pace of his thrusts without making any sounds or cause any sudden movements. She had to stifle a giggle at the sight of him trying to move without disturbing the bed.

She saw Harry grip the pillow in which his face was buried and then groan into it as he tried to push back against Ron without rising from the bed. Ron whispered something in his ear, and Harry shook his head slightly.

Ron pulled his head up a little and whispered a little louder. “Tell me, Harry.”

“Shhh, Ron,” Harry whispered, turning his head to the side to meet Ron’s face.

Ron shot his head up to look over at Draco and Hermione, who both did a convincing job of appearing to be still sleep, remaining still and breathing shallowly. Hermione added a soft snore for effect.

“They’re asleep… now, tell me,” he said, moving against Harry once more, this time a little harder, but still carefully so as not to disturb the other two.

Harry didn’t answer.

“Come on, Harry, tell me… did you like it when Malfoy was fucking you?” Ron asked as he shifted, giving another soft thrust.

Harry grunted something into the pillow.

“Harry…” Ron persisted.

“Yes!” Harry whispered harshly, pushing himself up against Ron.

Ron moved again, grunting and speaking a little louder against Harry’s ear. “Tell me what you are.”

Harry whined as Ron pushed into him harder. “I’m a slag.”

Draco sniggered, which caused Ron and Harry to both abruptly turn their heads and glare at him.

“Oi, Malfoy! If you’re going to be a perv and watch, at least try to be decent and warn us!”

“I didn’t want to interrupt. You were doing so well, Weasley; the bed didn’t shake once.”

“Fuck you.”

Hermione couldn’t help but smile.

Ron shot her an accusing glare. “Hermione, you, too? You both should be ashamed of yourselves.”

“You’re the ones who can’t control yourselves… we were sleeping!” she said, looking amused.

“Exactly,” Draco said. “Not exactly the sort of thing I want to see when I wake up, Weasley.”

“Well if it bothers you so much, then turn your pointy nose the other way!” Ron said, rolling over.
Draco continued to stare at Harry with a strange smile. When Harry noticed, he began to squirm under Draco’s studious gaze, growing visibly uncomfortable.

“What are you looking at, Malfoy?” he asked in irritation.

“You,” Draco replied.

“Do you mind?” Harry said in embarrassment, his cheeks growing red as he pulled the covers over him.

“I’m just trying to figure out how you guys work,” Draco said, looking between Harry and Ron speculatively. “So, let me get this right: Weasley is usually on top?”

“No!” Harry said emphatically.

“Yes!” Ron declared at the same time.

Harry looked back at Ron and scowled.

“Pretty much,” Ron said somewhat proudly.

“That’s not true, Ron!” Harry insisted. “Well, not always; I’ve been on top before,” he said, looking away, his cheeks growing red again.

Ron scoffed. “When was the last time you topped me?”

Harry didn’t reply; instead, he stared straight ahead.

“C’mon, Harry, admit it, you love taking it… you’re a slag.”

“That’s like the third time I’ve heard you call him a slag, Weasley… am I missing something?” Draco asked.

“Shall I tell him?” Ron asked with a cheeky smile.

Harry shook his head. “No! It’s none of his business!”

“Harry, is this about one of your fantasies?” Hermione asked.

Harry turned to glare at her in warning. “Hermione, be quiet!”

“There’s nothing to be ashamed of; we’ve all been intimate now. Besides, it’s not such a bad fantasy,” she said encouragingly.

Harry rolled his eyes.

“Would someone mind telling me what you three are talking about?” Draco said in frustration.

“Well, Harry has this fantasy…” Hermione said, looking over at Harry, hoping he’d finish her sentence.

Harry gave Hermione a dangerous look and when he didn’t speak, Ron sat up.

“And it’s the reason why I call him a slag,” Ron said with a smile, reaching down under the covers to pinch Harry’s bum.

“Ouch! Stop it, Ron!”
“Oh come on, Harry, you can tell me,” Draco said encouragingly with unusual sweetness in his voice.

Harry raised his eyebrows. “Mind your business, Malfoy,” he said firmly.

“My, you are a bitchy one. It’s a bloody fantasy, Potter, not an ancient family secret. Is it really that naughty?”

Harry looked at Draco doubtfully. “Well…” he started cautiously, still avoiding Draco’s eyes.

“Yes?” Draco asked as he rolled over to give Harry his full attention.

Harry swallowed and looked shrewdly at Draco.

“Well, go on!” Draco urged.

“I have a fantasy about… being used,” Harry said under his breath.

“What? I didn’t catch that last part.”

“Being used,” Harry said a little louder, turning to face Draco, stiffening for an insult.

“Used?” Draco repeated, his eyebrows going up. “By a bloke?”

“Well, not exactly.”

Draco’s forehead wrinkled. “A woman?”

“Yes and no…” Harry said, still avoiding Draco’s stare.

“Out with it!” Draco demanded in annoyance.

Harry huffed. “Fine! I have a fantasy of being used, by any and every one.”

Draco laughed for several moments, while Harry looked like he wanted to kill him. Hermione looked over at Harry anxiously, hoping he didn’t take Draco’s laughter too hard. She knew how much courage it had taken to reveal that to Draco.

When he finally finished laughing and composed himself, Draco looked at Harry and shook his head. “For once, Weasley’s right− you are a slag.”

Harry scowled.

“So, like a gangbang?”

“Yep,” Ron said, smirking.

Draco smirked. “Who would have guessed the star of the wizarding world wants to be everyone’s slut. What’s that all about, I wonder?”

Harry shook his head. “I knew I shouldn’t have told you.”

“Why? I can help you make that one come true.”

“How, Malfoy? I’m not up for a Slytherin gangbang,” Harry said.

Draco grimaced. “You think I want to see half of those wankers naked? Perhaps Weasley and I can
oblige you, and the rest you’ll have to do with your imagination,” he said, wagging his eyebrows.

Harry’s mouth dropped open. “Ah…”

“What do you think, Weasley?”

Ron grinned. “Sure. What do you have in mind?”

“Oh, this is going to be fun!” Hermione said.

Draco turned his head to regard Hermione. “Why don’t you just sit there and watch for now.”


Draco sat up. “I want you to watch, that’s why. All right?”

Harry and Ron both looked between Hermione and Draco curiously until Hermione nodded reluctantly. Draco turned his attention back to Harry.

“Now, Harry… get on the floor, on your knees, right here, in front of the bed,” he said, pointing in front of him.

Harry gave Draco an “are you kidding” expression. With one swift movement, Draco threw off the covers and grabbed the back of Harry’s neck, pushing him forward.

“Get your hands off him, Malfoy!” Ron protested.

But it was too late; the evidence of the effect of Draco’s forcefulness on Harry was clear to everyone, as his erection stood prominently against his stomach and his breathing grew visibly rapid.

Ron raised his eyebrows in mild surprise.

Draco winked at Ron and tightened his grip on the back of Harry’s neck. “I can be quite the brute if you like; do you want it rougher?”

Harry blushed and shook his head. “If you get any rougher, you’ll regret it.”

Hermione recognised the over forceful threat in Harry’s voice as a cover for his nervousness.

Draco scowled in irritation. “On the floor!” he ordered.

Harry gave Hermione a long meaningful look before turning to obey Draco’s order.

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Hermione knew Harry was nervous, but the look he had just given her said everything. Despite his trepidation, he was willing to explore something he had fantasised about.

She wasn’t sure she could say she would do the same.

She watched as Harry rose from the bed and got on his knees in front of all of them.

Draco whispered something to Ron who drew back with a thoughtful expression before smirking and jumping out of bed, positioning himself in front of Harry.

He began stroking his cock in front of Harry’s face, the other hand combing through Harry’s hair.
“Put your hands behind your head and sit up straight,” Draco ordered, to which Harry immediately complied, bringing his mouth level with Ron’s cock.

Hermione could feel herself becoming excited as she tried to picture herself in Harry’s position.

Ron traced the lips of Harry’s mouth with it and grinned down at him. “Are you going to be a good slag, Harry?”

“Yes,” Harry hissed.

Draco leaned over him. “Would you like for me to whip you first, Harry, or would you rather me get straight to shagging?”

Harry looked like he was going to pass out as his eyes fluttered and he began to pant. “Whip me,” he said, staring straight ahead.

“Yeah?” Draco smirked. “You’re going to show me what a good painslut you are, aren’t you?”

Harry nodded quickly. “Yes,” he said, his breathing ragged. He appeared very affected by what Draco was saying and ready for whatever was next.

Hermione eyed him and found herself becoming jealous. She tried to push it down and concentrate on being happy that Harry was about to live out one of his favourite fantasies, and inched closer to the edge of the bed to watch.

Draco smirked; running his hand down Harry’s back to his arse as he pulled his hand back and smacked him hard, causing Harry to moan.

“So, you want to be whipped, Potter? What’s the magic word?” Draco asked, causing Ron to snigger.

Harry craned his head up to glare at Draco, keeping his silence.

Draco gritted his teeth, and then looked up at Ron in annoyance. “Give up, Malfoy; you’re not going to tame Harry. Let’s just bugger him the way he wants.”

“Alright, you want to join in?” Draco asked Hermione.

“Yes,” she replied.

“Alright then, why don’t you pick out something for me to hit him with?” he said to her, glancing at the glass case.

Hermione turned to look at the case, and then she got up slowly, reaching in and selecting the red and black flogger that Draco had used on her only a few days before.

“So, you like this one now, eh?” he asked with a teasing smile.

Hermione didn’t answer him but simply held it out for him to take.

“Would you like to have a go at it?” Draco asked Hermione.

Hermione noticed that Ron was watching her with interest and Harry, who seemed to be studying her with scepticism. She remembered the whipping he had given her and the way it had felt to be under his control. She didn’t want it any other way, but she was curious about how it would feel to be on the other end of it, if it would turn her on or even make her feel powerful.
“I just want to try it, alright?” she asked Harry, waiting for him to give her permission.

Harry turned his face from her and stared ahead. “Go on, then, just this once,” he said.

Hermione stared at Harry’s back and then up at Draco.

“On second thought, better not… wouldn’t want you to break a nail,” Draco said coolly.

Hermione put her hand on her hip and gripped the flogger firmly with her other hand. “I am capable of whipping him just as well as you can!”

“Let’s see it, then,” Draco said.

She stood behind Harry and took a deep breath and drew the whip back and thought about hitting Harry hard with it; but she changed her mind at the last moment and let it land softly against his skin, barely making a sound.

Draco rolled his eyes. “Just like a girl.”

“I can do it much harder than that, but unlike you, I’m not a cold-hearted sadist!”

“You should watch your mouth, Hermione. Vocal cords aren’t necessary for your blow-job giving abilities,” he said threateningly.

Hermione stared back at him and then let out a small gasp when he grabbed her around the waist, pulling her back close against his chest. He slid his hand down her arm until he was covering the hand in which she held the whip. His grip over hers tightened as he leaned in and whispered into her ear.

“You see, Hermione, Harry’s a painslut, so he wants to feel something real, so when he asked me to whip him… he wants me to swing like I mean it. And even though we’re just getting to know each other, he trusts me enough to give him what he needs… don’t you, Harry?”

Harry arched his back, as if begging Draco to strike him.

His words echoed in her head, and she found herself once again confronted with incongruity of what she was willing to do and what she fantasised about doing. Was he calling her fake again? Yes, he was. And maybe he was right. Maybe she wasn’t ready for anything that felt too real.

She held her breath as Draco gripped her hand tightly, manipulating it until the whip landed across Harry’s back with a loud slap. She couldn’t stop herself from flinching in his grip, but he held her tighter still. “Like that,” he whispered. “Would you like it harder, Harry?”

“Yes,” Harry replied.

It was as she suspected. Holding the whip did nothing for her; she didn’t like the feeling and would have much preferred to be on the receiving end of it.

She finally managed to disentangle herself from Draco and sat back on the bed numbly, keeping her eyes on Harry and avoiding Draco’s intense stare.

He knew… he knew she wasn’t ready… she was pretending to be submissive. She didn’t know how to tell him how much she wanted the real thing. She could tell him right now, but she didn’t trust herself to mean it.

Draco turned his attention back to Harry and began to strike his back again and again, each lash
harder than the last until Harry was moaning and gasping.

Ron knelt down facing Harry, watching his face as Draco whipped him. Deciding he was alright, he ran his hands along Harry’s chest and began pulling and pinching his nipples.

“Oooh…”

“You like that, Harry?”

“Yes,” he grunted, steeling himself as Draco continued to hit him harder.

“Right… fucking tart you are,” Ron said. “Give me that,” he said, standing up holding his hand out. Draco rolled his eyes and handed Ron the flogger.

Ron drew back the flogger and struck Harry across the top of his back near his shoulders, hard, causing Harry to whine.

“You could improve your technique, Weasley,” Draco said critically, without any malice in his voice.

“Yeah? Harry seems to like it,” Ron said defensively.

“Harry will like anything you do to him; he’s a slut,” Draco said loudly as Ron pushed the flogger back into his hands and returned to stand in front of Harry.

Draco dropped the flogger behind Harry and address Ron. “So, Weasley, he wants to be used; how would you like to begin?”

“I have a few ideas,” Ron said.

“More than one? That’s quite impressive,” Draco said with a sneer.

Ron scrunched up his face and then reached down and grabbed a fistful of Harry’s hair, smacking his cock across Harry’s face and running it over his lips.

“Open your mouth, Harry.”

“Nice one, Weasley,” Draco said, dropping to his knees and situating himself against Harry’s backside.

“You’re going to get exactly what you’ve always wanted, Golden Boy,” he whispered in Harry’s ear.

Ron began to push himself in and out as if he were making love to Harry’s mouth and then grabbing both sides of Harry’s head, holding it still as he increased his thrusts.

“You like that, Harry?” Draco asked.

Harry moaned over Ron’s cock and nodded slightly.

“ Fucking right you do, you dirty slag; I bet you wish there was a cock in your arse right now, don’t you?” Ron asked.

Harry grabbed Ron’s legs, and began to moan louder around his cock, as he nodded in agreement, his own cock rigid and leaking.
Draco leaned over with a low chuckle, “Don’t worry, I’m about to stuff that tight arsehole of yours.”

He palmed Harry’s arse crudely, staring at Hermione and smirking and then back down at Harry as he pulled the flesh harshly before smacking his cheeks experimentally and listening for the different types of sounds he made after each one.

Hermione licked her lips and fought from keeping her hands from snaking down to her very wet centre as she watched Harry push his arse back for more of Draco’s firm hand.

“Hmm… gods, you’re hot; you’d put a lot of tarts at school to shame. I should take you into the Slytherin common room and let Zabini and the boys have a go at you… you’d like that, wouldn’t you?” Draco said, pushing himself against Harry’s opening.

Harry moaned.

“Mmm? Answer me!” Draco said, smacking Harry in rapid succession.

“Hmmmpf…”

“Can’t hear you!” Draco growled.

Ron pulled out of his mouth long enough for Harry to give Draco a breathless, ‘Yes,’ before forcing Harry to open his mouth once more to take him again. Hermione finally could take no more and began rubbing her legs together, trying to soothe the pooling heat at her core.

Draco noticed her vain efforts to remain still on the bed.

“Are you enjoying yourself?” he asked her.

Draco placed both hands on Harry’s shoulders as he pulled him back onto his cock, locking eyes with Hermione.

“That’s a good little whore,” he grunted.

Hermione bit her lip trying to stifle a moan.

“Are you jealous, Hermione? Do you wish we were doing this to you?”

She pursed her lips.

“Wish you were on all fours, getting stuffed from every end? Mmm…”

Hermione nodded slowly.

Draco smiled. “You think you can handle this… I know Harry can, he’s been thinking about it for a long time, haven’t you?” Draco asked leaning over Harry.

Harry began to buck back against Draco.

“Fuck yeah, he has! What do you want, Harry, you wish the whole fucking Quidditch team was here right now getting their rocks off taking turns on you, don’t you?” Ron asked as he pulled out and smacked his cock across Harry’s face.

“Yeah… yeah,” Harry moaned.

“Want it on your face, Harry?” Ron groaned, stroking himself over Harry.
Harry simply stared up at Ron and opened his mouth wide.

“Drink it down then, slut,” Ron groaned, emptying himself into Harry’s mouth, letting it spray in his mouth and across his chin.

Hermione fought to keep herself from looking at Draco but caved in, feeling his eyes on her. When she turned to look at him, she knew he saw it – her raw need, her envy of Harry’s position on the floor between them, and the lust to replace him in that position.

He smirked to let her know he recognised it and then turned his attention back to Harry. He moved his hands from his shoulders down his back to grip his arse and continue pounding into him.

“So, want to be gang banged by a Quidditch team? Oh, we can definitely arrange that… next game,” Draco said, smiling up at Ron.

Ron appeared bewildered for a moment but relaxed as he realised that Draco was just trying to get Harry off.

“Yeah, that sounds like a plan; what do you say, Harry? Whichever team wins, you reward them with your mouth. Would you like that?”

“Uuugh! Yes, Ron… yes!”

“Eh… you’d like that, huh, Potter? Want to service every cock and cunt on the field after the game… maybe we’ll make you,” Draco grunted. “Get down on all fours, while I’m fucking you,” he said, pushing Harry over on his hands as he pulled at his hips with one hand.

“Aah fuck! Put your face down, and spread your arse for me so I can go deeper,” he panted.

“Oh, gods…” Harry moaned as he reached back and spread himself open wider for Draco, who stilled and repositioned himself so that he could enter Harry at a different angle as he gripped his arse cheeks with both hands.

“Yeah, just like that. Oh… yeah, such a good slut for me,” Draco moaned, slowing his stroke.

Ron bent over Harry to talk to him in his ear. “Can you see them, Harry? The whole team is standing over you, starkers, waiting for you. There’s Cormac and Katie, Andrew… Demelza and Jack… you want to suck his cock?”

“Ugh, yes… yes!!” Harry moaned loudly as he came. Draco grunted over him, working hard toward his own climax, and then let out a loud groan as he reached it before falling back, withdrawing from Harry messily.

They both stayed in their positions on the floor, panting as Ron took a seat and leaned against the bed, while Hermione stared at all of them, trying to catch her own breath, realising that she wasn’t going to find any release any time soon.

Finally, Harry rolled over. “Cleaning spell?” he asked Ron.

“My wand’s on the other side of the bed,” Ron said.

Draco did a cleaning spell on all of them, getting Harry’s come spattered face last, and then fell back against the bed, spent.

“Now, are you going to tell me why that gets you off?” Draco asked Harry.
Harry’s face flushed once more with shame.

“I’m going to find out, you know,” Draco persisted, which was only met with silence.

Her arousal fading, Hermione peered down at them, waiting to see what Harry would say to Draco’s probing, but soon found herself being stared back at by Harry. He was smirking up at her.

“What?” she asked in irritation.

“Jealous?” he asked.

“Why would I be?” she asked, her eyes burning into his.

“Oh, I don’t know, maybe because you have a similar fantasy,” Harry said with a nasty grin.

Ron and Draco both whipped their head up to stare at Hermione.

Her cheeks burned from her blush. “It’s obvious that you’re just trying to take the attention off of yourself now that you’ve gotten off,” she said snippily.

Draco gave Hermione a crooked smile. “I’m not surprised she wants it… she looked like she wanted to push you out of the way a few minutes ago,” he said to Harry.

“It’s not like she hasn’t been between two blokes,” Ron said.

“Not like that, she hasn’t… she’s never been completely used like that, have you, Hermione?” Draco asked knowingly.

“Harry, that wasn’t for you to share,” Hermione said softly, glaring at him, avoiding Draco’s eyes.

“Oh come on now, we’ve all been intimate,” he said, imitating her voice and words from earlier.

Hermione scowled, feeling exposed in front of all of them and slightly miffed at Harry using her own tactics against her. The same question was staring her in the face.

Is this what you really want?

She suddenly felt claustrophobic and needed to get away from all of them. She stood up, grabbed her bag, and made her way to the door.

She heard Ron call after her, but she closed the door behind her and went into the other bedroom, locking the door.

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She heard faint knocking on the bedroom door.

“Hermione,” Ron said against the door.

“It’s alright, Ron, I just need some time to myself, okay?”

“Are you alright?”

“Yeah, I’m fine, I’ll come find you guys when feel like talking,” she reassured him.

She held her breath as she waited for him to walk away and breathed a sigh of relief when she heard his retreating footsteps.
She thought about Draco taunting her while Harry was getting his fantasy played out. She had been ashamed at how much she envied Harry in that moment.

It unnerved her.

Draco was right. It wasn’t just the allure of being between the two of them; she wanted to feel used, ravished, but by someone who she knew cared about her. There was security in that. That she could let go and be the object of so much lust and unbridled passion made her head swim with dirty thoughts.

She found herself thinking of her fantasies again. She was so close to having them fulfilled; all she had to do was to say the words and it could all be real.

She was biting her lip again.

Once she told them what she wanted, what she really wanted…she knew that it couldn’t be taken back without serious consequences. They wouldn’t trust her again if she did and she would be something like a tease, playing them like a puppeteer. And, although maintaining control was what she did best, she knew now that they all saw through that. But actually going through with it had serious consequences of its own.

Her automatic mental deliberations about the matter annoyed her. She eyed a book she had already read and went to pick it up to re-read it. It wasn’t long before her eyes grew heavy and she crawled into bed to fall back asleep.

When she woke, she took a shower and dressed before going upstairs to get a bite to eat. It was obvious that the boys had already eaten, leaving evidence of their meal on the table. She shook her head and cleaned it up and then made her lunch.

The house was deadly silent, and she wondered what they were doing, and where Snape had gone.

She ate slowly, but found that she was growing more and more restless by the moment. Something was building inside of her, a decision was being made, a choice was rearing its brutal head, working itself out in her mind in spite of her conscious efforts to not think on it. It was nagging at her, and so she finally decided to give up and think about it purposefully. She would approach this logically; it was what she did best.

Her thoughts returned to what Draco had said to her about wanting something real, and Harry trusting him to give it to him.

Trust. She knew that it was at the heart of why she wasn’t giving in to her desire to submit completely. In order to give up control, she had to trust… all of them.

She knew she could trust Harry and Ron, who both loved her, and had her best intentions in mind, even when they made mistakes. They were both her best friends and lovers, and nothing would ever change that.

But Draco was different. She thought of their argument in the library and the way he had used Ginny, and she found herself tensing. Her thoughts then took her to the way he had defended her and Harry in Potions class and his treatment of her since they had been in the house. She felt her body growing warm as she thought of the way he had made her beg and expose herself in front of all of them and the way he let her ride him and the way they had gone at it all night as if they had both been starved for it.

But outside of that, she didn’t really know as much about him, and he was guarded in what he said.
revealed. The little she did know left her confused, frustrated, but longing to know more. And then there was his comment about showing her ‘the real thing’; she wanted to know what he meant by that.

Whatever the ‘real thing’ was, she suspected that she had gotten a taste of the worst of it with Ron. A part of her feared that submitting meant she might be susceptible to real corporal punishment of the same sort. Still, she couldn’t deny the arousal she had felt when he had spanked her and rode her from behind as he pulled on the belt he had wrapped around her mouth.

For the first time ever, he had really stood up to her, and she had enjoyed it. The feeling of being made into a tool for someone else’s pleasure had shaken her very core, making her come harder than she had ever come with him, and she wanted him to make her feel like that again.

And then there was Harry; he, more than any of them, knew exactly what she longed for, had firsthand knowledge of all of her fantasies. She found herself trying to summon what she had felt after being whipped by him, something she never thought she’d really enjoy, and she knew she couldn’t summon it on her own. In order to feel that way again, she needed to submit again.

The only thing she remembered of it was that she had been left feeling high and giddy, and clinging to the hope that the feeling lasted much longer than it did. And although she didn’t enjoy the first few punishments Harry had given her, she felt both humbled and relieved of her guilt.

For the first time, she wasn’t able to think her way out of an uncomfortable spot; her intellect couldn’t get her out of the mess she had made, and she had been forced to face the uncompromising truth of her actions as well as what she was willing to do to make amends. She had never felt so safe, terrified, special, and vulnerable before but she knew she wanted more of it.

The thought of it made her shiver, and a familiar ache began to throb between her legs.

She was confined to a house with three wizards she was very much attracted to and enamoured with, and they were clearly interested in dominating her in the ways she had dreamed about. But if she did, how would it affect how they saw her, how they treated her in public? Would they still respect her? If she was going to do it, she had to be sure that she remained true to herself throughout.

*What do you really want?*

And then she knew. The answer was clear as day.

She wanted to squirm under Draco’s humiliating demand that she beg and present herself to be inspected; she wanted to feel the helplessness and longing she felt when Ron had bound her to the bed, denying her release as well as the satisfaction she had felt when he had objectified and used her for his own pleasure. And most of all she wanted to feel the way she had felt during her time with Harry… to be able to just let go and trust that someone would know what she needed, even when she wasn’t quite so sure herself.

She steeled her nerves for what she was about to do, and after finishing her lunch and cleaning up, she walked slowly toward the stairs to find that the door to the right bedroom was closed, and she could hear whispering.

She told herself she would not to turn around or rethink what she was about to say.

*What the hell am I afraid of; I’m freaking Gryffindor!*

She pressed her head against the door and thought once more about their possible reactions, and what she would do in response to each one. And then, finally she turned the knob and opened the
door.

Standing in the doorway, gazing down at all three of them sitting in a semi-circle on the floor, she took a deep breath.

They all watched her in silence as she came closer and sat down in front of them.

“Hermione, what is it?” Ron asked, his expression becoming concerned.

She swallowed. “I need to talk to you about something.”
Beyond Duty Part I

She won’t fall for nothin’, she’s much more than cute
Don’t mind your window shoppin’, that’s alright
But you ain’t gonna taste my forbidden fruit

She’s personal property, personal property
Personal service, personal touch
Exclusively mine, thank you so much
She’s a heart-stoppin’, brain thuddin’
Blood pumpin’, knee tremblin’
Spine crushin’, tongue tyin’
And she’s mine…

“Personal Property” by Def Leppard

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“What is it?” Ron asked in concern after an awkward silence.
She took a deep breath, turning to address Harry. “I’ve been thinking about what we talked about.”
Ron and Draco both looked between Harry and Hermione with questions on their faces.
“Oh, and?” Harry said with his eyebrows raised.
“And, I want to try it,” she said with a hopeful smile on her face.
“Really?” Harry asked, smiling.
Hermione nodded. “Yes… really.”
“What are you two talking about?” Ron asked.
“I want to try being… submissive,” Hermione said.
“You are a submissive,” Draco said pointedly.
“I mean, all the time… I want to belong to you,” she said bravely, looking him in the eye.
“Who?” Ron asked, glancing at the other two and then back at her.
“All of you,” she said.
“You mean be our slave?” Draco asked, putting emphasis on the last word.
Hermione shook her head. “No, I don’t like that word, and that’s not what I mean… I would have limits, conditions.”
“Because you don’t mean it,” Draco said, his eyes like stone.
“I do mean it!”
“Hermione, you don’t have to do something this extreme; if you want kinky sex, then that’s not a
problem,” Ron said.

“No, Ron, this is about more than sex!” she said in aggravation.

Ron’s forehead wrinkled.

“Hermione wants to pretend like she’s owned,” Draco said.

No, she didn’t want to pretend; she wanted to experience it and she was determined to show him that she was serious about what she wanted, although she had to admit that hearing the word ‘owned’ sounded far more consequential when said out loud.

She narrowed her eyes at Draco. “I mean what I say, but I would like a contract,” she proposed.

“Told you,” Draco said dismissively.

Harry looked back at her doubtfully. “And what will this contract state?”

“It would list my terms and limits,” she said.

Draco gave an exaggerated yawn and stood up.

“Pardon me, but am I boring you?” she asked, indignant.

“No, just not interested,” he said.

Hermione became self-conscious but was not going to get flustered by his harsh words. She kept her face neutral to hide her hurt feelings.

“What’s the matter, can’t handle a woman strong enough to ask for what she wants?” she asked.

“I don’t mind a woman asking me for anything, but what I can’t tolerate is a girl who thinks she can tell me what to do and when to do it.”

Hermione huffed. Ask… tell, what did it matter? She wanted to retain some sense of dignity if she was going to try this. She was confused and frustrated by Draco’s reaction. She had thought he would respond more enthusiastically.

She opened her mouth to respond, but Draco put his hand up. “Save it.”

“Draco, sit down,” Harry said. Draco raised his eyebrows but instead of complying, he shoved his hands in his pockets.

“At least hear her out,” Ron said.

Draco rolled his eyes and slowly sat down.

“What the hell is your problem?” she asked. “You’ve been acting like a prick since this morning!”

“I’m sick of you prancing around here like we’re all your little servants. Even when you’re acting ‘submissive,’” he said, physically throwing up air quotation signs. “You know exactly what you’re doing to get what you want. Everything you do is so fucking calculated.”

“Just because I think before I act does not make me conniving,” Hermione said defensively.

“Listen, you’re not going to tell me what and when to do anything, especially that!” Draco said,
raising his voice.

“You’re mental if you think I’d allow you to do anything you want to me!”

“No, that would be real slavery, but you’re not even willing to submit unless you’re in the mood or approve of what you’re told to do. Forget about slavery, I don’t even think you can handle really being submissive,” Draco said.

“I think she can,” Harry said.

“Thank you!” Hermione said, pleased that Harry was defending her.

“Not so fast, Hermione,” Harry said. “Did you tell Draco this morning that he was being too nice to you.”

Hermione’s eyes darted to Draco. “I don’t know, it was early; I was just making pillow conversation.”

“Oh, is that what they call it?” Ron asked sarcastically.

“So you want Draco to be a prat?” Harry asked.

Hermione scowled and threw Draco a nasty look. “That’s not what I meant, and you know it!”

“What I know is that you want me to act like the arsehole you think I am because you’re too scared to really submit.”

“I’m not scared of anything!”

Draco snorted. “You’re scared of giving up control. I mean, *really* giving up control. Asking for a contract is just your way of trying to control things.”

“That’s not true,” she said, shaking her head.

“Yeah, it really is, Hermione,” Ron said. “You try to control everything and everyone around you.”

“That’s ridiculous, Ron! I know I can’t control other people!”

“But it doesn’t stop you from trying, though,” he insisted.

“Not really,” she said in a weak protest.

“He’s right. You walk around bossing everyone around, yet you fantasise about giving up control,” Harry said.

“Alright, fine, maybe you’re right. But, I’m willing to give up some control now to explore this further.”

“So, you’re willing to be trained, then?” Draco asked.

Trained. That word conjured up images of Pansy crawling around on the floor at the party. She remembered the way he had told her to fetch a ball, made her drink out of a tray, and petted her. She immediately dismissed any notion that she and Pansy would be of like mind about anything.

She huffed. “I’m not a pet!”
“Oh, please drop the act; you know the idea turns you on,” Draco said.

Hermione started fidgeting. “Perhaps a little, but I don’t intend—”

“See, this isn’t going to be about what you want all the time. It’s about you giving up control and pleasing us, which will end up getting you off as well,” Draco said.

Hermione folded her arms over her chest. “I refuse to give up total control and let you boss me around and abuse me without conditions or limits.”

A dead stare between her and Draco was interrupted when Harry spoke. “Hermione, do you really think that Ron and I would allow something bad to happen to you? You said you trusted us, so trust us.”

“But, you can’t just take it back when you don’t get your way,” Draco added. “You have to trust us to do the right thing.”

“Trust is earned,” she said defiantly.

“Yes, it is, and that goes both ways,” Harry said. She was reminded of their previous conversation and how she had come dangerously close to destroying their trust in her.

Hermione looked back at her two oldest friends, and a silent understanding passed between them.

“What exactly is involved in training?” she asked Draco hesitantly.

“What we see fit,” Draco said firmly.

Hermione shook her head. “I need more information than that!”

“No, you really don’t. This is the problem,” Draco said.

“It’s not a problem that I have enough common sense to think of my safety, or does it bother you that I’m not as desperate as Pansy?”

Draco scoffed. “Here we go again.”

“Well, I’m not going to be treated like a dog, if that’s what you think!”

“Pansy enjoyed the way she was treated,” Draco said defensively.

Hermione pursed her lips in frustration.

“The point is: do you trust us?” Harry asked.

“I trust you,” she said.

“What about me?” Ron asked.

Hermione nodded slowly.

“Let me guess: it’s me that you don’t trust?” Draco asked.

“Well… I gave you my wand, didn’t I?” she said.

“That’s not what I asked you… You want a contract because you’re worried I’ll do something you won’t like?”
She stared back at him appraisingly, unsure of how to answer.

“Tell you what, no contract, but we’ll have a verbal agreement,” he offered.

“Go on,” she said, trying to quell her rising excitement.

“And, we all have to agree on the terms of the agreement before anything starts,” he continued.

“And?”

Draco regarded her for a moment before speaking. “And as a part of your submission to me, we will spend some time getting to know one another better. Sound fair?”

Hermione narrowed her eyes. “Alright… I suppose.”

Draco smirked. “Now, let’s talk about the conditions of your slavery.”

“Can you stop using that word?” she said anxiously.

“Fine, your submission. Better?”

“Much.”

“Rule Number One: You’ll submit to all of us, inside and outside of the bedroom,” he said with a challenge in his voice as if expecting a protest.

“In public?” she asked, her brow furrowing.

“Yes, in public as well,” Draco said.

“Well… within reason; I won’t be made a fool of. As a matter of fact, I don’t want it to be obvious to anyone, especially at Hogwarts.”

Draco gave her a small smile. “It won’t be, unless you want it to be.”

Hermione looked to Harry and Ron, who both remained unusually silent.

“Sound good?” Draco asked all of them. Harry and Ron finally nodded their heads in agreement.

“Fine,” Hermione said stiffly.

“Fine, what?” Draco asked.

Hermione stared back at him, unsure of what to say.

“Fine… Draco…” he said, slowly as if instructing a child.

“Fine, Draco,” she repeated.

“Right then, Rule Number Two: You’ll call each of us by our first name when asked a question or given an order, unless we instruct you to call us by another name.”

“Like?”

“Like, Master,” Harry said.

“Or, sir,” Ron said with a smile.
Hermione nodded her consent.

“Look at that, you can’t even get past Rule Number Two,” Draco said with a sneer.

Hermione huffed. “Yes, Draco.”

“Rule Number Three: You’ll obey all commands without question, and if you argue or resist, there will be a punishment.”

Harry frowned. “I think we should all agree on the punishment, to make sure no one gets hurt.”

Draco cast a wary glance to Ron and shook his head. “We won’t all be around her all the time, so that makes things a bit difficult.”

“Fine, we have to agree on the types of acceptable punishments beforehand, to keep each other in check,” Harry said. Ron ears grew pink.

“Alright then, we’ll discuss a list of reasonable punishments; anything outside of that must be agreed upon by all of us,” Draco said.

“I’ll go with that,” Ron said.

Hermione’s mind started to wander to the list of punishments she’d read about in the restricted book she’d read. Some of the punishments were downright sadistic and frightening.

“What if I don’t approve of the punishments?” she blurted out.

“I knew it. This isn’t going to work,” Draco said in exasperation.

“No, what I mean is, what if you choose a punishment that I honestly can’t do, like it seriously inspires panic?”

“Well, we’ll discuss your limits in a minute, and we’ll make sure to respect those,” Harry said, giving her a reassuring smile. She smiled back and Draco rolled his eyes.

“Also, we’ll stop if you use your safe word, which is Filch,” Ron said.

Hermione almost clapped to hear that he’d remembered and was actually taking this seriously.

“Oh great, Weasley, you can learn; there’s hope after all,” Draco said before turning to address Hermione. “But, if you overuse or misuse your safe word, you will be punished.”

“How will you know?” Ron asked.

“You’ll know, Weasley,” Draco said. “Rule Number Four: We’ll rotate. We’ll set aside one or two hours a day for non-sexual time.”

Hermione couldn’t help but smile, it was nice to know this was going to be more than sexual.

“Thought you’d like that one,” Draco said. “Now, do you have questions?”

“No questions, but I do have another rule,” she said.

“What?” Harry asked.

“If any of us at any time feels uncomfortable with the terms of this agreement, we’ll agree to discuss
“Alright, sounds good. I think that about does it,” Draco said, clapping his hands together.

There was no way in hell that was the end of the conversation. He was trying to have complete control again, and that simply wouldn’t work.

“What about my limits?” Hermione asked.

“Oh yes, those… I’m sure you have quite a list; let’s hear it, then,” he said.

“My submission, whatever you ask of me, absolutely cannot interfere with my school work,” she said firmly.

“We wouldn’t dream of messing with your perfect marks,” Ron said airily.

She nodded. “And I don’t want you using this against me, to hurt me.”

“Define hurt,” Draco said, looking at her sceptically.

“Like drawing blood, leaving bruises,” she said, letting her eyes rest on Ron, who looked away in shame. “Or leaving marks in general.”

“Oh, now, that’s no fun. No marks at all? Stripes can be fun,” Draco said with a mischievous grin.

“Well…”

“Let’s just say blood and bruises for now, alright?” he pressed.

She nodded slowly. “And nothing mental,” she added.

“Define mental,” Draco asked.

Hermione shrugged. “Like taking a piss on me, making me shag a goat, or embarrassing me in public. You have to respect me in public! I don’t want to be treated like a pet or degraded in front of others; I should be treated like a lady.”

“We’ve already covered that,” Draco said.

“And it’s perfectly reasonable,” Harry added quickly.

Draco smirked. “You know, I think it would raise suspicion if I started treating you like a lady now. How about I’ll treat you the way I’ve always treated you?”

“I knew it!” Ron said, with a scowl “So you’re going to remain a prat toward us, then?”

“What do you expect, Weasley? You want us to all walk into Hogwarts holding hands or something?” Draco said, clearly bothered by the subject.

“Guys, let’s talk about how we’re going to act once we get back to Hogwarts later,” Harry said, putting an end to the rising tension in the room. “Anything else, Hermione?”

“Yes, and none of you can share me with anyone else,” she said.

“Hermione!” Ron said in indignation.

“Well, I’m sorry, but it needed to be said!” she said, throwing a glance at Draco, who looked back at
her affronted.

“I also don’t want anyone else to know about this contract or my submission,” she said.

“Of course. Is that it?” Draco asked.

“Oh, and no tickling!” she said, putting her finger up at Draco.

“Hmm, we may have to use that as a punishment,” Draco said, smiling mischievously.

“No! Please… it’s unbearable. I could die or something, seriously,” she pleaded.

Harry and Ron sniggered. Draco begrudgingly nodded.

“Fine, is that it?” he asked once more.

“Yes, I think so,” she said slowly, racking her brain for other things. “You know this is a verbal contract; we should write it down.”

“Only, we don’t want to write it down; our word should be enough. Or are you still intent on topping from the bottom?”

“Topping from the bottom?”

“Yes, trying to control how you’re controlled. Pretending to be submissive when you’re really ordering us about.”

Is that what she had been doing? It didn’t seem like it. But it was interesting there was a phrase for it all the same.

“I see,” she said.

“Do you?” Draco asked.

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes, Draco.”

“Good, so that’s it then,” he said.

“Wait,” Harry said, straightening. “What about Draco calling you a ‘Mudblood’?”

“Yeah, Hermione… Malfoy says it turns you on,” Ron said with disgust.

“I didn’t exactly say that,” Hermione said hesitantly.

“Well what did you say?” Harry asked, eyeing her closely.

“I said that I don’t want it used excessively,” she said softly, trying to push through the shame of her admission.

“I don’t think he should use it at all. It’s disrespectful!” Harry said.

“I don’t understand why you like it,” Ron said with a question in his voice.
“It’s not as if I like it per se… it just arouses me… sometimes,” she said, searching for a way to explain something she wasn’t sure she entirely understood herself.

“That’s just bizarre,” Harry said with disapproval.

“You mean like calling me your fucktoy, Harry?” Hermione asked pointedly.

Harry blushed.

“You called her what?” Ron asked in open shock.

Harry ignored him. “That’s different, Hermione, and you know it.”

“No, it isn’t, Harry- it’s just as demeaning. How is it different?” she asked.

“It just is,” Harry said, uncomfortably shifting.

“It’s more shocking maybe,” she said, thinking out loud.

“So you’re saying I can call you a Mudblood, too?” Ron asked in disbelief.

“It sort of loses its effect, coming from a known blood traitor,” Draco said with a sneer.

Ron scowled. “What makes him so special?” he asked bitterly.

“That’s what I’d like to know. What is it about Malfoy saying it that turns you on? Would it turn you on if I said it?” Harry asked.

“Probably not, since your mum was one,” Draco said.

Harry sat up, his eyes widening. “Excuse me,” he said abruptly, rising to his feet and rushing out the bedroom door.

Ron shook his head. “Now you’ve gone and done it, Malfoy. You never talk about Harry’s mum like that!”

“I heard Harry was sensitive about his parents, but I didn’t know it was this bad,” Draco said with a frown.

When Harry came back, he appeared pensive. They all looked up at him, waiting for him to explain his behaviour.

“Have you seen Snape since last night?” he asked.

They all shook their heads.

“What’s going on, Harry?” Hermione asked.

“I’m not sure, but I’m going to find out,” Harry said with a determined expression. They all looked at him strangely until Harry’s attention returned to Hermione.

“Now, where were we? Oh yes, Draco calling you a Mudblood is acceptable, then?”

“Well… sometimes… maybe,” Hermione said, hating how flaky she sounded.

“It’s either yes or no, Hermione; you don’t get to make the rules after this,” Harry said.
Finally Hermione nodded, and looked at Draco, who was smirking. “Don’t worry, Hermione, I’ll pick my spots carefully,” he said with a wink.

“Just don’t do it around me, please,” Harry said with a sickly grimace.

“So, when does all of this begin?” she asked.

“No time like the present,” Draco said, giving her a predatory grin that made her shudder.

Hermione cleared her throat and looked to Harry and Ron for reassurance, but Harry’s face revealed little, except for the dark gleam in his eyes. She tried to focus on Ron for encouragement, but he was looking back at her with measured evaluation in his eyes as if thinking about all of the possibilities that lay before him.

She swallowed, determined not to show her apprehension or reservation about what she had just agreed to.

“First things first: strip,” Draco ordered.

Hermione slowly stood to her feet and slid off her sweats and underwear.

“I want you shaved,” Harry said, staring at her crotch, which made Hermione’s cheeks burn.

“Don’t worry, we’ll make that happen… tonight,” Draco said.

Harry gave Draco a small smile and Hermione took a deep breath. The thought of one of them with a razor to her bits was a little scary.

“I like you naked,” Ron said finally after looking her over slowly. “I think you should stay this way, all day and all night.”


Ron stood up and walked behind her, slapping her firmly on the behind, causing Hermione to yelp.

“What did you say?”

She looked down at Harry and Draco, who sat on the floor, as if waiting for her to call off the agreement. She closed her eyes briefly and opened them. “I said, that’s fine…”

“That’s fine, what?” he asked, slapping her arse again.

“Ah… that’s fine… Ron!”

Ron gave a satisfied smile and came around to face her. “Of course, we can’t have you totally starkers around Snape.”

Hermione let out a sigh of relief.

“That doesn’t mean you can’t make yourself pleasing to look at through dinner, though. I want to see cleavage and plenty of thigh,” Draco said, licking his lips.

Hermione glared at Draco, who looked at her with a challenge on his face.

“How about you Transfigure her clothing into that get up you made Pansy wear at your party,” Ron suggested.
Hermione turned her glare onto Ron, who gave her a sheepish grin.

“So you’re finally admitting you can’t Transfigure worth a shit, then?” Draco asked Ron.

“Just do it!” Ron said in frustration.

“How about I teach you how to do it yourself?” Draco offered.

“OK,” Ron said appreciatively.

“Also, you’ll keep the collar on at all times,” Harry said.

“You’re joking?” she said disbelieving.

“No I’m not, and if you question an order one more time, I’ll think about making you wear it when we return to school.”

Hermione stared back at Harry in surprise.

His stare was unflinching. “Understand?”

Hermione nodded slowly. “Yes, Harry.”

“On your knees,” Draco ordered. “I should make you crawl around on all fours for the next day or two.”

“Malfoy!” Ron said in protest.

“What? I want to see if she’s just playing or taking this seriously. You can call it off anytime you like, Hermione,” he said with a small smirk. “But once you do, it ends, completely.”

“Yes, Draco.”

“Right then, so this is going to be a test for you. For the next oh, I don’t know, few hours, we’ll see how serious you are about really being owned. If you pass this test, we’ll lighten up, and you’ll be rewarded for being a good girl. If you fail, then all bets are off, and we’ll all agree that you just don’t have it in you to be a real submissive. Sound reasonable?” he asked, looking at her.

Hermione closed her eyes briefly and grit her teeth. “Yes.”

“What’s that?”

She had to fight from rolling her eyes as she replied, “Yes, Draco.”

“Good girl.”

“Now, I don’t know about you lads, but I’m getting hungry,” he said with a smirk.

“No more stew, something different this time,” Harry said, staring down at her.

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Snape watched as Hermione, dressed in a tight fitting French Maid uniform exposing her various assets, and a collar around her neck, set the table. She then went back to the kitchen to continue cooking while the boys sat around the living room giving her various orders.

Draco seemed hell-bent on taking the most advantage of the situation.
“Water,” he drawled loudly to which Hermione came in the living to give him a glass of water. “This won’t do, I need much more ice,” he said looking at the glass in disapproval. Hermione’s lips went tight before she finally said, “Yes, Draco,” and turned to go back into the kitchen.

Snape looked at Draco with revulsion and shook his head.

When Hermione came back out with a full glass of iced water and handed it to Draco, she immediately turned toward Ron.

“And what about you? Would you like something as well?” she asked loudly as if to call attention to the situation. Ron just shook his head, his face red with shame as he glanced up at Snape.

Hermione looked up at Snape and smirked down at Ron. “What’s the matter, Ronald, you have nothing to be ashamed of... you all are treating me as well as any house-elf right now.”

“Hermione! You’ll pay for that later,” Harry said in a hushed tone, glancing up at Snape, who was pretending to busy writing something.

Hermione scowled as she asked, “Would you like anything, Harry?”

“Yes, I’d like for you to take the sarcasm out of your voice and get me a biscuit,” he said in warning.

“But you haven’t even had your dinner, yet! You’re going to ruin it!”

Harry didn’t reply or break eye contact with her either.

She sighed loudly. “Yes, Harry!” She turned on her heel to retrieve a biscuit a for him.

When dinner was finally served, they all sat around the table in silence as Hermione sat on the floor next to Draco. He placed her plate on the floor in front of her and smacked her hand when she reached for a roll. He then leaned over and picked up her roll, offering it to her. Hermione stared up at him a long moment before opening her mouth, allowing him to feed her.

“That’s enough!” Snape said, glaring at Draco.

“But Profes—” Draco started.

“I said, that’s enough, Draco. Ms. Granger, get up and sit at the table like a human being.”

“Yes, sir,” she said.

“What is going on here?” he asked, looking around at all of them.

“Isn’t it obvious?” Draco asked, apparently quite put out by Snape’s interference.

Snape turned his stare on Hermione. “Ms. Granger?”

Avoiding Snape’s stare, Hermione focused her gaze on the table instead. “Yes, sir, it was actually my idea,” she said softly.

“I see,” Snape said, looking at her thoughtfully.

“We wouldn’t do it unless she wanted it. It was all her idea,” Ron said quickly.

“Well, some of it at least,” Harry said.
“Let’s cut the crap, shall we; she’s being trained. I’m sure you’re aware of what that entails, Professor,” Draco said suggestively.

Snape’s lip curled into a snarl as he looked back at Draco. “Yes, I am quite aware of what training is, Mr. Malfoy, but I’m not sure that you are.”

Draco swallowed as he looked to Harry and Ron for support. “We’re all in agreement about it. No one is being forced to do anything they don’t want to.”

Snape stared between Draco, Harry and Ron until they all dropped their eyes in discomfit. “Do me a favour, and make sure whatever ‘training’ you require of her, that she stays fully clothed in my presence.”

“Ah, of course, Professor,” Ron said, his ears going pink once more.

“Ms. Granger,” Snape said more gently than usual. “Dinner is… very good this evening. I dare say I believe you have a hidden talent,” he said, giving her a small smile.

The boys looked at Hermione and mumbled their compliments about dinner and said their thank yous.

Hermione smiled gratefully at Snape.

“And I think that since Ms. Granger has made such an excellent feast, the least you three could do is to clean up. Agreed?” he asked, leaving no room for refusal.

They all nodded in quick agreement not looking at one another or Hermione.

The rest of the dinner was quite strained, and they all ate in tense silence. When they were done, Snape told Hermione she could go relax and take a nap or read if she liked. She thanked him and excused herself to retire downstairs for a nap.

Draco began to rise from the table as well when Snape pointed at him.

“Sit down,” he said.

Draco slowly sat back down, his eyes apprehensive.

“Although I’m quite pleased to see Ms. Granger more agreeable to suggestion, and I must admit, much less annoying, I do hope, that you remember that she is a person, and for you two,” he said, looking at Harry and Ron, “a close friend. I do not expect your treatment of her to deteriorate to the point where I have to intervene again.”

“You don’t understand; this isn’t permanent. We were just testing her,” Draco said.

“Oh, I think I understand perfectly, Mr. Malfoy. Just make sure you don’t take it too far. Real submission is given, not forced. It is a gift, and if you abuse it, it can be taken back, if not by Ms. Granger, by me, understand?”

“Yes, sir,” they all said in unison.

“Good. Now clean up,” Snape said.

“Wait, Professor,” Harry said.

Snape’s grip on his fork visibly tightened as he waited for Harry to speak.
“My mother…”

“What about her?” Snape asked stiffly.

“She was a Muggle-born,” Harry said.

Snape’s entire face went tight as he stared back at Harry. “Yes, I know,” he replied, keeping his voice strangely flat and even.

“Did - did she have anything to do with the prophecy?” Harry asked.

Ron and Draco looked up at Snape curiously.

“This is not a discussion to be had right now, Potter.”

“Is that a yes?”

“I will tell you everything you need to know when it is time,” he said.

Draco narrowed his eyes at Snape.

“It’s time to tell the truth, right now!” Harry said irately.

“Enough! I’m sick of your demands, Potter. You haven’t the foggiest clue what you’re asking for or what it may mean. For once in your spoiled life, just do as you’re told and stop asking me about things you aren’t ready to hear,” Snape said with restrained tone that threatened to grow much louder.

He and Harry stared back at each other with contempt until Harry rose, taking his and Hermione’s plate with him to the kitchen.

Ron and Draco followed Harry’s lead, leaving Snape at the table alone.

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Hermione awoke to the slamming of a door and saw that Draco was leaning against it with a fixed gaze on her. Harry was next to him and was holding a large bowl in his hand. Draco looked over toward him and Harry smiled back at him before disappearing into the bathroom, shutting the door behind him. She heard running water and then looked back curiously at Ron, who was standing closest to her by the bed. She immediately climbed out of bed.

“Strip,” Ron ordered.

She nodded and disrobed. Draco stood up straight and began walking toward her.

“What was that shit before dinner?” he asked.

“What?” she asked, trying to remember if she had said or did something to displease him.

“Your smart arse remarks to Ron,” he said, backing her up toward Ron.

“I was just joking,” she said apprehensively.

“You should choose your jokes more carefully next time,” he said as her back hit Ron’s chest.

“Weasley?”
Ron nodded slowly as he took Hermione’s hand and pulled her back toward the bed. He took a seat and pulled her down onto his lap.

“Ron, what are you doing?”

“Punishing you,” he said, looking up at her. Hermione felt herself getting excited, thinking about the playful spanking Ron had given her days before, but instead, he slapped each of her breasts harshly, causing her to jump and look back at him and Draco in embarrassment.

She was surprised that he thought to do something like that to her, the effect was surprisingly humiliating, but she kept her face impassive and unemotional as she looked back at him defiantly.

Ron smirked. “You can stare at me all you like; I know you weren’t expecting a real punishment, were you? Well, get used to it.”

Despite the humiliation or perhaps because of it, her breathing grew heavy.

“I’m not sure there’s anything we could do to turn you off,” he said in amazement at her obvious arousal.

“Sure there is, Weasley,” Draco said. “There’s always the belt, we know that for sure.”

“You promised, no marks,” she whispered anxiously.

“Unlike Weasley, I know how to use a belt without leaving bruises, and you won’t find it particularly arousing either, since it’s clear you’re not a painslut,” he said, removing his belt.

Hermione looked at him guardedly, waiting to see if he was just threatening her. He took her chin in his free hand and squeezed. “You’ll show us all the same respect. If you disrespect one of us, you’ve disrespected all of us… is that clear?”

“Yes, Draco.”

He shook his head, tapping the belt in his hand against his thigh. “I don’t think you know how serious this is, Hermione. We’re not playing with you.”

Despite the threat, she found the way he was handling her very arousing and found herself fighting not to show it. She didn’t want him to mistake her arousal for taking her submission lightly.

She nodded. “I know… I know,” she said softly as she bowed her head in his grip and pressed her lips to his hand as much as she could.

Draco’s face softened, and he began to stroke her face. “You will soon enough,” he said pausing, “or maybe not,” he said as Harry came out of the bathroom looking at all of them.

“What’s going on?” he asked, glancing at Hermione.

“Punishment,” Ron said, looking up at Harry.

“Yeah? Maybe we shouldn’t; Snape might not like that,” Harry said sarcastically.

Ron shook his head and set his jaw. “What the fuck does he know about her? We’re her friends; we’d know her better than he does.”

“Do you agree with that, Hermione?” Draco asked.
Hermione nodded. “Yes, Draco.”

“But you seemed to enjoy Snape’s intervention. Maybe you don’t want to do this our way, because
this is about us, not what he thinks.”

“Yeah, Hermione. I wouldn’t want you to feel forced into anything,” Harry said. “If you don’t want
this, that’s fine.”

“As a matter of fact, yeah, let’s call this whole thing off,” Ron said, standing up.

Draco smirked. “You know, I think you’re right, Weasley. I don’t think she really wants it anyway;
we’re treating her so badly.”

“I didn’t say that!” Hermione protested.

“Right, let’s just do what she tells us to do from now on,” Harry said to the other two.

“She probably could even recruit a fourth for her harem,” Draco said teasingly.

Harry nodded. “Yeah, I bet she could train Jordan right away; he fancies her. He’d probably do
anything she said.”

“Don’t,” Hermione said.

“Don’t what?” Harry asked.

“Don’t call it off… I need….,” Hermione trailed off, looking frustrated.

“What do you need, Hermione?” Draco asked, staring down at her.

“I need what you want… Draco,” she said.

“You need what we want? Why?” Harry asked.

“Because, I want to be yours,” she said.

“You know, I think she’s ready,” Draco said, giving Harry a nod.

Harry went back to the bathroom, and a few moments later, he came out with a towel over his
shoulder and the bowl he had brought down, which was now full of water. He had a tin under his
arm and a razor clenched carefully between his fingers.

“Lay down,” he ordered.

Hermione reclined back on the bed slowly, keeping her eyes on Harry and the razor in his hands.
She watched as Draco pulled the nightstand against the wall toward the bed, then Harry set the bowl
on it. She was gripping the mattress nervously as her body went completely stiff. Draco came around
to the left side of her, while Ron moved to the right.

“Just like we discussed, Weasley,” he said to Ron, who immediately grabbed Hermione’s right leg
and pulled it toward him as he pushed hand on her right arm, pressing it into the bed. Draco did the
same on her left side, spreading her left toward him and pressing her left arm into the bed, so that she
lay completely open before Harry.

Harry kneeled down in front of her on the bed and sprayed a handful of shaving cream into his hand,
spreading it over her mound evenly, before wiping his hand on the towel on his shoulder.
He picked up the razor. It gleamed brightly in the room’s light as he brought it inches over her mound.

Harry paused, looking into her eyes. “Are you sure this is what you want, Hermione?”

Hermione’s eyes moved from Harry’s to the razor. “Yes, Harry, yes.”

He began to shave her. Taking his time, being careful, he started at the top, taking long, gentle swipes, pausing after each to clean the razor in the bowl.

She looked up to see Draco looking down, smirking. Ron was watching Harry closely, but she couldn’t read his expression.

It wouldn’t be a good idea to squirm, despite the mounting arousal from having them so focused on her in this way, so she told herself to stay still and bit her lip to keep from moaning.

Draco leaned in close over her, interrupting her concentration. “Why do you think we’re shaving you?”

Hermione’s breath became short; she didn’t know how to answer him. She never did, he always asked her trick questions so that he could make her feel less than perfect and vulnerable. “I… I don’t know… because you want to?”

“You’re smarter than that, Hermione… why do we want to do it?”

Hermione couldn’t think straight, feeling the pressure of Draco’s hands bearing down on her leg and arm, pressing her into the bed, with Ron applying slightly less pressure on her right,

“Because… you like it shaved?”

Draco inched closer until he was almost kissing her. “No, because I like my cunt shaved… I like it clean cut and ready for use, just like my property should be.”

Her breath hitched at hearing him call her bits his property the way he had referred to them on the first day they had been together.

“This is no longer play; this really is my property now, isn’t it?” he asked.

She nodded, at loss for words.

“Tell me!” he ordered.

“Yes, it’s your property, Draco…” she said, practically panting. The struggle to remain still growing harder as her arousal mounted higher.

“Just his?” Ron asked, looking at her harshly, pressing her arm into the bed harder as his grip tightened. “Huh?”

“No, it’s yours, too, Ron,” she moaned.

“Yeah? I want to hear it,” Ron demanded.

“It’s yours, Ron.”

“My what, ‘Mione?”
“Your property,” she said, staring up into his eyes.

“My pussy,” Ron whispered.

Harry paused and sat up straight. Hermione looked down to see him staring at her, his eyes demanding the same declaration she’d given to Draco and Ron.

“Yours, too, Harry,” she said, staring up at him.

“I know,” he said, giving her a small smile.

“It’s ours, Hermione; you’re ours… as of right now, you’re owned,” Draco said. “We fucking own every bloody inch of you, isn’t that right?”

“Yes, Draco,” she moaned.

“Say it, Hermione,” Harry insisted.

“You own me,” she repeated as she unconsciously writhed against her human restraints.

“Hold still, I’m almost done,” Harry said, bending down once more to finish up. After he was done, he wiped her newly bare mound gently with the damp end of the towel.

“Got a spell?” Harry asked, looking at Draco.

“What?” Hermione asked, suddenly worried.

“Well, would you rather we shave you every week? I certainly wouldn’t mind,” Harry said.

Hermione shook her head as Draco pointed his wand down at her bits. She drew in a breath.

“Calm down, I’m not going to hurt you,” he said.

Still they all watched in tense anticipation as he was about to spell her when he dropped his wand.

“On second thought, I think this is something you should maintain yourself. New assignment: either find a spell to permanently keep it as it is, or you’ll make sure you’re shaved at all times, for us, understood?”

“Yes, Draco,” she said, slightly relieved.

“You’re not off the hook that easy,” he said, pointing his wand back at her mound.

“What? What are doing?” she asked him uneasily.

“Just something to mark our property,” Draco said.

Harry raised his eyebrows and Ron’s eyes went wide.

“Please, you said no marks, Draco,” Hermione pleaded looking at Harry and Ron.

“Malfoy,” Ron said, looking at him in warning.

“Don’t worry,” Draco reassured. “This mark will fade over the next few weeks, until we can find something more suitable.”

“Something we all agree on,” Ron added.
“Of course,” Draco said, looking up at Harry, who nodded in agreement.

“I don’t want a tattoo, please…” Hermione pressed.

“Shush, Hermione, tattoos are for Muggles, and you are a witch,” he said, staring into her eyes. Her heart swelled to hear Draco call her a witch.

“Our witch,” he continued. “And this isn’t any more of a tattoo than Snape’s Dark Mark, unless less permanent. Now shut up and let me finish.” Using his wand like a quill, he scribbled something over her mound that burned for a second before cooling.

Hermione looked down and saw that her bare, cleanly shaven mound was red and irritated but she saw no letters.

She gasped the next moment as Harry buried his face into her cunt, pushing his tongue inside of her, sucking on her clit even as he spread her wider with his hands. Draco’s hands were pressing against her inner thigh, opening her even wider for Harry and then his mouth was covering hers possessively. She felt a mouth closing over her right breast and began writhing. She moaned into Draco’s mouth as Ron took her nipple between his teeth.

Harry’s tongue was relentless, lapping at her folds, then probing her, pausing every few minutes so he could suck on her. She was close, so close, and she fought against Draco and Ron’s hands to close her legs around Harry’s head as she tried to move her hips against his tongue to work toward her release. She was almost there, and then everything stopped.

She opened her eyes to see all three of them looking down at her, grinning.

“Didn’t think it would be that easy did you? You still haven’t been punished for mouthing off at me before dinner,” Harry said.

“What?” Harry asked.

Hermione growled in frustration.

“Just for that, you’ll be sleeping on the floor tonight… chained,” Draco said.

Hermione opened her mouth in protest but then stopped herself.

“Ah, she’s learning,” Draco said approvingly. “If you keep this up, you’ll get to sleep in the bed with us tomorrow night.”

What a foul, evil little prat, she thought. She tried to clear her mind, instead of reaching for a biting retort.

“Yes, Draco,” she forced out.

Draco nodded. “Now, go wash up and get ready for bed.”

As Hermione rose, she looked at Ron. His looked away as if suddenly feeling guilty. She brushed past him to head to the bathroom, slamming the door behind her.

In the very next second, Harry opened the bathroom door.

“Oh, I can’t even shower in private now?” she asked incredulously.
“Not if you’re going to get yourself off, no,” he said, standing at the door.

Hermione tried not to show her frustration as she turned on the shower under Harry’s watchful eye and stepped inside. He stood there for a good while until he seemed to grow tired of it and then closed it.

By the time Harry left, her arousal was gone. She numbly ran the washcloth over herself. Her hand kept returning to touch her newly shaven mound. It was bare and smooth and felt so foreign. Being held down by Draco and Ron while Harry shaved her still seemed surreal, and she tried to replay it in her head, letting the meaning of it sink in.

Was she really owned? Could anyone who willingly gave themselves over to someone really be owned? It was a choice after all, one she could change. But she didn’t want to… it felt quite good. The knowledge that she belonged to them, that she was so valued that they wanted to possess her, keep her to themselves.

And then the fact that Draco had called her a witch. She’d never forget the way he had said it clearly and declaratively as if he were apologising, acknowledging, and claiming her all at once.

She closed her eyes, allowing the water to run over her face. As she lathered up again, and let the soap slide down her body, she ran her hand once more over the newly smooth surface of her mound.

When she opened her eyes to look down and study it, she noticed the suds were collecting around invisible imprints that had been burned into her skin. It only took her a second to read the word it formed, even though it was upside down.

*Ours*

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As he watched them shave her, he couldn’t stop himself from slipping into the familiar waking memory of Lily on her knees in front of him, begging to be owned.

He remembered thinking how unreal it felt to have someone so beautiful, brilliant, and special kneeling before him, giving him her body and heart in that one simple act.

He wasn’t even fully conscious of his hand sliding down to his cock as he began to stroke himself absently, thinking of the fading memory of power, gratitude, and lust that swept through him that night, and feeling her magic and his combine into something neither one of them could resist as she offered her mouth to him.

He remembered clearly how he had pulled her head back and brushed her throat with his fingertips, savouring the moment before he would put a collar around her neck and take her as his property. He felt himself shudder as an unexpected orgasm ripped through his body. It had indeed been a long time.

As he came back to his senses, his eyes focused once again upon Hermione laid out before them, and sighed heavily as he thought of the illusion of ownership.

It had all been a lie.

Lily was never his… not completely. He did a cleaning spell on himself and closed his cabinet, rising to get a drink and retire to bed.

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Draco watched as Hermione came out of the shower. She looked down at Ron, who was kneeling, creating a makeshift bed for her on the floor.

“You’re spoiling her, Weasley,” Draco said.

“And you’re taking this way too seriously, Malfoy.”

“Ron, she’s in training,” Harry reminded him.

“I know, but come on!” Ron said as if Harry had gone mental.

“Oh alright, but that’s it, after that she gets chained to the bedpost,” Harry said, glancing at Hermione.

Ron shook his head and gave Hermione a sad smile. “You heard him, get comfy,” he said, patting a spot on the makeshift bed.

Hermione stared at it and then finally settled down onto it, trying to get comfortable.

“That’s a good girl,” Draco said, petting her and then hooking a long chain tied to the bed to the hook in her collar. She didn’t smile as she glared up at him, instead she settled down on her side, facing away from him and moved toward Ron.

Draco yawned, stretched, and climbed into bed. Much to his annoyance Ron stayed on the floor, pulling Hermione into his arms before closing his eyes.

Draco frowned and rolled over to face Harry, who was lying on his back, staring up at the ceiling. After several moments, Harry said the spell to turn off the lights. Draco continued to stare at Harry’s form in the dark with the awareness that he and the other boy were wide-awake.

He listened as both Ron and Hermione began their usual snoring, and his mind began to wander as it often did when he couldn’t sleep.

“Harry,” he whispered.

“What?”

“You want to take a shower with me?” he asked.

“Damn, do you ever get enough?” Harry asked. “We could cuddle if you like.”

“Are you serious?”

“No,” Harry said with a small chuckle.

Draco found himself smiling and sat up on his forearms, looking down at Harry.

“What?” Harry asked.

“I know what’s on your mind,” Draco said.

“What do mean?” Harry asked.

Draco didn’t answer him; instead he leaned in to kiss him, sucking on his bottom lip.

“Mmm, you taste like cunt,” he said.
“You like?” Harry asked.

“Definitely… come on, let’s have a shower,” Draco said.

Harry nodded and they both quietly rose from the bed tip toeing lightly toward the bathroom.

“Feeling randy, are we?” Harry asked, quirking an eyebrow.

“A bit, and I want to talk to you,” Draco said.

Harry’s face grew serious. “About what?”

“Oh, this and that,” Draco said. He moved in closer, tentatively at first, and then embraced him tightly in a firm hug.

Harry froze up uncomfortably. “Draco, what’s going on?”

Draco sighed, and pulled back. “Nothing, I just thought you might need that.”

“Why would you think that?” Harry asked, giving him a strange look.

Draco shrugged.

Harry narrowed his eyes. “What?”

“What was that about earlier today? Your fantasy, I mean,” he asked.

Harry’s face grew red. “I don’t know. Why does it matter?”

“I’m not making fun of you, alright? It’s just… I don’t know, I’m just wondering what that’s about.”

“Since when do you care?” Harry asked a bit curtly.

Draco studied him for a minute. “Do you feel used… like everyone takes advantage of you or something?”

Harry stared at Draco for a moment before nodding slightly. “Sometimes.”

Draco leaned in and kissed Harry once again. They kissed for several moments before Draco broke the kiss. He pulled his t-shirt over his head and pushed down his pants. Harry looked him over and did the same. As Harry completely disrobed, Draco reached in to turn on the shower. He could feel Harry watching his back as he stepped in.

“Come on,” he said to Harry, who slowly stepped inside behind him.

Draco turned around and watched as Harry let the water run over him. He let his eyes move over Harry’s lean and muscular body slowly until he was staring at Harry’s eyes. They were closed and he seemed to be enjoying the water. Draco waited, trying to get up the nerve to say something he thought he’d never say to Harry.

But it was also something he thought that Harry needed to hear. So he decided that when Harry opened his eyes, he’d just spit it out and be done with it.

Harry opened his eyes with a puzzled expression. “Are you alright?” he asked in concern.

Draco braced himself. “You know, you’re lucky, everyone loves you.”
Harry stared back at him, clearly taken aback and then he shook his head. “No, they don’t. They love who they think I am or who they want me to be, and even then, you can’t count on that. They turn on you quickly,” he said with resentment in his voice.

“Is that why you feel used?” Draco asked.

Harry looked toward the wall. “I don’t know.”

“Maybe that fantasy of yours is about you letting people use you so that you can keep their affection.”

Harry shook his head. “No, nothing can earn you someone’s affection, I’ve learned that. But… maybe the fantasy is about me getting used on my own terms.”

Draco moved around Harry, gently pushing the other boy against the wall. He put both of his arms on either side of Harry’s head and began to kiss the other boy’s neck, which elicited a soft moan. He let his mouth trail slowly down Harry’s body until he was on his knees, the water running against Draco’s back as he looked up into Harry’s eyes.

“Use me,” Draco said.

He watched as Harry shifted uncomfortably in front of him, apparently at a loss for words.

“Go on, use me, Harry, I won’t mind,” he said as he pressed his mouth against the head of Harry’s cock.

Draco moaned as Harry gripped his hair tightly, pulling his mouth down on him. He sucked him slowly with care, running his tongue over him as he pressed his hands against the tiles behind Harry’s legs.

Draco allowed his head to be guided back and forth, as Harry fucked his mouth. He fought the urge to gag as the head hit the back of his throat several times and instead became determined to take as much of him in as possible, relaxing his throat and focusing on using his tongue to caress the length in his mouth in the same manner he himself enjoyed.

It wasn’t long before Harry was gripping his shoulders with both hands and crying out, spilling himself in Draco’s mouth. Draco didn’t let go until Harry was going soft in his mouth and the last bit of his release was gone.

Harry looked down at him with a gracious smile.

Draco smirked back up at him and stood up to open his mouth under the stream of the showerhead. He let the water run over his face and hair before stepping back to gaze at Harry, who was watching him with a look of satisfaction on his face as he leaned against the wall.

“I think we’re being watched,” Draco said.

Harry straightened up. “What? Snape?”

Draco nodded solemnly.

“That’s… disgusting!”

“Yeah, well, it’s just a hunch, but I know you’re suspicious, and frankly, I’d like some answers as well,” Draco said with a knowing look.
“Well… I have been thinking of a way to get him to talk,” Harry said.

“Yeah? Tell me,” Draco urged.

Harry nodded cautiously. “Alright, so here’s my plan…”
Beyond Duty Part II

“The right way to wholeness is made up of fateful detours and wrong turnings.”

-Carl Jung

Don’t tell me that you didn’t see this coming down
Don’t say that this isn’t what you wanted now
Don’t tell me this isn’t what you asked for
Be careful what you ask for...

“Blackjack” by Everclear

Harry remained awake long after Draco had finally drifted off to sleep, replaying their plan to get Snape to reveal more information over and over in his head.

They both agreed that it would be best not to tell Ron and Hermione until they were sure it was going to work. Draco thought the fewer people who knew the better. Harry reluctantly agreed.

At first, Harry suggested that they simply take Snape by surprise and overpower him with a hex with the threat of revealing everything to Dumbledore, but Draco thought that idea was too brash and that Snape would end up with the upper hand.

“What if he doesn’t care if Dumbledore knows?” Draco asked. “Or what if Dumbledore already knows about the assignment?” That question left both Harry and Draco silently contemplating the consequences. “Also we’re bound; if we tell, we don’t even know what might happen to any of us.”

“It’d be worth it if Snape has us in over our head into something foul,” Harry countered bitterly.

Harry had watched as Draco stared off in deep thought before his eyes had grown wide. “I almost forget - he has a potion supply in his lab.”

“He has his own lab?” Harry asked in surprise. “Of course he does,” he mumbled to himself.

“Alright, so what?”

“So, I’m sure he has Veritaserum in there,” Draco said.

Harry shook his head. “And what if he doesn’t, then what?”

“Then we’ll overpower him and threaten to out him to Dumbledore,” Draco said flippantly.

“But you just said—”

“Look, you think I would risk it if I didn’t think he had any? He keeps that stuff around like some people keep spare change,” Draco said. “Except…”

“What?”

“How do I get back there without getting caught? I mean if he’s really watching us?”
“You think he’s watching us everywhere?”

Draco frowned. “I doubt he’s interested in what we do in the bathroom; he can’t be that perverted!”

Harry shrugged. “Then we’ll just pretend to take a long shower together; I’ll sneak my Invisibility Cloak in here with us and then—”

“Your what?”

Harry huffed. “My Invisibility Cloak.”

Draco stared back at Harry dumbfounded. “How did you get one of those?”

“Long story,” Harry replied, anxious to get back to planning.

Draco narrowed his eyes. “You carry it around with you? What else have you been using it for?”

Harry shook his head in frustration. “Draco, if you’re worried that I’ve been spying on you in the showers, forget it.”

Draco frowned. “So you say…. So that’s how you’ve been getting about. Perhaps you should have been Sorted into Slytherin.”

“No way,” Harry said dismissively. “Anyway, like I was saying, we bring the Cloak in here, and you put it on. Then I’ll walk out like I’m leaving you in here, I’ll say something like, ‘you’re going to stay in the shower a bit longer?’”

“Alright…”

“In the meantime, you’ll be under the Cloak behind me. I’ll walk to the door and open it and go up and get some juice and you’ll follow me; only once I get upstairs, you’ll keep going back to his lab.”

“But, what if the lab door is closed or locked?” Draco asked.

“I can create some sort of diversion while you get it open; you know basic unlocking spells right?”

“Yeah, but—”

“All I need to do is give you enough time to get in and get what you need and then get out,” Harry said excitedly.

Draco shook his head. “This is too risky.”

“Scared, Malfoy?” Harry asked with a smirk.

Draco narrowed his eyes. “No, I just don’t like gambling when there’s not much promise of a good return.”

“What’s the worst that can happen?”

“We get caught,” Draco said anxiously.

“And then what? He owes us an explanation; he can’t bloody well kick us out of school or take house points from us! We shouldn’t even be here!” Harry said in frustration.

Draco had nodded slowly in agreement. “Alright.”
“The only thing that I’m worried about is that he’ll find out what it is we’re slipping to him. I mean, what if he suspects and doesn’t take it; there’s got to be another way to make sure that he does…”

“How could he suspect? It’s odourless and has no taste. You guys didn’t even realise you were drinking it at the party, and you didn’t trust me at all.”

“Yeah… I guess. But this is Snape; he’s clever,” Harry said in concern.

“He’s also arrogant; he wouldn’t dream we’d be so bold. Trust me,” Draco said.

Harry looked back at him and smiled, nodding in acceptance.

For the first time, he didn’t think twice about trusting Draco, and that thought alone was remarkable enough to keep him up half the night. He smiled to himself, and looked over at the sleeping boy to his right before finally falling asleep as well.

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Early the next morning, Draco awoke to the sound of soft sighs and groans next to him. He looked over at Harry, who was knocked out and then looked to his right where there was no one next to him in the bed. He suddenly remembered that Hermione and Ron had slept on the floor and he quietly scooted over to peek at them over the edge of the bed.

Ron was buried inside Hermione, her legs wrapped around his back, and her hands in his hair as he moved gently over her.

She moaned, pulling him tighter into her. They kissed awhile before Ron pulled back, staring down at her as he stilled.

“You know you don’t have to do this slave thing…”

“Ron, I told you, it’s not slavery. Please don’t ruin it; just make love to me,” she said, putting her hand up to his mouth.

Ron pulled her hand down. “I love you, Hermione. I don’t want you to do something you’ll regret.”

“I won’t; you’re here, right? It’ll be okay,” Hermione said, reaching up to stroke him.

Draco quietly pulled his head back and stayed very still as he looked up at the ceiling and continued listening. He didn’t hear anything for several minutes but kissing and soft moans and then Ron chuckling softly.

“What are you laughing at?” he heard Hermione ask with a smile in her voice.

“You’re lucky I love you, you know that? I have to be mental to let this go this far.”

“No, Ron, you’re lucky I love you enough to let it go this far; don’t pretend you aren’t enjoying it as well.”

“Just a bit.”

“A bit? I know you’ve been dying to order me around,” Hermione said, laughing softly.

“Hey, you’re not supposed to be laughing. This is serious business; we’re not playing with you,” Ron said, mocking Draco from the previous evening.
“Shhh…” Hermione said, breaking out in giggles.

“Hermione, you can’t laugh; it’s not a part of the rules!” Ron said, chuckling.

“I-I can’t help it, sir… you’re quite funny,” she said, stifling her giggling.

“Oh that won’t do. I’ll have to punish you,” he said with dramatic flair.

“Oh… please… please don’t,” Hermione replied in mock fear.

“Too late; you’re going to get it now,” he growled playfully.

Draco listened as Hermione gasped and then moaned again. There were wet smacking sounds of them kissing and then more moans followed by Ron telling Hermione how much he loved her. Hermione told him she loved him just as much in return, which made Draco’s mouth go dry.

He felt a lump in his throat as an odd feeling seized him. He didn’t know what to make of listening to the two of them laughing together, making fun of him and declaring their love for each other. It made him feel something he couldn’t quite name. Was he insulted, hurt, jealous?

He turned his head once more to look at them and watched as Ron kissed her slowly and pushed several curls from her face. Hermione was smiling into the kiss, wrapping herself around him tighter.

An unexpected pang clenched Draco’s chest. He knew what he was feeling now - empty, cold, and lonely.

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Hermione opened her eyes and caught Draco’s stare just as Ron groaned into his climax. Their eyes locked with Draco openly glaring at her, while she stared back up at him with a shocked and apprehensive expression. Ron kissed her on the cheek and then rolled off of her with a smile on his face until he noticed Draco.

“You really are a perv,” Ron said. “That’s the second time I’ve caught you watching me; you want a private show or something?”

“Don’t flatter yourself, Weasley; it’s not my fault you like to wake up shagging and manage to wake everyone else in the process.”

“Can you think of a better way to wake up?”

Draco rolled his eyes.

Hermione bit her lip and rose to her knees, moving closer to the bed. “Feeling a bit left out? We can fix that,” she said, reaching out to touch him.

Draco pushed her hand away. “No thanks. I’m not in the mood,” he said, rolling over.

Hermione looked back at Ron, who shrugged. She pointed at Draco’s back and mouthed the words, “He heard us!” Ron threw up his hands and shook his head in helpless understanding.

Ron huffed and then slowly crawled over to the edge of the bed. He reached underneath the duvet and pinched Draco’s arse cheek.

“Ouch!! You’re going to pay for that! I told you not to touch me, Her—”
“I’m not Hermione,” Ron said, smiling.

Draco gave him a deadly glare. Ron drew back, raising his hands in surrender. “Boy, you’re in a foul mood! I suppose you want to chain me up again?” he asked flirtatiously.

Draco scrunched his face up. “You wish, Weasley.”

“Alright, if you insist, but this time I get to be on top at the end of it,” Ron said, licking his lips.

Draco tried to hold his angry stare but couldn’t fight the reluctant smile breaking through. “So you liked the chains, eh?”

Ron shrugged. “They weren’t so bad; it’s the cock ring I can’t stand.”

Draco smirked. “Get away from me, Weasley, or I’ll consider putting it back on you.”

“Anything to touch my cock again, right?” Ron said with a cheeky smile.

Draco shook his head and glanced back at Hermione, who was watching their exchange. When she gave him a reassuring smile, Draco narrowed his eyes and promptly rolled over to face Harry.

They slept for a few more hours, until Hermione started pulling on her chain, causing the others to stir.

“What is it?” Ron asked.

“I have to use the bathroom,” she whined.

Ron unhooked her from the bedpost, and she ran to the bathroom.

When she came out, Draco was sitting up, with a displeased look on his face. “You deserve to be punished.”

Ron looked up at Draco in surprise. “For what?”

“She knows.”

Hermione sighed. “Fine… what do you want me to do?”

Draco shook his head. “Forget it. Just shower, and then go up and make us some breakfast.”

“Mmm, I’m starved,” Harry murmured.

“Me, too,” Ron said hesitantly.

Hermione pursed her lips and turned around.

“What’s that?” Draco called.

“Yes, Draco,” she said stiffly before shutting the bathroom door.

Ten minutes later she came out, threw on some sweats, and left the room. Draco quickly rose and shut the door, levelling a serious stare down at Ron, who was still sprawled out on the floor.

“What?” Ron asked.
“I heard you two this morning,” Draco said bitterly.

Ron shrugged. “Yeah, I know… so?”

“What are you talking about?” Harry asked.

“Weasley and Hermione having a laugh about her submission.”

“Ron!” Harry groaned in frustration.

Ron clicked his teeth. “Sorry, but I just can’t take this ‘slavery’ thing seriously! And I really don’t think any of us should!”

“Even if you don’t, what’s the point of it if you’re going to make fun of it? She’s not going to take it seriously if we don’t. And then it won’t work,” Draco said.

“Ron, she asked us for this; it’s something she wants. Even if you aren’t that into it, just go along with it and don’t mess it up,” Harry said.

Ron shook his head. “That’s what she said.”

“That should tell you something, Weasley,” Draco said as he began to dress.

“It just feels weird, bossing her about all the time, making her sleep on the floor, making her eat on the floor,” Ron said, glaring at Draco.

“Look, maybe I took it a bit far, but she gets off on this; the sooner you accept that and learn to just enjoy it, the better it will be for everyone.”

“Fine! But I’m not going to pretend like some of it isn’t funny. I have to have a little bit of fun.”

“Just make sure you don’t disrespect us when you’re having fun,” Draco said. “I’m going to go up and have a chat with her,” Draco said, opening the door.

“About what?” Ron asked.

“Do you have to know everything?”

Ron sighed and buried his face into the pillow on the floor.

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Draco climbed the steps and watched Hermione’s back as she fluffed a bowl of egg yolk between opening a can of beans, searching for tomatoes and mushrooms, and pulling out a fresh loaf of bread. She was cooking the Muggle way, when she could have done half of the things she was doing using Levitation or stirring spells.

He pulled out a seat at the kitchen table, prompting her to turn around.

“Come to make sure I’m making breakfast properly?” she asked tersely.

“No, just here to talk,” he said softly.

Hermione eyed him suspiciously. “Talk?”

“Yes, or is that being too nice for you?” he asked sarcastically.
Hermione gave him a small, cheerless smile. “Still on about that? Who knew you were so sensitive?”

“You don’t really know me at all.”

“A fact that you seem to enjoy reminding me of,” she said, turning back around to tend to her preparations.

“I wouldn’t want you to get the idea that you do just because we’ve been shagging all week,” he said.

“You don’t exactly make it easy. It’s not like you’re not the most open person in the world,” she said as she began to chop tomatoes.

Draco didn’t respond; he simply sat in the chair watching her. Hermione remained silent as she prepared breakfast. It was becoming painfully clear to Draco that she was growing tired of their bickering and if they were going to move past it, he’d have to show her he was serious about really getting to know her.

He shifted in his sit and forced his tongue to unfold itself. “Why would you give your body to someone you don’t know?” he asked softly.

Hermione didn’t turn around, but the sound the chopping became louder and more vicious.

“I don’t really own you… not like they do, do I?” he asked, waiting for her to turn around.

She didn’t, instead she continued to prepare the food in silence.

He nodded as if she had answered. “You know, I know I don’t; you can’t really own anyone if they haven’t given themselves to you… completely.”

His words hung in the thick silence that stood between them. She finished chopping and resumed stirring the eggs, even though they were certainly thoroughly mixed.

“It’s hard to give your heart to someone who won’t let you in, Draco. What do you want me to say?”

Draco folded his hands in front of him. “How do you expect me to be open with you, when you don’t even like it when I’m nice to you?”

Hermione narrowed her eyes. “Excuse me if it takes a while to believe that anything you say isn’t crafted by an ulterior motive. Maybe it’s all of those years of you tormenting me. Besides, being nice and being open are two different things. You know much more about me than I know about you.”

“Alright, then. Go on; ask me something… anything,” he said.

“Why do you act like such a prat?”

“I thought you liked the prat,” he said, raising one eyebrow.

Hermione didn’t smile or respond, instead she stood waiting.

Finally, Draco shrugged. “I don’t know…”

Hermione sighed. “Great, I’m getting to know you so much better now. Thanks for sharing,” she said, turning back around.

“You know you’re just asking for a punishment,” he said without any real seriousness in his tone.
“Right, because that would be easier than talking about yourself, wouldn’t it?” she said.

Draco dropped his head in his hands and mumbled, “Because that’s who people like.”

“What?” she asked, turning around.

Draco dropped his hands to stare up at her plainly. “I said that’s who my friends like - the prat. They think it’s… well it’s who they think I am, and frankly, sometimes it’s necessary.”

“When do you ever need to be a prat, Draco?”

“Sometimes people need to hear the truth, and it’s not pretty.”

“You don’t have to be a prat to tell the truth!”

He shook his head. “You’re not in my social circle, Hermione.”

Hermione looked at him sceptically. “You can’t use that as an excuse. There are… nice Slytherins,” she said hesitantly.

“Oh, really? Like who?” he asked folding his arms over his chest.

“Like… like Derrick!” she said.

Draco chuckled. “Derrick? He’s a wanker, and he gets no respect.”

“Because he’s nice?”

“Because he’s a pussy. He lets people run over him to get his way. Besides, he’s not really nice; he’s deviously nice. That’s the worst sort, if you ask me.”

“So you think being an arsehole makes you more honest?”

“Sure. At least I’m open about who I hate. Besides, you’re either a bully or the bullied in my house. I’m not about to change now. It’s expected of me.”

Hermione shook her head. “You lecture me on worrying about what other people think and it turns out everything you do is to fit into some expectation others have about you. A bit hypocritical, don’t you think?”

He remained quiet for a moment, looking her over slowly. “And what about you? Why do you really work so hard to get all ‘O’’s? Why do you need to know all the answers?”

“I like learning,” she said stiffly.

Draco stifled a laugh. “Oh come on, Hermione! How would you feel if you got an ‘A’ or a ‘D’?”

“That would never happen,” Hermione said with a dismissive smile as if it were the silliest idea.

“What if it did?” he pressed.

“It wouldn’t…” she said firmly, stirring the eggs more aggressively.

He sighed. “But, what if it did?”

She stopped stirring to glare at him. “You don’t know how hard it is to be a Muggle-born at Hogwarts! I’d try to explain to you but I doubt you’d care!”
“Try me.”

“Alright then, do you know how it feels for someone to think you’re inferior before you even open your mouth?”

He couldn’t say that he did. Being a Malfoy had its built-in privileges, one of them being a reputation for being shrewdly business savvy and socially skilled when the situation called for it.

“No.”

“Right! Of course not! There are people that have already made up their mind that I’m worthless before I open my mouth, regardless of my marks, just because my parents are Muggles.”

Draco found himself nodding in understanding, and the words ‘I see’ tumbled from his lips before he even thought about it.

“No. No you don’t, Draco. You can’t possibly understand because until very recently, you were one of them!”

He stared back at her, frozen by the weight of Hermione’s pain. Her voice has risen to an almost shrill tone and she was visibly shaking. He recognised that she probably needed to get it off her chest, despite the fact that what she was saying caused an unfamiliar and unpleasant pain in his own. It was obvious he had hurt her feelings, more deeply than he could have imagined. He couldn’t help but bow his head as guilt and something that felt strongly like shame washed over him.

“You don’t know what it’s like, because you don’t have to prove yourself, Draco. You don’t have to worry that any mistake you make will confirm everyone’s suspicions that you don’t belong, that you’re inferior!” she said, her eyes teetering on the edge of angry tears. She held them back and then let out a long ragged sigh.

Draco gaped at her in confusion. “Are you okay?”

She chuckled to herself. “Yes. I suppose I’ve wanted to say that to you for a while.”

Draco nodded. “Yes, it appears so.”

Hermione sniffed and held her head up. “It’s true.”

“Yes, I know,” he said, trying not to sound too defeated. Just because she was mostly right, didn’t mean he had to look like a total twit by admitting it. He also didn’t want her thinking that being right meant that he was completely wrong.

She looked surprised, but then wrinkled her brow. “Draco, if that’s your way of apologising, don’t —”

“Look, about our conversation in the library…”

Hermione folded her arms over her chest audaciously. “Oh yes, the one where you said I don’t belong at Hogwarts? The one where you said all Muggles were trying to take over the wizarding world?”

Draco closed his eyes briefly and sighed. “Yes. And I’m not going to apologise for all of it.”

“Figures,” she muttered.

“I did mean some of what I said before - I still think Muggles are dangerous, history doesn’t lie—”
Hermione opened her mouth to speak.

“Let me finish! I think you’re right - once someone is born with magical ability, they’re just as vulnerable and... they’re just as capable as any wizard or witch that’s grown up in this world.”

“Are you saying that Muggle-borns have a right to be at Hogwarts?” she asked.

He nodded slowly. “Yes. I think that Muggle-borns with magical abilities do belong at Hogwarts.”

A smile began to break through her scowl.

“But, don’t ask me to love Muggles, Hermione... that’s pushing it,” he said firmly as if expecting another argument.

She walked over to him, her smile growing. “I suppose that’s a start.”

Draco felt himself relax. “Yes, I suppose...”

“Would you like to help me make breakfast?” she suggested.

Draco sniggered in amusement. “Are you mental? You’re lucky I’m not punishing you.”

“What do you call this? I hate cooking,” she said.

“How about I just stay and watch you. That is, if you don’t mind the company,” he offered.

“No, I like it. I like it a lot,” she said with a small smile.

Something in Draco’s stomach fluttered as he smiled back.

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Harry made apprehensive small talk with Ron, as he waited for Draco to join them downstairs. When Draco arrived, he was carrying a tray of full of food, and so was Hermione.

“You guys didn’t have to do that; we could have come up,” Harry said.

“Thought it’d be nice, breakfast in bed and all that,” Draco said.

Harry and Ron looked up at Draco curiously. Hermione tried to hide a smile as she shrugged it off.

“Aren’t you a dear?” Ron teased.

Draco gave Ron a bothered glance. “Keep at it, Weasley, and you’ll be wearing yours.”

“Oh, alright; let me help,” he said, rising to take the tray from Draco.

They all ate in comfortable silence until Harry said, “So, this is our last day, is it?”

They all sat thinking on it.

“We should all have one last good shag tonight, like all of us, together. That’s what we came here for,” Ron said.

“I’m ready,” Draco said.

“That’s a surprise,” Harry said.
Ron and Hermione sniggered.

“Are you ready?” Draco asked Hermione.

She took a deep breath. “Yes, I think so.”

“We’ll see,” he said.

“I can’t believe we have to go back to school tomorrow,” she said.

They all sat quietly, reflecting about the week when Ron looked up at Draco. “Did you mean it? You’re goin’ to remain a prat toward us?”

Hermione, Harry, and Ron all stared at him as he continued to eat. He reached for a drink, taking a long sip before speaking. “And how do you want me to act, Weasley?”

“You could at least try not making fun of us,” Ron said.

“And keep Crabbe and Goyle away from us,” Hermione added.

“And not egg them on,” Harry finished.

“Oh alright!” Draco said in annoyance.

“And—” Hermione started.

“Look, that’s it! I can’t do any more than that; I almost got banned from my dormitory because of you three,” Draco said in exasperation.

“What do you mean?” Hermione asked.

“They vandalised my belongings; that’s what I mean. And that was just a warning,” he replied.

They all gaped at him in disbelief.

“That’s mental!” Harry said.

“That’s Slytherin,” Draco said.

“I hate all of this house business,” Hermione said.

“Right, sometimes it really stinks,” Harry interjected.

“Sometimes… but it has its good moments as well,” Ron countered.

“But I’m sure there are a lot of great people in other houses that we’ll never really get to know because of it,” Hermione argued.

“That’s just the way it is; it’s not going to change,” Draco stated.

“Isn’t it? We’re changing it now.” Hermione was hopeful.

Draco laughed. “Maybe you should talk to Dumbledore about making shagging mandatory… across houses.”

They all smiled at that.
“That’s just as good as an idea as sponsoring a party to create inter-house unity,” Ron said, chuckling.

Harry began to laugh as well and Hermione giggled.

Draco tried to scowl but couldn’t hold it. “You guys have to admit, that was pretty damned good.”

“No, it wasn’t believable at all!” Harry said, laughing harder.

“You came, didn’t you?” Draco said triumphantly.

“You made it really hard to turn down,” Ron said, licking his lips.

Hermione gave Ron a displeased look.

“What? Don’t tell me you didn’t think what Pansy was doing was hot?” he insisted.

“If you ever even think about making me—” Hermione said.

“Just make sure you behave and we won’t have to,” Draco said, his smile dropping.

“I won’t do it; I don’t care what the punishment is!” she asserted.

“Is that a challenge?” Harry asked.

“Sounds like one,” Ron said.

“No, it’s not. Just, please don’t do that to me,” she pleaded quietly.

“You’d have to be really bad for us to do something like that; it’s semi-public, after all,” Harry said reassuringly.

Ron looked at her with a satisfied smile. “You know, I’m starting to like this slavery thing.”

Once they all finished eating, Draco asked Hermione to take the trays back upstairs.

“I can’t carry it all,” she said in frustration.

“Boy you are a whiner; more fun for us later, I suppose. Ron, why don’t you help her,” Draco suggested.

“Oh, and since when did I become a slave?” Ron asked.

“It’s just common courtesy; I helped her bring them down,” Draco insisted.

“Oh, alright,” Ron said, rising with a tray. Hermione picked up the other tray and followed him out.

Draco quickly rose to close the door, and gave Harry a slight nod to signal that it was time to put their plan into action.

“I’m glad they’re gone. I wanted to get you alone; I can’t seem to get enough of you, Harry!” Draco stated loudly, pulling his shirt over his head.

“Oh?” Harry asked.
“Yeah, you’re so fucking hot,” Draco said, rushing to pull Harry into a searing kiss.

“Mmm, Draco… I feel the same way… you want to have another go at it in the shower?” Harry asked breathlessly, tugging at Draco’s trousers.

Draco threw back his head in exaggerated relief. “Gods, yes, I’ve been waiting for you to ask,” he said as he pulled Harry towards the bathroom.

Harry tried to stifle outright laughter as he broke away from Draco to pick up his duffel bag, which sat in the corner, near the door.

“What are you doing?” Draco asked.

“Oh, this? You’ll see,” Harry said sheepishly.

“What do you mean?” Draco asked wrinkling his nose.

“Draco! Don’t make me say it, it’s embarrassing,” Harry said softly.

“Are they knickers?”

“No! But… it’s a surprise, something I’ve wanted to show you…” Harry said, averting his eyes like blushing virgin.

“Hmm, sounds really kinky. Come on then, let’s not waste any time,” Draco said with a devilish smile.

They both disappeared into the bathroom and closed the door behind them. Draco turned on the shower as Harry dug into his bag.

“You think he bought that?” Harry whispered.

“Yes, of course; why wouldn’t he?” Draco asked.

“I don’t know. He doesn’t really trust me,” Harry said, straightening up with the Cloak in his hands, handing it to Draco slowly.

Draco still couldn’t believe the Cloak was real. They were so rare, and he’d only read about them in books. He caressed it for several seconds, studying its texture. “I still can’t believe you have one of these. How long have you had it?”

“Years.”

Draco looked up at Harry suspiciously. “And you’ve never used it to spy on me or any of my friends?”

“Not really,” Harry said, dropping his eyes.

“Not really?” Draco repeated. “Merlin…Hogsmeade, third year! We thought it was some sort of freaky ghost or a trick by Hermione!”

Harry tried to hide a sly smirk.

“That was you! I mean, all of you, underneath the Cloak?”

“Well—”
“Thought that was funny, did you?” Draco said with a small frown.

“Ah come on – you had it coming; you were being a prat,” Harry said.

Draco shook his head.

“Look, let’s just focus and go over this again, shall we?”

Before Hermione and Ron returned, Harry emerged from the bathroom with a towel around his waist.

“I guess you’re going to be staying in for a while, then? Alright,” he called back into the bathroom, brushing past a very well-veiled Draco to shut the door.

Harry dressed quickly and practically ran up the stairs, with Draco on his heels under the Cloak. When he reached the top of the stairs, he felt Draco veer right, down the hallway, while he continued left on his path towards the kitchen to get a drink. Hermione and Ron were sitting at the kitchen table, talking.

“Still hungry?” Hermione asked him.

Harry shook his head. “No, I need to talk to Snape,” he said, turning around calling out for the man. Behind him Hermione and Ron exchanged a glance and then continued talking.

Harry continued to call for Snape as he turned the corner of the hallway. “Professor!”

He shook the doorknob to every door he came upon as he began a slow creep down the hall. Whenever he came to a locked door, he would bang on it, looking increasingly more distressed.

“Yes, Potter?” he heard Snape deep voice say behind him.

Harry jumped. “There you are! Amazing, it’s like you appeared out of thin air!”

“You wanted to see me?” Snape asked, watching Harry closely.

Harry threw a quick glance behind him. “Yes, sir, I-I wanted to talk to you in private, if possible.”

“Oh? About what?” Snape asked, peering past Harry as if to see if there was anyone there.

“Yes, sir, could we go somewhere more private? I sort of wanted to talk to you, away from the rest of them. Not too sure they’d take kindly to what I’m about to say,” he whispered, glance down the hall to indicate that the others were close.

Snape motioned for Harry to enter his study.

Harry followed him in and shut the door. Snape eyed him impassively, waiting.

“Sir… first, I wanted to apologise…” Harry started. Snape’s eyebrow quirked up as he stood regarding Harry. “I’m sorry about the way we were treating Hermione. You were right to interfere,” Harry said with a troubled frown. “I don’t want to hurt her—that’s actually why I wanted to talk to you, sir.”

“Oh?” Snape said, taking a seat in front of Harry and motioning for him to take a seat on the chair next to his desk.
Harry quickly sat down and then rubbed his hands on his trousers nervously. “I feel so bad; I couldn’t sleep half the night,” he said softly.

Snape smirked as if he knew something, but didn’t reply.

“It’s just that… I love Hermione, and I don’t want her to feel… abused or anything,” Harry admitted with a worried expression on his face.

“Then don’t abuse her; it’s not very complicated,” Snape said curtly.

Harry nodded. “Yes, sir, but I feel like there’s so much I still don’t know. Have you been in a relationship like this in the past?”

Snape didn’t reply but sat studying Harry sceptically.

Harry lowered his eyes, trying to look embarrassed. “I-I don’t mean to offend you or anything, but any advice you could give… I’m so new to this, and I want to make sure she’s happy. I was hoping there were some tips, perhaps,” he finished weakly.

An uncharacteristically genuine smile grew on Snape’s lips. “Yes, there are a few things you could learn,” he said condescendingly.

Harry sat up eagerly. “I’m all ears.”

“First, I do hope you have established a safeword,” Snape said.

“Yes, sir, we do have that,” Harry said with pride.

Snape nodded and Harry looked around until his eyes found the clock on the wall. Only about seven minutes had passed. It always felt like any time alone with Snape dragged on much longer than it actually did. He hoped Draco had managed to get in the lab by now. To be sure, though, he had a few questions to keep the conversation going.

“Sir, what if she’s too proud to use her safeword? How would I know?” he asked with concern.

Snape sat back with a pensive expression. “Yes. That may occur. With fiercely independent and strong-willed submissives, you will have to learn their limits by looking for non-verbal signs that they are distressed; it’s not an exact science, more of an art really.”

“You sound so experienced,” Harry said in feigned admiration.

Snape smirked. “I’ve had a few submissives in my times, Potter.”

“Where did you learn it all?”

“There are books on the topic, and then, of course, just like anything, you learn by doing,” he said.

Harry nodded and glanced quickly at the clock. “Sir, do you think we should apologise to her… for embarrassing her in front of you? We didn’t really mean to humiliate her.”

Snape rubbed his chin, and sat thinking for a few minutes, while Harry watched him and then glanced around once more; taking quick note that almost fifteen minutes had passed.

“No. For this latest stunt, I don’t think you should apologise. After all, some submissives enjoy humiliation and eating on the floor. As far as I know, Ms. Granger may as well. There’s nothing wrong with admitting fault where there is fault, but in these early stages of training, limits will be
tested and you all will learn what works for you. Just don’t do any of it in my presence. You don’t have to show off your power just because you have it.”

“Yes, sir. I think I’ll go back and have a talk with her now. Thanks!”

“No problem, Potter. I’m actually very pleased that you are not as dim-witted as I thought. Perhaps Ms. Granger is in capable hands.”

Harry smiled and rose quickly turning for the door.

“Oh, and Potter…”

“Yes, sir?”

“If you’re trying to trick me…”

Harry’s breath hitched as he fought from revealing his trepidation. “What do you mean, sir? Trick you?”

“Into believing that you don’t plan to take advantage of Ms. Granger’s position. There are certain advantages to being a dominant; I’m not fooled that you are only concerned about her interests, but I do appreciate your attempt at trying to be more mature about it.”

“Yes, sir,” Harry said, walking slowly out of Snape’s study. He looked behind him, elated that Snape did not follow. He let out a sigh of relief and continued down the hall to the left bedroom, where he hoped that Draco was waiting for him with the Veritaserum.

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Draco’s hands were shaking. He had done some underhanded things in his time, but sneaking into Snape’s private lab to steal what he hoped was Veritaserum in order to feed it to him just about topped the list.

He was starting to second-guess their plan when Harry opened the door and closed it.

“Did you get it?” he whispered.

Draco nodded. “Yeah, but… I don’t know if this is such a good idea anymore,” he whispered.

Harry went over to the bed, and leaned in for a passionate kiss. Draco couldn’t stop himself from kissing Harry back, reaching up to throw his arms around the other boy’s neck. Harry pulled Draco from the bed, reaching around his waist as he walked them back towards the bathroom.

Once inside, Draco pulled back quickly. “We can’t keep going into the bathroom to talk, he’ll figure it out.”

“What’s gotten into you?” Harry asked.

“I just…” Draco ran his hands through his hair, hating how nervous he felt. “I don’t know, Harry; there may be a reason why he’s not telling us certain things. What if it’s for our own good?”

Harry looked at him in incredulity. “What do you mean? We have a right to know everything! Besides, we’ve gone through all of this; we can’t turn back now. Don’t you want to know what he’s planning for us?”

Draco nodded. “Yes.”
“Alright then. Let’s stick to it,” Harry said. “OK, where is it?”

“Here,” Draco said, pulling the vial from his pocket.

“Ok, give it to me,” Harry said. “Did you have any trouble?”

“Well nothing in his lab is labelled, but this seems to have the same consistency and properties of Veritaserum,” Draco said cautiously.

Harry shrugged. “I guess that’ll have to do,” he said, stuffing it in his pocket.

“I suppose it’s time for you start making a roast.”

“Yep, it sure is,” Harry said, with a sly smile.

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The attractive aroma of roast permeated the house, and when Snape walked into the kitchen, he found Harry slicing potatoes with two pots boiling on the stove.

“What are you doing, Potter?” Snape asked, regarding Harry and the boiling pots with the same distrustful gaze he usually wore in a Potions lesson.

Harry glanced up as continued slicing. “I talked to the other two, and we all agreed with what you said: Hermione deserves to be treated better. So, I thought she’d like it if I cooked tonight.”

Snape nodded. “It’s good to know you do listen from time to time.”

Harry gave him a small smile and returned his attention to his preparations until he heard Snape walk away. He quickly went to the cabinet and pulled out four identical plates and one plate that didn’t look like the others and smiled before returning to resume cooking.

Once everything was done, he called out, “Dinner’s ready!”

They all came from upstairs; Hermione’s collar was on, but she was dressed in normal Muggle clothing, and both Ron and Draco seemed to be giving her space. Draco pulled out a seat for her and motioned for her to sit. She smiled, which caused Ron to scrunch up his face at Draco and cast him a curious look.

Draco threw Harry a quick glance and took his seat next to Snape. Harry waited for Snape to take a seat and placed a prepared plate of food in front of him.

“For your hospitality, sir. I do hope you like it.”

Snape quirked a small smirk. “Well, Potter, you’ve managed to cook something, without blowing things up? If you would only adopt this attitude in class, you’d earn higher marks, despite of your glaring incompetency…”

Harry’s lips went tight, but he managed a small smile.

They all rose and fixed their plates, bringing it back to the table and sat eating in silence for several minutes. Harry and Draco ate their own food slowly and exchanged several glances as Snape continued to eat.

Ron and Hermione seemed to sense something was going on, but remained quiet, watching both Harry and Draco with curious expressions.
“So, um, sir…” Harry started.

“Yes, Potter?”

“What’s your favourite colour?”

Draco sniggered. Ron and Hermione scrunched their faces at Harry.

Snape stared back at Harry with a blank expression as mumbled, “Black.”

“Really?” Harry asked sarcastically.

“Yes.”

“No surprise there; here’s a better question: what’s your Boggart?” Draco asked.

Harry’s eyebrows shot up as he regarded Draco, who smirked.

Snape narrowed his eyes at Draco but answered quickly. “Werewolf, actually.”

“Merlin, did he just admit that?” Ron asked in shock.

“He did… Harry, what’s going on here?” Hermione asked.

Snape turned his eyes on Harry with one raised one eyebrow. “So, you’ve managed to trick me. Bravo, Potter. Now, you’ll learn everything your little heart desires, much to your regret.”

“Why, are you going to take house points away, or perhaps something worse?”

“No,” he said quietly.

Harry swallowed. “Then why… why will I regret hearing the truth?”

“Because you won’t be able to handle it,” Snape replied matter-of-factly.

“I can handle anything you say; I’m tired of your secrecy.”

“Get on with it, then,” Snape said smugly.

“Tell us about the ritual – what do we have to do?” Harry demanded.

“I’m not sure…” Snape said, looking around at all of them.

“What?!” they all exclaimed.

“I haven’t found it yet,” he continued.

Ron stood up, glaring down at Snape. “You’re still looking for it? It might have been nice for you to mention that before we all started fucking!”

“Calm down, Mr. Weasley. I’m getting close, and if you curse at me one more time, I will take house points…” he said as if he couldn’t wait to do just that.

Ron laughed humourlessly. “Close? Close? We’re doing this on your word that—”

“That there is a prophecy; I’ve shown you that much.”
“I need a drink,” Draco said.

“I would offer you something, but it appears you have already taken it upon yourself to raid my private drinks cabinet,” he said.

Draco and Ron exchanged a look.

“I knew this was a bad idea! I can’t believe we’ve gone through all of this for nothing,” Harry said.

“Don’t tell me you aren’t enjoying yourself, Potter, I’ve seen you,” Snape said smugly.

“Blimey!” Ron said.

“What?” Hermione said, with a scathing glare.

“So, you are watching us, then?” Draco said, folding his arms across his chest.

“You nasty old bugger!” Ron said.

“Two hundred points from Gryffindor,” Snape said with a smile.

“You can’t do that!” Ron said.

“Of course I can,” Snape said.

They all stared back at him in disgust and disbelief.

“You’re disgusting!” Harry spat.

He rolled his eyes. “Don’t worry; I’m not sniffing your sheets afterward. And whatever I’m doing, I assure you that I’m not half as disgusting as your father… if you only knew how vile he was,” he said, the goad hanging alone, just waiting for Harry to reach out and pull it.

“Don’t you dare talk about my father!” Harry said, raising his voice.

“Did you really think I was going to leave the brightest witch of our age to be abused by three hormonal teenage boys, without supervision?” Snape demanded, glaring at Harry.

Hermione blushed at Snape’s compliment, but then she shook her head and frowned. “It’s very inappropriate for you to be watching our… activities.”

Snape shrugged. “I stopped keeping track of what was appropriate the moment I told you four about the prophecy,” he said. “Any more questions, Potter? Perhaps a few about your unlamented father?”

“Say another word about my father!” Harry threatened.

“Or what? Afraid that I won’t be able to lie and tell you he was a decent person?”

“Tell us about the prophecy,” Harry said through gritted teeth.

“I already have,” Snape said in a bored tone.

“No… what does it mean? Why us?” Harry asked.

“Have you ever heard of Carl Jung?” he asked.

“He’s a Muggle psychologist,” Hermione said quickly.
“Very good, Ms. Granger.”

“What does he have to do with this?” she asked.

“He was a Squib,” Snape said.

“Really?” Hermione said in surprise.

Snape nodded. “Yes, and his theories about the human psyche have many layers of meaning and many of them are not really of his own creation. He took a great deal of his so-called research from wizarding mythology.”

“Of course, that’s what Muggles do,” Draco said, throwing a glance at Hermione.

“Are you paying attention, Draco? Snape said Jung was a Squib!” Hermione pointed out.

“Same thing,” Draco said dismissively.

“Ugh!” she groaned.

“Are you two quite finished?” Snape asked in a bored tone. When Draco and Hermione fell silent, he continued. “Jung’s theory on archetypes is drawn specifically from the origins of the prophecy. The prophecy is very old, almost as old as Hogwarts itself, and when I said it spanned across time, I meant it. There have been opportunities for it to be fulfilled throughout history, none of which have been successful.”

“How many Dark Lords have there been?” Harry asked.

“Technically there have been five Dark Lords. But as far as this particular prophecy, I’ve counted only four it may have applied to,” Snape said.

“Four!” Harry, Ron, and Hermione said together.

They all stared back at Snape, eager to hear the rest.

“It appears the prophecy is still viable because it never came to fruition,” he finished.

“Oh great! Not only can you not you find the ritual, but even if you do, now you’re saying it might not work?” Ron said, looking distraught.

“From my research, it appears that there have been two failed attempts, which resulted in the deaths of all involved,” Snape said.

“What!” they all exclaimed.

“Oh shit!” Ron said.

“You’re telling us this now?!” Harry asked.

“You asked,” Snape replied.

“That’s perfect! We’re on a suicide mission!” Ron said.

“I wouldn’t call it suicide, Mr. Weasley. In the past, it’s been mostly left up to chance, usually unknown to those involved; and the two scantily-documented efforts to make it come to fruition have involved those who were forced by those who were corrupt and seeking power for their own
purposes."

They all stared at him, tense with anticipation, waiting for more information that might reassure them that they were doing the right thing.

He looked around at them, seeming to sense they were on edge and needing reassurance.

“As far as I know, no one has ever had this much information about the prophecy before attempting to do it, and no one has had the chance actually to orchestrate its fruition so that the bond is natural, includes the proper people, and seeks to accomplish its rightful purpose. So that puts you ahead of the curve, so to speak,” he said.

They all glanced around at each other nervously.

“What have you learned so far? How do you really know that we’re the right people?” Hermione asked anxiously.

“According to Jung, a whole person is made up of several archetypes. There are several, but four archetypes in particular that he ‘borrowed’ specifically from wizarding mythology seem to relate to this particular prophecy.”

“How can you be sure?” Draco asked.

“I’m not entirely,” Snape said plainly.

They all groaned in unison.

“But, after careful consideration of wizarding history, mythology, and anthropology, it’s clear that there is a reason that a Muggle-born is vital to its fruition, as are two Gryffindors and a Slytherin.”

“This is related to our houses?” Harry asked.

“Yes, from what I can gather, this has something to do with Godric Gryffindor’s friendship and later bitter split from Salazar Slytherin over their different views about whether Muggle-borns should be attending Hogwarts.”

“And Slytherin is known for producing Dark Lords, isn’t it?” Ron said, glancing at Draco who narrowed his eyes in return.

Snape pursed his lips. “That may have something to do with it, yes. But, this is only partially about your house affiliation, there’s more to it than that.”

“Of course, it has to have something to do with each of us, in particular,” Hermione explained.

“Yes, Ms. Granger, there’s something essential about each of your innate characteristics, the archetypes you represent, that will make your bond complete to create the whole… making your combined magic very powerful.”

“What are the archetypes?” Hermione asked.

“The Self, the Shadow, the Anima, and the Animus” he replied.

“What do they represent?” Hermione asked.

“Jung has his theories on what they represent, but taken from wizarding mythology, they represent different aspects of our being. The self,” he said letting his eyes fall to Harry, “is the central core.
Everything is ordered around it; it is often thought of as the God image of man,” he said, smirking as if he didn’t believe that part.

“The Shadow,” he said to Draco, “which seems to be clearly connected to Slytherin’s role in the prophecy, represents our most latent desire, the unconscious, if you will, and what some call the dark side of humanity. The Shadow also has qualities that the Self doesn’t possess or denies itself.”

Harry and Draco exchanged a long stare as if seeing each other clearly for the first time.

“What are the other ones?” Ron asked eagerly.

“The Anima is the ultimate feminine representation of the human spirit, but it’s also a part of a male psyche as well. And finally, the Animus is the ultimate masculine.”

“Let me guess, I’m the Anima?” Hermione said with some resentment.

“Correct, Miss Granger.”

“So that means… I’m the ultimate masculine?” Ron asked with look of pride.

Draco scoffed. “That’s ridiculous!”

“Why?” Ron asked defensively.

Draco shook his head at Ron.

“And what about the last time the prophecy could have worked? Who was the Anima then?” Harry asked.

Snape sat back and stared at Harry for a moment. “I do believe that would have been your mother.”

Harry nodded knowingly.

“And that would have made you the Shadow, correct?”

“Yes,” Snape said, keeping his eyes fixed on him.

“And the person who would have been in Ron’s place?” Harry asked, straightening his posture as if waiting for a blow.

“Sirius Black.”

Harry’s jaw flexed like he was chewing on his tongue.

“Harry…” Hermione said reaching out to him. Harry yanked his arm from her.

“And my dad?”

“The Self.”

There was a heavy silence at the table as they all watched Harry.

“Of course, that’s why it didn’t work, isn’t it? My mum would never agree to such a thing,” he said with satisfaction. Hermione gave Harry a puzzled look and then looked around self-consciously.

“No, that’s not why it didn’t work,” Snape said with the shadow of a smirk on his face.
“What do you mean?” he asked, glaring at Snape.

“It didn’t work because the configuration was wrong, and of course, there was no knowledge about the prophecy, at least not on any of our parts,” he said ominously.

“What are you saying?” Harry asked, anger seeping into his voice.

“I’m saying the wrong people were involved, Potter,” Snape said.

“Harry,” Hermione said tentatively once more.

“No… let him finish!” Harry insisted.

“Do I really need to, Potter? You’re not that thick,” Snape said dryly.

“Say it!” Harry demanded.

“If you insist on hearing about your mother’s exploits with her so-called boyfriends, I’ll be forced to tell you—”

“Say it!” Harry said.

“They almost got it right. Your mother was the Anima; your father, the Self; Sirius was undoubtedly the Animus… I suppose I could have been the Shadow, but your father, being the wonderful person he was, would have never allowed that. However, he had no problem sharing her with Remus. Pity… close, but no cigar.”

Harry stood up suddenly, balling his fists at his sides. “You’re a liar! You’re a bloody liar!”

“What are you saying?” Ron asked Snape.

“I’m saying that Potter’s father and his friends were very close, closer than you could ever imagine,” Snape said.

“You’re a fucking liar!” he yelled.

“Harry, he’s not… he can’t be,” Draco said cautiously.

“He must be! My mum was not a slag!” Harry shouted at Snape. Hermione winced and looked up at Harry as if she had been slapped.

“Slag? That’s a strong word; then again, I’m not sure what I would call someone who allowed James and his mangy friends to use them in the middle of the Forbidden Forest like a pack of wild dogs. I suppose I wasn’t enough for her,” Snape said bitterly.

Harry stood over him, breathing rapidly, shaking.

“Shut up! Shut. Up! She would never allow someone as disgusting as you touch her!”

“Let me?” Snape laughed hollowly. “She begged me. And if it had not been for your father, they’d both be alive right now,” he snarled.

Harry drew back his fist and punched Snape in square in the jaw. They all gasped in shock as Snape raised his hand to his mouth and glared up at Harry.

He wiped the blood off his bottom lip and smirked. “Now then, Potter, is there anything else you’d
like to know?”

Harry screamed in his face and turned around abruptly, rushing for the front door.

“Harry! Where are you going?” Draco called after him, rising from his seat.

“I’ve got to get out of here!” Harry said, opening the door and running out into the night.

Hermione, Ron and Draco ran after him.

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The night was cold, as usual, and Spinner’s End was eerily quiet. There was nothing at the dead end of the cobblestone row but a pair of eyes, barely visible in the dark. He watched in wide-eyed excitement as the Potter boy emerged from Snape’s house. Three others followed him out, two of them were expected, but the third was quite a surprise. Seeing all four of them together, at Snape’s house, was certainly unexpected. He watched on as they formed a circle around Potter, who was visibly upset, and began to speak to him in soothing tones, trying to calm him down.

Lying in wait outside of Snape’s home in the dead of winter had paid off, after all.
As the disinhibiting effect of the Veritaserum began to wear off, Snape became keenly aware of the scene that had just played out over dinner in an entirely different light.

He licked and sucked absently at the cut on his lip, remaining completely still in his chair, staring at his food. Shame began to crawl up from his belly as the idea that he had been tricked by two of his students, one of them Potter, truly began to set in.

Constant vigilance, Severus, Moody’s voice mocked in his head.

He closed his eyes and tried not to growl in frustration for allowing himself to be lulled into a false sense of security in his own home. In the end, Potter’s flattery and deference along with his attempts at some measure of proper cordiality had been Snape’s undoing.

Normally, being fed Veritaserum would have produced frustrating results for whoever would dare to try it on him. He always made sure to take two drops of the counter potion he had developed to nullify the effects of the truth-telling serum before meeting with the Dark Lord.

He had no doubt that the potion might be slipped into his food during one of the many impromptu dinner meetings held at Malfoy Manor. If the Dark Lord himself didn’t try, he anticipated that one of his followers, several of which still held deep mistrust towards Snape, very well might.

He had sworn to himself that he would never be tricked like that, and yet, here he was, facing the uncertainty and guilt of being fooled by two sixth-years.

What made it worse was that he could still feel a small sense of guilty satisfaction from what he had revealed. He couldn’t deny the smug sense of victory he had felt as his deep-seated resentment and disdain for James Potter had finally been given a voice, a voice that he had no control over and didn’t

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The Little White Lie

Secrets, and the way we keep them
Between you and me
Promise we’ll never need them
I can see something so true
No one else could ever see
And I’ll never chance losing you
I believe my heart, I hear what it's telling me
One little white lie
One white lie surrounds us
One white lie won’t stop the love
That I feel around us.

-“White Lie” by Foreigner

Yes, I know, you keep telling me that you love me
And I really do wanna believe.
But did you think I’d just accept you in blind faith?
Oh sure babe, anything to please you,
But you better be good to me…

-“Better Be Good To Me” by Tina Turner

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have to censor in order to protect the younger Potter’s feelings.

And then to be punched in the jaw by a student, by Potter. His indignation and guilt battled as he thought about if and how he should address it; surely he had done enough damage for one evening.

He settled on the decision to let it go; he might have even deserved it.

Exhaling, he tried to concentrate on the good - they hadn’t found out everything. And for that, Snape was grateful. It had been dangerous, what they had done. They didn’t have an inkling of how dangerous it could have been. Draco had been foolish to participate in planning such a thing with Harry. He of all people should have known the risks.

Snape had no doubt that had Potter asked the wrong questions, if he and the other two had discovered that Snape was working as a spy for the Dark Lord or that Draco had been given the assignment to befriend them by the Dark Lord, the entire mission would have been compromised. Potter would have misinterpreted everything, and the boy would have given no room for further explanations.

Even now, Snape was aware that it would only be a matter of a day or so before Potter would run and tell Dumbledore everything he knew, bond or no bond. And although Snape could try to prevent that, a part of him thought it might be for the best. Perhaps it would force things to light that had been hidden for too long.

But, whether it did or not, what it really meant was that he was running out of time.

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They were all trying to calm Harry down. Hermione had her hand on his arm, Ron had his hand on Harry’s back, and Draco stood at his side.

Harry appeared as though he was considering pushing them all away. Even in the dark, they could see his flaring nostrils, tightly drawn expression, and green eyes glaring through his glasses, reflecting the scant light offered by the crescent moon over them all.

“Harry, we shouldn’t be out here; let’s get back inside,” Draco urged, glancing around nervously.

His gaze settled on something on the side of the house, and for a brief second his eyes grew wide and terrified before returning to his usual impassive mask.

“I’m not going back in there—not with him there,” Harry said stubbornly.

“Harry, look, you’re upset right now, but—” Ron said.

“Upset doesn’t even begin to describe how I’m feeling right now, Ron!”

“Harry, listen. You don’t have to talk to him… you don’t even have to be in the same room with him if you don’t want to. Let’s just go back inside, alright? We’ve got school tomorrow, we just have to get through tonight,” Hermione said, holding Harry’s wrist tightly.

“Come on, mate… if he says another word, I swear, I’ll knock him out myself,” Ron said, rubbing his hand over Harry’s back, reassuring him on as Hermione began to lead him to the front door.

Draco watched as they walked back to the house.

“Give me a moment; I’ll be right in,” Draco said.
Ron turned briefly, with a question on his face, but when Draco gave no reply, he turned back to focus on Harry. He and Hermione continued on, leading their lover back to the house.

Back inside, they found Snape sitting at the table with a disoriented and troubled expression. The man stared up at Harry with a rare mixture of sympathy and concern. He opened his mouth, but before he could speak, Hermione cast a warning look.

“Not another word, Professor; you’ve said quite enough!” she said in a scolding voice.

Snape closed his mouth and looked away.

Once they got reached the right bedroom downstairs, Harry pulled away from both of them and made a strange growling sound in his throat.

Ron and Hermione looked at him apprehensively.

“Harry, please calm down,” Hermione said.

Harry’s breathing was still ragged, and he couldn’t seem to stand in one place for long.

“I can’t believe… my mum, she wasn’t… she couldn’t have been…”

Hermione’s fingers balled into fists, and she narrowed her eyes as she moved closer to Harry. “A slag, Harry? Is that what you think she was? Is that what you think of me?”

Harry turned his head sharply to regard Hermione. “What? What are you on about?”

“Your mum sleeping with your dad, Sirius, and Remus, and possibly Snape… she had four lovers, Harry. Does that make her a slag? Is that what you think of me as well?”

Harry stared back at her, apparently stunned by the connection between what he had said and what Hermione was referring to, and shook his head.

“Hermione, this is my mum,” he said in frustration.

“And I’m your girlfriend! It’s good enough to share me with Ron and now Draco, but your mum is better than that, right?”

“Hermione, you don’t understand; this has nothing to do with you!”

“No, I think I understand perfectly!” she said, backing away from him.

“Oh come on, you’re twisting this all around! Ron, you understood what I meant, right?”

Ron shook his head, stuffing his hands in his pockets. “No, Harry, I don’t. I know we’re talking about your mum and all, but if what Snape said was true, then it sounds like… well it’s the same thing really, isn’t it?”

“No, it’s not!” Harry insisted, staring at them both in irritation.

“And why not?” Ron asked.

“Because it’s my mum!! That’s why!”

His words hung in the air as they all staring at each other in tense silence.
Finally, Harry threw his hands up and turned his back to them, walking over to the far corner. He stood there for several moments and then slid down the wall like Bubotuber pus, pushing his hands through his hair, and putting his head down on his knees.

Hermione stared at him and then back at Ron before walking over to the corner to sit down beside him.

Ron stood awkwardly by the door, watching them for a few moments, and then quietly turned and left, closing the door behind him.

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Once Hermione and Ron had escorted Harry back inside, Draco held himself steady and forced his eyes to travel back to the same spot he had been avoiding for the past several minutes.

There they were: a pair of eyes, attached to a vaguely familiar lump of a shape in the dark. He clenched his teeth and told himself to look unaffected even though his insides felt twisted and knotted like Devil’s Snare. He was acutely aware of his body and face, which felt tightly strung as he fought to appear nonplussed at the sight before him.

Pettigrew was staring right at him. He could see that much in the dark. The little slice of moonlight revealed his beady eyes and his stubby, dishevelled form.

They were staring at each other, and then Pettigrew stood up fully. He had been crouching against the house, near a dead bush. He began to walk slowly toward Draco.

Draco didn’t move; he kept his eyes fastened on the disgusting stump of a man in front of him.

A slow smug smile began to grow on the rat face of the man, and Draco had to fight to keep himself from screaming.

As Pettigrew’s smile grew wider, Draco found himself torn between wanting to run and outright lying. He could always tell Pettigrew that he was a prisoner, that Snape had forced him to come here. Anything would be better than the sadistic satisfaction that lay behind Pettigrew's smile.

Draco’s skin prickled as he thought of his mother and his father, and it took all of his willpower and what little hope he had left in him to fight off the urge to plead with the man before him. But instead of screaming, running, lying, or begging, Draco gave the man a small smile back and bowed his head slightly as though they shared a secret understanding.

Pettigrew's smile immediately dropped at Draco’s reaction, and he stood studying the boy closely. Draco maintained his cool mask, despite feeling like his smile was absurdly out of sync with his emotions. He gave the man one last glance before turning and slowly walking back to the front door, leaving Pettigrew staring after him with a confused frown.

Once inside, he felt himself shaking with anger and… fear. He hated being afraid. And he had never been more afraid in his life than he was right now.

His vision was taking in the whole room and then it sharply focused on Snape sitting at the dining room table, frowning.

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Ron didn’t know what to do or where he should be, but he knew that he didn’t want to stick around while Harry and Hermione talked out what Harry had let slip. He understood that Harry had made a
bad comment in the heat of the moment, and it was almost understandable. But he also understood that Hermione was no slag, and that he would have to deal with the consequences of what he said on his own, and face Hermione’s wrath, which was something Ron never enjoyed seeing. He went to the bedroom next door, closing the door behind him and started pacing the length of the room.

He was trying to calm himself down because he was quietly unravelling. He began to scold himself for agreeing to take part in any of this. What had he been thinking, lying to his mum and dad to sneak away to shag at their creepy Potions Professor’s house?

He certainly didn’t want to be here anymore.

And why would they ever trust Snape in the first place? The thought that Snape had cast a powerful Imperius on them that was only now wearing off crossed his mind briefly. The Head of Slytherin house had probably brought them to his house for a good laugh and a week’s worth of wank material.

He punched the wall, not caring that it split the skin of his knuckles, leaving a trail of blood along the wall and tiny paint chips in his fresh wound.

In hindsight, he realised that when he had agreed to it; he hadn’t believed that any good could come from any of it. The only reason he had done it was for them. But, toward the end, he had actually been convinced that some good may come from it.

He stopped pacing and eyed his bag in the corner. He slowly walked over to it, staring down at it. He wanted to leave right now, but he realised that in just a few more hours, they would be back at school. It couldn’t come soon enough as far as he was concerned.

He sat on the bed, thinking of the week. It had started off rough, and he hadn’t thought that he would be able to get through it. Having Malfoy touch her, and then Harry… and then the unfathomable, touching him.

Up until that moment, he hadn’t allowed himself to think on it too much, but now, he was alone and there was nothing else to think of but the surreal nature of what they had all done.

Surreal, but not entirely awful. Being with Malfoy hadn’t been as bad as he had thought it could be. He told himself that he would never admit it out loud, but he had actually found the git’s company enjoyable more times than he thought possible. Malfoy was a much more worthy chess opponent than Harry, and when he wasn’t taking himself and everyone around him too seriously, he was actually rather funny.

Ron even noted that he had even begun to look forward to the verbal sparring they often engaged in. Despite Malfoy’s taunts about his intelligence, Ron enjoyed being treated like a worthy opponent. Whether it was physical, verbal, or in chess, Malfoy never coddled him or patronised him, and Ron always felt like an equal around him.

It had been a rather pleasant surprise, but still, if he had his choice in the matter, right now, he would pull out of the prophecy. He wanted to put his foot down and end this foolishness. But he knew he couldn’t, it would mean suffering the consequences of whatever Dark curse Snape had bound them with, and worse, leaving Hermione and Harry without any option to decide what they wanted.

He sighed in resignation as he stood up to go to the bathroom to gather the few toiletries he had left in there. He began to pack them away along with his clothing, trying to focus his thoughts on Christmas at the Burrow, the Hogwarts Express tea trolley, and starting Quidditch again, until he
heard yelling coming from upstairs. It sounded like Malfoy.

“Close the door,” Snape said, staring at Draco, who had come back in looking quite unlike himself.

His normally cool grey stare was now wild and rather deranged. His nonchalant demeanour was gone, and he seemed quite rattled, his breath rapid and his fists balled as he glared at Snape in contempt.

Draco slammed the door and stalked towards him quickly as if he meant to do harm. “It doesn’t matter if the damned door is closed or not! We’re screwed! I should have known better than to trust you. I trusted you! And now, I’m dead… my family is probably going to die because of you!”

Snape stared back at him in bewilderment. “Draco, calm down,” he said in concern.

“Don’t. Tell. Me. To calm down! Do you know who’s outside right now? Hmm?”

Snape waited in silence for Draco to answer his own question.

“Pettigrew!” Draco blurted out, followed by a soft maniacal laugh.

Snape looked back at him quizzically, but didn’t respond.

“Did you hear me? I said, Pettigrew is outside of your fucking house! And he saw all of us… Harry, me, Hermione, Ron… all of us, together!!! We’re fucked! We’re not even supposed to be here! How are you going to explain that? Huh?” he yelled.

Snape pushed his chair back and stood up, peering over Draco’s shoulder at the window facing the left side of the house.

“Thanks to your brilliantly incomplete and reckless plan, I’m probably going to die! We’re all going to die!” Draco continued.

Snape quickly moved past Draco, making his way over to the window to look out and see if he saw anything. Before he could get to it, Draco grabbed his arm, pulling him back.

“What are you doing?!” he yelled.

“Get your hands off of me, boy!” Snape snarled, yanking his arm back. “And lower your voice,” he said. He clicked his teeth and shook his head, regarding Draco in disappointment. “You’ve always been in danger, Draco; you just didn’t know it. Please save the hysterics for someone who doesn’t know any better.”

“You know, my aunt Bella may be a crazy bitch, but she had you pegged right. I should have listened to her. I hate you!”

“Yes, well, that’s one thing we can agree on; Bellatrix is quite mad,” Snape said calmly, turning back around to peer out of the window.

“I hope they get you first! I’d like to see you tortured and killed slowly before I bite it!” Draco yelled, advancing towards him.

Snape gave him a dismissive eye roll and Draco lunged at him.

Snape pushed him back toward the table. Draco stared back at him for a moment before withdrawing
“I hate you!” Draco yelled, raising his wand.

Snape stood, considering what type of hex to use on Draco when he noticed Weasley running up the stairs.

The boy’s eyes went wide, taking in the sight of Draco raising his wand at his Potions professor. He quickly moved towards Draco, wrapping his arms around the youngest Malfoy in a full-body hug before lifting him up and stepping back.

“Malfoy, what are you doing!” Weasley yelled, dragging Draco back toward the stairs.

“I hate you!!” Draco screamed at Snape as Ron carried him downstairs.

~*~

Ron fought to control the wild struggling boy in his arms as he dragged him down the steps and carried him into the empty bedroom.

“Malfoy!” he yelled, trying to drown out Draco’s screams.

“Let me down, Weasley! Now!” Draco yelled, flailing in Ron’s tight grip.

“Not until you calm the fuck down!” Ron said, holding him for a few more moments, before pushing him roughly against the wall and shutting the door behind them.

“Have you and Harry totally lost it?! Attacking Snape like that!” Ron asked, shaking his head as he tried to catch his own breath and get himself together. “I can’t believe Harry punched him… and now you… what were you about to do?” he pressed, staring at Draco.

Draco didn’t reply, but Ron took notice of his appearance; the boy looked quite distressed. Draco put his hands to his face and then bent over at the waist.

“Fuuuuck!”

Ron froze, glued to his spot on the floor, as he watched the normally cool and even-tempered boy in front of him fall apart.

“So stupid… so fucking stupid,” he heard Draco mutter to himself over and over again.

There was loud knocking at the door. “Ron! Is everything alright?” he heard Harry ask.

“Yeah, just give us a minute, Harry,” Ron said. “We’ll come over in a bit, alright?”

There was no answer for several moments and then he heard Hermione say, “Are you sure, Ron? Is Draco alright?”

“Yeah, he’s fine, Hermione… really…” he said firmly, hoping they wouldn’t come in and make the situation any more tense than it already was.

There were a few moments of silence and he could hear Harry and Hermione whispering.

“Alright, but if you need anything…” Hermione said with reluctance in her voice.

“Alright, thanks… just give us a minute,” Ron replied.
When he finally heard them withdraw, he exhaled slowly. He watched Draco’s doubled-over form against the wall and then began walking slowly toward him, trying not to move too quickly, not sure what kind of mental state the boy was in. He stopped a few feet in front of Draco, giving him as much space as possible.

“Malfoy…” he said, bending over to try to make eye contact with him.

Draco shook his head and then straightened up, and so Ron straightened up with him. He stood staring at Ron and then shook his head once again. He had tears in his eyes, which unnerved Ron almost as much as seeing spiders. Whatever could push Draco Malfoy to tears, in front of him, of all people, was bad, really bad.

“Malfoy…” Ron said, moving in closer and reaching out to put his hand on Draco’s arm to get his attention. His eyes were scanning the room, refusing to rest on any one thing in particular.

Ron found himself becoming more alarmed and curious as Draco’s strange behaviour continued. He drew closer still and then did the one thing that seemed natural when faced with another male on the verge of going mental. He grabbed both of Draco’s arms and shook him hard.

“Malfoy… Draco!”

Draco’s watery eyes suddenly became focused and he gazed back into Ron’s, giving him a small crazy smile.

“We’re all going to die,” he whispered, a single tear finally spilling over, sliding down his pale cheek.

Ron stared back at him, unsure of what to do.

This was not the Draco who always kept his composure around him, never allowing anyone, especially a Weasley, to see him at anything other than his best.

And even though Draco’s words frightened him, Ron wanted to know more about this unhinged and pessimistic person standing before him. But first, he wanted to reassure Draco, to let him know that it could never come to that sort of end, for any of them… Ron wouldn’t let it.

Before he was aware of what he was doing, his lips were crashing down onto Draco’s, hard and fast. He wasn’t sure if it was the right thing to do, but he didn’t know how else to draw Draco out of his panic. A part of him hoped that it would be enough to keep the blond open and vulnerable, the way he was right now. This Draco felt real, and that seemed just as important as any other revelation they had learned that night.

Draco would either fight him or kiss him back, either way, it would be better than him shutting down or truly losing it.

Ron’s entire body relaxed in relief as Draco began kissing him back, with just as much force. The power of Draco allowing himself to be vulnerable and accepting his kiss in this moment made Ron dizzy. He felt himself becoming excited as Draco gripped his arms tightly, drawing him in, like a warm blanket.

He wrapped his arms around Draco’s waist, pulling him in more tightly as he leaned into the kiss, trying to cover the boy protectively, as he offered a reassuring squeeze.

For a moment, Draco relaxed in Ron’s embrace, letting the strong freckled arms wrap around him as
he whimpered softly into Ron’s mouth.

And then as quickly as it began, it abruptly ended when Draco broke the kiss and pushed Ron forcibly away from him, causing the other boy to stagger back several steps in bewilderment.

“Get the fuck off of me, Weasley!” he said, trying to catch his breath.

Ron was trying to catch his breath as well, watching him cautiously. He waited for another breakdown or perhaps an attack, but instead Draco began to wipe the tears from his eyes and then his mouth as if to erase any evidence of the kiss.

“What the hell did you do that for?” Draco asked, giving Ron a strange look.

Ron looked back at Draco with a clueless expression and shrugged. “I don’t know… you were going loopy, didn’t know what else to do,” he said quietly.

“Well, you could have done anything but that,” Draco said, trying unsuccessfully to give Ron a look of disgust before breaking out in a snigger.

Ron gave him a small tentative smile back, still watching him closely. “You alright?”

“What do you think?” Draco snapped, fixing his hair, and making sure his face was dry as he attempted to regain his composure.

“What happened?” Ron asked.

“Exactly how thick are you, Weasley? Weren’t we all at the same table when Snape told us he didn’t know what the hell was going on?”

“Yeah, I was there, but you were fine then. Either you had a super delayed reaction or there’s something else you’re not telling me,” he said with a question in his voice.

Draco shook his head. “Look, I’m just… I’m in deep shit,” he muttered.

“Well, you could have done anything but that,” Draco said, trying unsuccessfully to give Ron a look of disgust before breaking out in a snigger.

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happen,” he said, still averting his eyes from Ron’s.

Ron drew closer, his stare demanding as he waited to get Draco’s full attention. When Draco finally met his gaze, Ron just had to ask, “Because he’s a Death Eater? You think he’d kill you… kill us?”

Draco looked offended. “Forget the lies your father’s been spreading about my family, Weasley. My father and mother would do anything to protect me, anything. Even die for me,” he said proudly.

“But—”

“And I’d die for them as well. And, if it comes to that, then I’m ready for it,” Draco said stoically.

Despite Draco’s brave face, Ron could still see the fear in his eyes. “It shouldn’t have to come to that though, not unless you blab your mouth.”

Draco shook his head. “I thought this would work; I thought there’d be a way to get rid of him, once and for all… but now, if this doesn’t work, he’ll find out for sure.”

“Who? Your dad?”

“No, Weasley… him.”

Ron’s face went white. “What? How? How could he find out?”

Draco looked away and then back at Ron determinedly. “Snape is Marked. He’ll always be Marked… no matter what side he’s fighting for, he’s owned. The Dark Lord only has to summon him and use Legilimency or torture to get it out of him. There’s only a small chance of luck and Snape’s willpower standing between us and death right now… never underestimate the Dark Lord’s power,” he said with warning.

Ron tried to swallow, his mind racing as he stood considering the youngest Malfoy with new eyes. “You’re really taking a big risk being here… I admire that,” he said softly.

Draco stared back at him silently.

“You know, if you’re worried about being found out… about them coming to get you… you should know that we wouldn’t let them do that, not if we could help it,” Ron said.

Draco gave him a dismissive headshake. “What are you saying, Weasley? You’d protect me against the Dark Lord? Against Death Eaters? All because we had a great shag?”

Ron scoffed. “Let’s get something straight, Malfoy. It wasn’t really that great of a shag; it was alright… and no, we wouldn’t just let them come and get you. They’d have to deal with us first. Whatever it is we’ve gotten ourselves into, we’re all in it now… together,” he said.

Draco looked at Ron sceptically. “Why? Why would you—?”

“Because they care about you, and I care about them, and well, you’re a pretty good chess player,” Ron said with a small smile.

Draco looked back at him, stunned.

Ron leaned into him and lowered his voice to a hushed tone. “Actually don’t tell Harry this, but, you’re a much better chess player than he is; he’s really pants at it.”

Draco chuckled, letting his head fall back against the wall, gazing up at the ceiling. “Great, Ronald
Weasley is going to protect me… I feel so much safer now,” he said mockingly.

“You should, I’m the ultimate masculine,” Ron said with a smirk.

Draco shook his head. “I knew Snape was full of shit the minute he said that,” he said with a smile.

Ron studied his face for a moment. “Are you alright, now?”

Draco nodded. “Yeah, but this didn’t happen. Not one word about this to them, you hear me?”

Ron nodded. “Alright, Malfoy.”

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“What would cause Draco to yell like that?” Harry asked Hermione as they returned to the bedroom.

“I don’t know…” Hermione said anxiously.

“I guess we’ll find out soon,” Harry said.

They stood in awkward silence.

“Hermione,” Harry started.

“Harry,” she said at the same time.

“Listen, I didn’t mean—”

“Yes, you did, you meant it, even more so because you didn’t think you were talking about me when you said it.”

“I don’t think you’re a slag, Hermione,” he said firmly. “When I said that I wasn’t thinking.”

“You know, all this time, I’ve been worried about what everyone at school would think about me dating two blokes, but I didn’t stop one second to consider that it might change how you saw me as well,” she said, her eyes watering.

Harry shook his head. “You couldn’t be more wrong right now, Hermione. I respect you… I admire you for God’s sake. You’re like… I wish I could be more like you. I love you. I don’t think I could love anyone else more than I love you and Ron.” Harry bit his lip furiously, as if searching for the right words.

She stared back at him, her expression doubtful and hurt.

“Come here,” Harry said, opening his arms to her.

She didn’t move for a moment, but then she went to him and let him wrap his arms around her as he looked down at her and kissed her forehead.

They held each other and then Hermione looked up at him. “If you love me, Harry, why would you say something like that? Do you really think that being with more than one person makes someone a slag?”

“No, Hermione, it doesn’t… I just had this image of who my parents are… who they were, and this doesn’t match it at all. I always thought of my mum as being with my dad, and that’s it. Sirius… he never told me, he never said anything about this. And Remus… it’s like they lied to me. I feel like
they played a prank on me or something,” he said sadly.

“ Maybe they were trying to protect your feelings?” she offered.

Harry huffed. “ That doesn’t matter, they should have still told me.”

“But, it obviously didn’t work out, did it? Your mum ended up marrying your dad, and Sirius ended up on his own, well, actually in Azkaban, but Remus, he fancies Tonks; that’s clear,” she said.

Harry nodded.

“It was different, Harry,” she said. “ It had to be; I couldn’t imagine choosing you over Ron or choosing Ron over you. I wouldn’t, not to get married, not for anything.”

“And I wouldn’t want you to; I couldn’t imagine our lives without Ron,” Harry said.

“ Exactly,” Hermione replied.

“But don’t you see, Hermione? That only makes it worse.”

“It doesn’t mean it wasn’t love, Harry. It just means it was different between them than it is with us. Maybe they tried it, and it didn’t work out. But this, what we have, it’s real and it works,” she said.

“And what about Snape?” Harry asked bitterly.

“Harry, your mum may have loved him as well,” she said hesitantly.

Harry drew back to look at her. “ That’s gross! If she did love him, it’s because she was a good person; I doubt he loved her back. Snape made her sound like she was a tart or something, begging off for sex. I doubt he’s capable of loving anyone.”

Hermione shook her head. “ You don’t know that, Harry. Do you think anyone would ever believe Draco and I could care for each other?”

Harry looked down at her with a sad expression. “ Hermione, has Draco ever really said he cares about you?”

Hermione bit her lip, her cheeks flushing. “ Well, no, but, has he ever said he cared about you?”

Harry smiled knowingly. “ No…”

“But you know he does, don’t you?” she asked.

Harry shrugged.

“And you care about him as well, even though you haven’t said it,” she pressed.

“I don’t know… I don’t know what to think about anything right now,” he said.

“Harry, people show love in different ways. It’s not always picture perfect. I don’t know what the situation was with your mum and your dad and the rest of them, but I do know that they obviously loved each other very much, and they loved their friends, too.”

Harry let go of her and began pacing again. “ This is so… why wouldn’t Sirius or Remus tell me?”

“ Maybe they thought you’d punch them or something,” she said with a smirk, watching him pace.
Harry stopped pacing and stared at her resolutely. “I need to talk to Remus… soon.”

“I think that might help,” she agreed.

“That’s going to be a fun talk. Hey, Remus, how have you been? Is it true you shagged my mum with Sirius and my dad?” he said sarcastically. “I don’t even know how I would begin that,” he said, giving her a helpless a look.

They stood in silence, each in their own thoughts, trying to picture Harry having such a conversation with Remus.

Finally, Harry sighed and gave Hermione a small smile. “I do know one thing, though…”

“What’s that?” she asked.

“You’re no slag, Hermione,” he said.

Hermione studied him for a moment. “Yeah?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he said.

She raised an eyebrow and smirked. “Even when I’m on my knees, sucking your cock while you’re calling me a whore?”

Harry looked back at Hermione in shock. “Hermione!”

“Hmm?”

Harry shook his head, smiling. “No… not even then.”

Hermione smiled and threw her arms around his neck, holding him tight. Harry hugged her back; smiling, relieved that she had accepted his apology.

He leaned in to kiss her but she pulled her mouth from him, instead moving her lips up to his ear.

“If you ever even hint that you really think I’m slag again, talking to Remus will be the least of your worries,” she whispered softly, allowing the undercurrent of the threat to speak for itself.

Harry loosened his embrace and nodded in understanding. Submissive or not, he knew he was fortunate to receive her forgiveness; he didn’t want ever to be on the receiving end of Hermione’s wrath.

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If Snape was supposed to keep watch over Draco at Hogwarts, it made no sense that he would have Potter, the Mudblood, the Weasley boy, and the younger Malfoy in his home.

The younger Malfoy smiling at him had been strange. It was as if he knew something, or had even been expecting to see him. Peter didn’t like that. It could have been a ruse; the Malfoys were notorious for their ability to appear cool under pressure, and he thought that for a moment he had seen a flicker of something like fear or surprise before it had been replaced with that nonchalant Malfoy stare and smug smile.

He could summon the Dark Lord right now; it would only take a touch of his wand to his Dark Mark and Snape and the others would be finished, and Peter would be rewarded greatly.
But if they were all supposed to be here; if things were going as planned and he sabotaged some grand scheme that he had not been made privy to, he would be punished, perhaps even killed. He knew that the Dark Lord had entrusted Snape to oversee the boy’s assignment, but little else about the assignment had been revealed to Peter. It would be foolish to summon his Master before finding out more.

Still, he had an idea; he knew it had something to do with the Mudblood and a sexual prophecy involving others. Something the back of his mind nagged, and he thought of the night he had witnessed Lily Potter and his so-called friends engaged in the most depraved thing he had ever seen before the first war.

If only it had been revealed that Lily, the perfect little Gryffindor Princess, was actually a Mudblood whore. He didn’t have the guts back then to confront them, to tell everyone what he had seen; his chance had come and gone. But he had gotten them back in other ways though, most of them at least, and that would have to do for now. He snorted. Lily and her three boyfriends; if he could he would…

Peter gasped. He recalled the Dark Lord saying the prophecy was tied to four people, one of them a Mudblood.

The Granger girl and Lily Potter were both Mudbloods, Gryffindor Mudbloods. And now she was in Snape’s house with three males, two of them Gryffindors who were already her boyfriends, and one Slytherin. It was almost an identical scenario with Lily, except Peter knew that Snape had been cast off to the side as soon as James had become wise to what was going on.

Peter remembered the incident under the tree clearly, as if it had occurred yesterday. James and Sirius had always been mean to Snape, but that particular incident was particularly nasty, even for James. Peter knew it was retaliation, that he must have found out about the true nature of Lily and Snape’s relationship. After that day, after Snape had called her a Mudblood, they were never seen together again, and he doubted that they even spoke to one another. And then the very next day, Peter witnessed as Sirius, Remus, and James all took their turns with her in the forest.

Interesting.

He would go back to the Manor straight away and find out what he could about the boy’s business with Snape before saying or doing anything else.

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Hermione’s eyes lit up when the bedroom door opened and Ron and Draco came in exchanging playful jabs. Both Harry and she were studying Draco closely, but there were no signs that anything was wrong.

Draco glanced up at both of them and then eyed them strangely, “What’s with you two?” he asked.

“We were going to ask you the same. Are you alright?” Hermione asked.

Draco gave them a dismissive huff. “I’m fine.”

“We heard yelling… well, at least it sounded like you,” Harry said

Draco shrugged. “Oh that… just blowing a little steam off at Snape. This whole business of not knowing the ritual is absolute rubbish. He’s lucky we’re bound, or I’d report him to Dumbledore straight away,” he said in the same snooty manner that reminded Hermione of the time he promised to have Buckbeak and Hagrid removed.
Harry nodded. “I just might do that.”

“Harry!” Ron and Hermione said together.

“You can’t! We’re bound, we don’t know what may happen if you told anyone, and…” Hermione paused and looked around the room.

“What is it, Hermione?” Harry asked, glancing around the room to see what she was looking at.

“Wait one minute,” she said, reaching around Draco’s back to retrieve her wand from his back pocket.

“What are you—”

Hermione threw him a fierce look that caused him to pause before turning toward the door, closing it and then pointing her wand up at the ceiling.

“Hermione, what are you doing?” Ron asked.

“Shhh,” she said, flicking her wand, making wide circles. She began walking the length of the room, and then doubling back toward the bed, walking around it as she muttered.

Draco smiled at her when she was done. “Clever girl, you are.”

“You’re surprised?” she asked with a cheeky smile.

“Not at all,” Draco said.

“What did you do?” Ron asked.

“She cast a rather powerful concealment charm, if I’m not mistaken. Where did you learn that one?” Draco asked.

“Read ahead a bit,” she said.

“Of course,” he said.

“As I was saying, I’m not sure you should go to Dumbledore, Harry,” she continued.

“And why not? There’s something else going on here,” Harry said.

“Harry, Snape wants us to fulfil the prophecy, and we heard what it says for ourselves. Obviously, he wants to defeat Voldemort,” she said.

“So he says,” Harry said guardedly.

“And he’s the one that took the locket away,” she continued.

“For all we know that locket may have been there to protect you, Hermione,” Harry reasoned.

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Ron said. “If Dumbledore was trying to protect Hermione, why wouldn’t he just give her the locket? Why would he go through the trouble of lying and saying it was from an admirer?”

“Exactly! I was wearing it for several weeks, in my most private moments… sometimes in the shower,” she said pausing, her eyes going wide. “Gods, it was on me when we were in the Room of
Requirement, when we… Harry, that’s just creepy,” she said, cringing.

“Yeah, mate, that’s just as pervy as Snape spying on us,” Ron said.

Draco looked between all of them, trying to understand what they were talking about.

“Well, I don’t know what happened in the Room of Requirement, but I’m pretty sure that Dumbledore tried to stop me from getting to know the three of you,” he said.

“Is that how I got banned from Hogsmeade?” Ron asked.

“I think so,” Draco said.

“And all of the interruptions in the library,” Hermione said.

Draco nodded.

Harry huffed. “Well, even if that’s true, it’s probably because he knew what Snape was trying to put us up to, prophecy or not, maybe it’s not something we should be doing!”

“Maybe… maybe there’s more to it than that,” Draco said.

Harry shook his head in disbelief. “Dumbledore has always looked out for me, I’m sure there is a reason why he went about it the way he did. I’ll just ask him when we get back.”

“Harry, don’t, please, let it be; we’ll figure this out on our own. You can’t go around breaking the bond; we don’t know what might happen,” Hermione said apprehensively.

“We don’t even know if anything at all will happen, Hermione. Snape also told us that there is a ritual, but he can’t even find it. He’s a bloody liar,” Harry said bitterly.

“Well, until we work out what’s going on, we have to look out for each other,” Ron said ominously, glancing at Draco.

Harry and Hermione looked at Ron strangely and then at Draco.

“Is there something wrong?” Hermione asked.

Draco gave Ron a warning glance and then shook his head. “No, everything is fine.”

“Draco, what’s going on?” Hermione demanded.

“I told you… everything is fine,” Draco said, averting his eyes from her insistent stare.

Harry stared at him sceptically.

Draco noticed and then looked at Ron once more before letting out a sigh. “Oh, alright, listen… I’m just worried that the wrong people may find out about this.”

“How would they?” Harry asked suspiciously.

Draco bit his lip and looked down, as if considering something.

“Well go on, tell them what you told me,” Ron said.

Draco glanced up at Ron. “Well… through Snape, he’s Marked.”
“Yeah, we know. So?” Harry said.

“So… once someone is Marked, they’re owned… the Dark Lord could summon him at any time to get information out of him,” Draco explained.

“But he hasn’t, has he? He didn’t summon him last year, and he won’t now. Snape may be a git, but he’s made it clear whose side he’s on; why else would he show us the prophecy?” Hermione said.

“You know, that makes sense. I think Hermione’s right,” Ron said. “I’m the last person to trust Snape, but I don’t think we’re in danger… he’d probably be dead by now if You-Know-Who really still owned him,” Ron said.

“Well… what if he’s still in contact with the Dark Lord… he could use his ties for good… I mean, since he’s Marked, he’d make a pretty fair spy for Dumbledore,” Draco said cautiously, watching their expressions.

Harry laughed. “Right, Dumbledore would never put anyone in harm’s way like that, even to defeat Voldemort; I mean what if they were found out? It’d be suicidal. Besides, I wouldn’t trust anyone who’d spy by posing as a Death Eater.”

“Why… I think they’d be very useful,” Draco said with a slight edge in his voice.

“Yeah in theory, but how would you ever know when someone like that was telling the truth?” Harry asked.

“Exactly… and they’d probably have to do something really foul to earn You-Know-Who’s trust, which would make them just as bad as the lot they’re spying on,” Ron added in support.

Harry and Hermione both nodded in agreement. Draco looked around at them and forced a smirk. “Yeah, I suppose you’re right.”

“But if you’re worried about your dad or something, don’t worry… we’ll protect you,” Harry said.

Draco shook his head. “What’s with you and Weasley? I’m not worried about my father! And if anyone else found out, I wouldn’t need your protection, Potter; I can take care of myself,” he snapped.

Harry looked back at him as if he had been pricked.

Hermione still had worry on her face as she studied Draco. “Still, I think we should have a way to tell each other if we’re in danger.”

“Might have been nice if you would have taught me the Patronus Charm…” Draco said to Harry.

Harry rolled his eyes. “Like you really wanted to learn it anyway.”

“Maybe I did,” Draco said defensively.

“Well, there are other ways to communicate,” Hermione said.

“Like?” Draco asked with interest.

“There’s a spell, the Protean Charm: you can use it to magically bind objects together so that they can be used as signals,” Hermione explained.

Harry looked at her. “Do you have any with you?” he asked.
Hermione smiled. “Of course, never leave home without them,” she said.

Draco looked between Harry and Hermione in puzzlement.

She went over to her bag, and retrieved four fake gold Galleons, one of them slightly paler than the others. She kept that one and handed the other three to each one of them.

“So you know how this works?” she asked Draco.

Draco nodded. “I think so; the ruling coin alerts the others about when and where to meet?”

“Correct,” Harry said.

“Good. I’ll hold the ruling coin,” she said.

“Oh, no you don’t,” Harry said, taking her coin from her and giving her his.

“And why not?” she asked, bothered that her coin had been snatched from her.

Harry smiled. “Because I said so,” he sniggered.

Ron tried to hide his smile, while Draco openly grinned and Hermione narrowed her eyes at Harry.

“Seriously, Hermione, you didn’t have a problem when Harry was holding it last year,” Ron offered.

“That was different,” Hermione said.

“Last year?” Draco asked.

“We used them last year for DA meetings,” Ron said.

“Right, so that’s how you guys were managing to evade us,” Draco said in amazement, turning his coin over in his hand.

“That and the Room of Requirement,” Hermione said.

Draco shook his head as if still a bit annoyed about the whole thing.

Harry smirked. “Serves you right; what were you doing supporting that toad anyway?” he asked.

“That toad was in charge of the school. It was either seize power or live under it… I chose to take advantage of an opportunity,” Draco said, putting his nose up in the air.

Harry shook his head at Draco.

“Do you know that woman tortured Harry?” Hermione asked with a scornful look.

“What do you mean?” Draco asked, trying to appear innocent.

“I mean, she literally had him carve letters into his hand,” Hermione said, grabbing Harry’s hand and flipping it over so that Draco could see the faint scars still there.

Draco scrunched up his face. “Oh yeah, Blood Quill, I heard.”

They all stared at him accusingly.

Draco winced. “Sorry, look if I could take it back… I probably would,” he said.
“Probably?” Harry asked.

“Well, they say suffering builds character. I’m sure you’re a better person for it,” he said with a playful smile.

They all groaned in unison.

“I said I was sorry; what else can I do about it?” he asked in exasperation.

Harry sighed and gave him a small smile. “Perhaps I’ll just take it out of your arse later,” he said, licking his lips.

“Yeah? Why wait?” Draco said, licking his lips in return.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “I suppose you two will be continuing your work on the bond after we get back,” she said sarcastically.

“Oh, I think you can count on all of us working on the bond, school or not,” Draco said, staring at her lustfully.

Hermione felt her centre heat up under his gaze; it had only been a day, but she had been missing him, craving his touch again, and right now he looked sexy.

“I think you and I need extra work, Hermione,” he said drawing closer to her.

Hermione tried not to squirm. “At school?”

“Yes, at school. It’s not like you’ll have a choice anyway, or did you forget that you’re my submissive?”

“No, I remember just fine, but we’ll have to be careful about where we… meet. And what about Pansy?”

Draco gave her a bothered look. “What about her?”

Hermione glanced around at Ron and Harry who were watching her and Draco with interest.

“I-I mean… you’re certainly not obligated to… I was just wondering if… well…”

Draco smirked down at her. “I haven’t fucked Pansy in a very long time, Hermione, and I don’t plan to ever again,” he said, watching for her reaction.

Hermione smiled.

“But, I will miss caning her arse; she marks up so well,” he said.

Ron frowned. “Caning? That’s horrible. You used a cane on her?”

“She liked it?” Harry asked, obviously intrigued.

Draco smirked. “No… and yes,” he said with a devilish smile.

Harry smiled back. “You’ll have to show me how to use one sometime.”

“It’s not something to play with; you can really hurt someone with one, and it’s not for every sub,” he said, glancing at Hermione.
Hermione folded her arms over her chest. “And I suppose when you used the flogger on me, you thought I would break down and cry if you hit me too hard?”

“I didn’t know what to expect with you,” he said.

“I could have taken it much harder, you know,” she said challengingly.

“Wouldn’t have known that; you were whining five minutes into it,” he said.

“It was my first time! I took much more from Harry,” she said.

Draco looked back at Harry, who nodded proudly.

“Are you asking for pain, then?” he asked her, drawing closer.

Hermione gulped. “No… I-I’m just saying, I’m not fragile, I’m strong.”

“Of course you are,” Draco said, eyeing her slowly, his stare growing in intensity. “Would you like me to try the cane out on you? I’d love to test your pain tolerance, to see just how much you can take,” he said, his voice getting raspy with arousal.

Hermione nodded slowly. Harry and Ron were both studying her as well, as if trying to picture her being caned.

“I’m up for it,” she said bravely, her voice betraying her anxiety about her pain tolerance being tested.

She remembered how Ron’s belting had hurt, but the thought of not being able to take as much pain as Pansy irked the hell out of her.

“Good,” Draco said in satisfaction. “You know, boys, I think someone is feeling rather randy,” he said to Ron and Harry.

Hermione looked around at all of them; she was feeling randy, and it was time.

“Well, Ron was right,” she said. “We came here to have a foursome, and we haven’t really had one yet,” she said.

“But it’s getting late now, and we have school tomorrow,” Ron said regretfully.

“Exactly!” Hermione said. “It’ll be much harder for us to find time and a place to practice, so we should take advantage of these last few hours together here.”

“You still want to go through with it, after all of this?” Ron asked her.

“Of course; we made a promise to do it, and if we have to, we’ll find the ritual ourselves. I’ll start researching it tomorrow,” she said with determination.

The boys all looked at her in admiration.

“Er, so…” Ron started.

“So…” Harry said with a smile.

“So, let’s get to it… by tomorrow morning, I want to be comfortable with taking all three of you at once,” Hermione said with a smirk.
Ron and Harry’s mouths dropped open.

Draco’s eyebrows went up, and then he adjusted his hardening erection through his trousers. “You know, for a submissive, you’re entirely too bossy,” he said, returning her smirk.

“Well then, do something about it. I suppose some sort of punishment is in order, correct?” she asked smartly, giving him a flirtatious wink.

Harry and Draco stared at her darkly, while Ron covered his mouth to hide a smile at her audacity.

“Cheeky bitch. You have no idea. Get on your knees, right now,” Harry ordered, his smile gone.

“Yes, Master,” Hermione said as she fell to her knees before them. Her anticipation was high, as she looked up at them, hoping they wouldn’t hold back anything on her…not tonight.

She wanted to spend these last few hours exploring a few of her dirtiest fantasies; there would be plenty of time for rest on the train ride back to Hogwarts.
These Last Few Hours

*Hurt so good*
*Come on baby, make it hurt so good*
*Sometimes love don’t feel like it should*
*You make it hurt so good….*

-“Hurt So Good” by John Cougar Mellencamp.

*The question is, ‘will you please us all tonight?’*
*Tonight… tonight… tonight*
*We need a lover… tonight*
*We need a lover.*

-“Tonight (We Need A Lover)” by Motley Crue.

~~~*~~~

Hermione felt her heart race as she stared up at them from her position on the floor. It was just like she had always fantasised, at least her fantasies of late. There they were, standing before her, their cocks hardening, their expressions intent and lustful. The power of having their undivided, captivated attention was intoxicating.

Although she was on her knees, the only female in the room, and physically, the weakest of all of them, at that moment, Hermione felt very powerful.

Draco’s leer sent a shiver up her spine. She had to look away, but when she briefly caught Harry’s dark gaze, her heart began to pound wildly. Unable to hold his stare, she looked away. Ron’s curious speculation somehow soothed her, steadied her.

“You like this, don’t you, Hermione?” Harry asked.

She looked at him, caught off guard by how close his question aligned to her thoughts. “What do you mean… Master?”

“Don’t play with me. You like the fact that all of our attention is focused on you right now. You forget, you told me all your fantasies. I know,” he said.

Exposed, Hermione felt her face grow hot.

Harry looked at the other two. “She’s baiting us, and I almost fell for it. She deserves a real punishment. I think we should banish her to the other bedroom without any cock tonight.”

Hermione’s stare darted between Ron and Draco. She hoped they wouldn’t agree.

“Who cares if she’s trying to bait us; we need to work on the bond, and I need to get off. It’s been a long day,” Draco said, as he kicked off his shoes and pushed up his sleeves.

“I’ll say,” Ron agreed.

“Fine,” Harry said, turning his attention back to her. “You like being the centre of attention? Crawl to the centre of the room.” He pointed to the spot where he wanted her.

Hermione turned to see Ron and Draco giving Harry curious glances.
“You’re forgetting yourself, Hermione,” Draco warned, unbuckling his belt as he kept his eyes fixed on her. The thudding in her chest increased as a wave of heat moved over her skin, and her hands became to tremble.

*He wouldn’t! Not after Ron. The bastard! He knows I don’t like the belt.*

Draco’s stare was unflinching as he wrapped the leather around his hand. Hermione immediately fell forward onto her hands, concentrating on feel of the carpet against her palms as she tried to steady her nerves.

“I’m sorry, Master.” She began to crawl across the room, looking back at Harry, waiting for his next order, but he gave some sort of hand signal to Ron.

Ron nodded. “Get up and strip,” he ordered, as she watched him push himself off of the wall to walk around and stand behind her.

“And do it quickly!” Draco moved in closer to her.

She stood up instantly to disrobe quickly before them, leaving on only her collar, and her clothing gathered around her feet.

Their eyes assessed her figure appreciatively, and she felt a measure of pride to see their desire and admiration displayed so openly on their expressions.

She turned her eyes to Draco, waiting for him to do or say something, since he was the closest to her.

“What are you staring at? Did I say you could look at me?” he asked harshly.

She knew she should have cast her eyes down immediately, but for some reason, she couldn’t rip her eyes from his, and continued to stare at him in confusion. Draco looked agitated, and she noticed that he was gritting his teeth the same way he always did when he was upset.

*What was wrong with him?*

“No, Draco… you didn’t,” she replied.

“Then keep your fucking eyes on the floor,” he snapped.

“Malfoy… watch yourself,” Ron warned.

The gray glare that had been focused intensely on Hermione turned to Ron.

“Or what, Weasley?” Draco challenged.

Ron tensed and balled his fist, visibly preparing for a confrontation.

“Calm down, both of you… Draco, you don’t have to speak to her like that,” Harry said.

“Don’t tell me what to do, Harry; we’re all on equal footing here, and I’ll do what I like right now,” he said curtly.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione kept their eyes fixed on Draco in puzzlement.

“What the hell is bugging you?” Harry’s voice was more concerned than angry.

“Nothing,” Draco said irritably, taking a deep breath as though trying to calm himself.
They all continued to watch him, which seemed to irritate him more.

“Look… she asked for punishment and she’s going to get it, it’s that simple,” he said, snapping the belt in his hand.

“What are you going to do to her, Malfoy?” Ron said.

“Why don’t you watch and see for yourself.”

“I’m not going to stand here and let you hurt her,” Ron protested.

Draco and Ron were locked in a heated stare, their mutual animosity threatening to boil over.

“I want him to, sir,” she said without thought.

“What?” Ron and Harry asked in bewilderment.

“I said, I want him to…” she repeated, her voice faltering a little as she thought of the implications of what she was saying.

“You want him to do what, Hermione?” Ron asked.

Draco’s eyes were boring a hole into her as he moved closer and grabbed her chin in his hand, squeezing, his breath hot on her face. “Weasley asked you a question….”

And that’s when she saw it, something was terribly wrong. Draco’s eyes were dry, but the corners were bloodshot, as if he had been crying, his nostrils were flaring, and his stare revealed barely veiled anxiety. Something had scared him, perhaps it was what Snape had revealed at dinner, or perhaps it was something even worse. Whatever it was, she didn’t like it. She wanted to comfort him.

“What do you need?” she managed to grind out through squeezed cheeks.

He let go of her face. “What?”

“What do you need right now, Draco?”

His eyes moved over her figure slowly, as if considering his options before finally settling back on her eyes. “I don’t need anything… but if I thought you could handle it, I’d like to hurt you right now,” he said.

“Malfoy!” Ron said in protest.

She nodded. “Then do it.”

“Hermione?” Ron gasped in shock.

“Would that please you?” she asked.

“Yes,” Draco said, watching her closely.

“Then I want to do it.” She reached out to caress his arm in reassurance.

His face softened for a moment and he sighed before his expression hardened once more. She gasped as he reached up and grabbed a fistful of her hair, pulling her head back so that her neck was exposed. His mouth, wet, and hungry began to suck on the flesh just above her collar. “You have no idea what you’re asking me for, Hermione,” he whispered against her neck.
“I think I do… and I’ll endure it if you like, if that’ll make you feel better…. Besides, aren’t you
supposed to be breaking me?” she said with small smile.

She held herself still as she felt him let go of her, afraid he would think she was mocking him.
Instead, he just shook his head. “You can’t be serious,” he said in incredulity.

“Hermione, are you sure?” Harry asked.

“Well, within my stated limits, of course…” she said, her voice faltering a little as she tried not to
sound bossy—really, it was a lot harder than she thought!

Draco laughed heartily. “Within your limits… of course… I’m about to test those. Get on all fours,
right now!”

She lowered herself in the next instant.

“You’re not to stand, unless we pull you up on your feet. You’ll crawl for the rest of the night,
understand?”

“Yes, Draco,” she said, peering up from her position on the floor.

“Now then,” he said. She saw his feet moving away from her and over towards the wall, where the
glass case was mounted. “Let’s see, what shall I use? I believe you have at least eight lashes
coming.”

Lashes… the whip, she had never really received a real whipping, not from Draco. The rapid
thudding in her chest became so pronounced she thought it was audible, what had she just agreed to?
The possibilities both excited and frightened her.

“You’ve been keeping count?” Ron asked.

“Of course, since last night,” Draco replied. And then there was nothing, no talking, no movement
that she could tell from her vantage point.

For what felt like several minutes, she stared at the floor, waiting. Her imagination began to spin out
of control, the silence around her growing more oppressive. She really wanted to see what they were
doing; she imagined that they were mouthing instructions to one another and she could hear the
whisper of movement. They must have been gesturing with their hands, too.

When she could take no more, she glanced sideways to where Draco was last standing but saw no
one, and as soon as she did, she heard the sound of a whip snapping in the air. Before she could
process the meaning of it, she gasped unconsciously at a sharp stinging sensation against her arse and
thighs where the straps of something leathery and knotted hit her.

“When I tell you to keep your eyes on the floor, that’s what I mean, understand?” Draco asked from
behind her.

“Yes, Draco,” she said.

“You’ve been the most insolent, misbehaved, out-of-control submissive I’ve ever seen, and we’re
going to put an end to it tonight,” he said.

Someone’s hand was in her hair, jerking her head back, lifting her off her hands until she was sitting
up. Despite her efforts, her eyes snapped up and she spotted Ron leaning against the wall, arms
folded, his stare intense as he studied her and whoever held her hair so tightly. Harry came back into
view, leaning himself against the wall opposite Ron. His gaze darted behind her, and Draco’s hand tightened further in her hair. It became difficult to breathe, and she could feel the heat creeping into her cheeks, perspiration beading on her brow.

She looked around at them, once more trying to control her face as not to show apprehension and then remembered she wasn’t supposed to be looking at them at all. She lowered her eyes quickly once more.

But then she heard chuckling. It sounded like Harry’s, and she couldn’t stop herself from glancing up and turning around. Before she could though, a silk blindfold sliding across her eyes blocked her vision.

Instead of tying it immediately, Draco pulled it back, yanking her head with it, until his lips were touching her ear.

“Did I say you could turn around?”

“No… no, Draco,” she said quietly.

“Since it’s obvious that you can’t follow orders on your own, I’m going to take the choice to disobey them away from you,” he whispered. “Do you trust me?”

Hermione nodded slowly.

“Wrong answer, Hermione,” he said, reaching around her chest with one hand and twisting a nipple harshly.

“Yes, Draco! Yes, I trust you,” she gasped.

“Even when this night is over? When we’re back at school… will you trust me then, too?” he asked.

School was the furthest thing from her mind right now. But she couldn’t see her new found trust in him ending anytime soon.

“Yes, Draco….”

“If you really mean it, then that makes me… happy,” he whispered, kissing her earlobe.

Hermione breathed a sigh of relief and smiled. Comfort dropped away from her like shards of glass as the blindfold tightened, rattling her sense of ease. Draco pushed her forward, surprising her. Her hands hit the floor, her body jarred by the force. A hard slap landed on her arse, causing her to twitch and clench of the cheeks of her bum tightly together, as her anxiety rose.

“You said that I was too easy on you before, correct?” he asked sharply.

Hermione suddenly regretted those words and tensed in preparation for another blow. She almost jumped as she felt something leathery and flat run down her back towards her arse. This wasn’t the flogger he had used just a moment ago… it felt more like a leather-clad paddle, with cold, flat metal studs around the edges.

Is he going to use that?

She steeled herself, adrenaline rushing through her, telling herself it couldn’t hurt too badly. Her whole body flinched and she dug her fingers into the carpet as it smacked against the bare skin of her arse, setting it ablaze. He mouth went dry and she clenched her eyes shut despite the fact that they
were already covered.

There was silence for a moment, except for the sound of Hermione’s heavy breathing.

“I blindfolded you - I didn’t take away your hearing.” The threat in Draco’s voice was clear.

“Yes, Draco!”

“Did that hurt?”

“Yes, Draco,” she said quickly, tensing once more as she waited for another blow. And then a rapid succession of hard smacks assaulted her bottom and she yelped and jumped as they increased in intensity. Her bum was on fire, the heat of it seemed to be spreading down and up her back. And as suddenly as it began, it ended.

And then she heard movement. She followed the sound with her head, and felt Draco leaning over her from behind.

“Scared?”

The sneer in his voice made her pulse quicken. She couldn’t see a damned thing and she had agreed to endure pain for him, but had no idea what he had in mind.

“Yes,” she said quietly.

Hermione waited for him to console her and tell her that everything would be okay or to threaten that she should be frightened; instead, there was complete silence, which only unnerved her more.

She hissed as he pulled her back up onto her knees so that her sore arse rested uncomfortably on her heels. She gasped as two fingers pinched her right nipple, pulling it and twisting it. And then the same rough treatment was applied to the other nipple. Despite the pain, she felt the flush of arousal spreading between her legs. Once again she marvelled at how pain could make her cringe, and desire more of it.

When something cold, jagged, and cruelly uncompromising in its grip closed down on her right nipple, she couldn’t control her tongue. She shrieked in shock, and before she could utter a word of protest, another one just like it closed down on her left nipple.

“Ooowww! Please take them off!” she pleaded, raising her hands to her breasts. They collided with a chain that was joining the clamps on her nipples. Reflex drove her fingers. She wanted them off. Now. But her hand was smacked away, causing it to hit a clamp and amplify the painful sensation. Pinched and heavy.

“No, you’ll keep your hands by your sides, understand? It can be worse, much worse, Hermione. Don’t make me show you just how much,” Draco warned.

She nodded, to which Draco responded by pulling on the chain connecting the two clamps, the teeth digging into her skin as the weight of his action pulled on her already-sensitive breasts even more.

Hermione let out a low pained moan and the hair stood on the back of her neck as she heard bare feet shuffle along the carpet; someone was drawing closer behind her. Whoever it was slid his hands down her arms and she didn’t know whether to cower or melt. She enjoyed the feeling of being caressed. The hands were large, rough and strong; it had to be Ron. She almost forgot about the clamps on her nipples and laughed as he slid his hands down her sides, tickling her before pulling her arms up into the air. The familiar and comfortable sensation was utterly incongruous with the anxiety
She felt a demanding tug, compelling her to stand, and the clamps swayed with the pull, drawing a whimper from her. She began to chew on her lip as she felt the cold hardness and clinking sounds of metal as manacles closed around her wrists. Her arms in chains above her; the weight and bite of the clamps on her nipples pronounced; blinded in complete darkness. She wavered between scolding herself and self-congratulation that she had put complete trust in them. Right now she was completely vulnerable. It was exhilarating and she could barely catch her breath.

Someone whispered, “Compesio.” Before she could think any further on it, the clank of chains from the ceiling chased all of her previous feelings of security away.

Someone fastened the manacles around her wrists to the chain hanging above her, and she wondered what they were playing at. There were chains already available in the corner of the room. She swallowed as her mind began to race about what could be next.

There was a tug on her arms as the chain began to recede back into the ceiling, and it then Hermione understood. The chains in the corner didn’t move like this. They wanted to suspend her, and here in the middle of the room there was more space for… whatever they had in mind.

The chains slowly pulled her up, inch-by-inch, until she was standing on the balls of her feet, and with a whisper, they left the floor. Her body swayed. The strain on her arms was slightly uncomfortable, but the adrenaline rushing through her made it tolerable. It felt strange to be dangling in midair; it almost reminded her of the Muggle monkey bars she used to play on as a child, but this was much different, and she was surrounded by three randy males, whose intentions right now weren’t entirely clear. She bit her lip to keep from asking what they were doing.

A shiver ran through her as she felt a hand close over her bits.

“Have you been touching it?” Draco asked, tracing the letters that he had tattooed on her mound.

“Yes, Draco.”

“Do you know what it says?”

“Yes, Draco.”

“And do you agree, that you’re ours?”

“Yes, Draco, I am,” she said quickly.

“Mine, too?”

“Yes, Draco,” she said in slight puzzlement. Where was he going with this?

“I don’t believe you,” he said, pulling his hand away, and then smacking her pussy with the palm of his hand, just barely missing her clit, and causing her to flinch in her bonds.

“It is yours… I swear, Draco,” she said almost pleading, to no avail, as she felt his palm collide once more with her mound, hitting her clit; this time it sent jolt of pain followed by a tingle that almost felt good.

“Even when you’re all done up in your finest Gryffindor colours at a Quidditch match against Slytherin? Will you be mine then, too?” he asked.
“Yes, Draco, even then,” she replied a little too soon, remembering that she was also in the room with two rabid Gryffindor Quidditch players.

She let out a yelp when she felt a large hand slap her arse from behind. “Is that right? So while I’m busting my arse on the field, you’ll be rooting for Malfoy?” Ron asked with aggravation in his voice.

Damn it, that had been a trick question

“I’ll root for both of you, of course, I’ll want Gryffindor to win, though,” she said hesitantly.

Draco sniggered. “Nice try, Hermione, but you’re going to be punished no matter what you say. That’s eight infractions you’ve committed since yesterday… which means you have at least eight lashes coming to you… but let’s make it an even ten, shall we?”

Hermione gulped and tried to steady her voice as she replied. “Yes, Draco.”

“Watch and learn, Weasley,” she heard Draco say.

She waited for a few moments in tense anticipation for a smack or sting of a lash, and he did not disappoint: a sharp stinging sensation sent her head back.

“Count, bitch,” he said sternly.

“One,” she began.

Another strike landed on her arse, causing her to jump in her bonds. The clamps on her nipples seemed to pinch harder as they swayed from impact of the lash.

“One. Thank you, Draco,” she said quickly to amend her mistake.

“Good…” he murmured.

The second one landed on her arse and she quickly counted and thanked him once more.

He moved to her side and the next landed on her thigh.

That had been unexpected and she wheezed in surprise. “Three. Thank you, Draco.”

“I don’t understand… what’s the difference?” Ron asked.

“The difference is that I’m not doing this in anger,” Draco said. “And I’m not using my full strength,” he said striking her again, this time it much lighter.

The latest lash was much lighter than the previous ones.

“Four. Thank you, Draco.”

“And, as nervous as she is right now, she knows I won’t go too far… and I’m alternating…” he said as he struck her once more, this time a little harder.

“Five… thank you, Draco.”

“See, Weasley? Light, hard… medium… hard!” he grunted as he delivered a particularly firm blow, causing her Hermione to sob.

In addition to the particular hard blow Draco had just delivered, the nipple clamps shook with every
stroke. Each time they did, the pull of them on her tender flesh blurred the line between pain and pleasure. She didn’t know how much more she could take.

"Six… thank you… Draco…” she said brokenly.

“So she never gets used to it. Here,” she heard Draco say.

Hermione held her breath as the realisation that Draco had just handed the whip over to Ron set in. She tried to tell herself this was Ron, she was in love with him, and he would never hurt her, but the nagging memory of his last effort at punishment made her curl her toes in fear.

“Remember your strength, Weasley. You don’t have to do it hard to make it firm,” Draco said.

“I get it, Malfoy!” Ron snapped.

The air was thick with anticipation. A breath-light smack landed across her back. Hermione didn’t move.

“Seven. Thank you, sir.”

“She’s not a bloody porcelain doll, Weasley,” Draco said in annoyance.

“I know!” Ron said defensively. “I just want to make sure I don’t hurt ’er, is all.”

“Oh boo-hoo; you made a bloody mistake, now get over it! Go on; do it properly this time,” Draco said.

This time when the strip landed against Hermione’s skin, it was biting, felt like she had been struck with the tail of a scorpion; her skin burned and the pain only seemed to intensify. She gasped, but couldn’t help the moan that also escaped her. It seemed with every lash, no matter how heavy, her body was responding as if it had been needing it.

“You like this, Hermione?” Ron asked.

“Yes, Ron,” she whispered.

She heard the whip whistle in the air as a hard and fast lash hit her thigh, causing her to cry out.

“I’m sorry… yes, sir. Seven. thank you, sir,” she said quickly.

“There we go,” Ron said.

She heard him move around to her side, and then sighed in relief as his next lash landed softly against her side.

“Eight. Thank you, sir,” she said, concentrating on her tone, understanding that it could earn her far worse if she wasn’t careful.

“Weasley, what did I tell you? Stay away from her side; focus on this area, or over here,” he instructed.

“Alright,” Ron said, as a particularly harsh blow landed against her upper back, making Hermione bite her lip to avoid screaming out.

“Nine. Thank you, sir!”
“Good one,” she heard Draco say with admiration.

Although the pain of the clamps were more tolerable now, it still hurt like hell, and she was desperate to get them off of her, feeling like a greater part body throbbed with pain of some sort.

“Please… take them off,” she whined.

“Shush… or we’ll leave them on for another ten minutes… last one,” Draco said.

Hermione waited and when no blow came, she began to fidget in her bonds. She heard whispering and then sensed that the whip was being passed around once more.

There was a whistle in the air and then it landed against both arse cheeks harshly. She cried out reluctantly once more.

“Ten. Thank you….” she paused cautiously, not sure whom she was addressing.

“Master,” Harry informed her.

“Master,” she repeated.

Another impact bit into her thighs.

Oh, shit! Why?

“Oww! I was only supposed to get ten!” she said in aggravation.

Another stripe hit her arse in the same place as before; this time it hurt much more than all of the rest of them. She was sure it would leave a bruise along her arse, but right now that didn’t matter. She let out a sob. “I’m sorry! Twelve. Thank you, Master.”

A hand snaked between her legs, probing her pussy. She cringed in embarrassment that now they all knew how much this turned her on. There was no hiding her arousal; the evidence seeped from her.

What kind of freak am I? she wondered.

Oh, well… if I’m a freak, so are they.

She stopped worrying about it and capitulated to the pleasure. She moaned as the fingers slid inside her and began to move back and forth, fucking her slowly. She tried with all of her might to push her hips against them, enjoying the feeling, but wanting much more.

She tried to open her legs but found it was difficult from her suspended position. She groaned in frustration as the fingers withdrew completely. The tips continued to trace light circles around her clit. She whimpered, wanting to be able to move her body against their ministrations properly.

But this is what she wanted, not to be in control, to show them right now what she was to them – and honour the rules that they made. She would get what she wanted, but she would get it on their terms, not hers. She stilled as the realisation and full meaning of it hit her.

A hot mouth breathed against her clit, causing her to buck her entire body forward, trying to meet it, while someone else spread her arse cheeks and drove their tongue in the crevice there. She gasped in shock that one of them would put their tongue there, of all places, still she found herself trying to move back and forth between the mouth in front of her and the tongue against her arsehole.

And then both mouths pulled back, leaving her wet, aroused, and frustrated. In the next instant, she felt herself being lowered down to the floor. She waited patiently as her hands were unhooked from the chain and taken out of the manacles. She hoped desperately that the clamps would be removed
next, but instead the blindfold was lifted.

She blinked several times, adjusting to the light in the room, as Harry blurred into view, naked, his face flushed, and he was squeezing his hand open and shut, exercising it as if he had just been wanking. She briefly wondered who had licked her arsehole, but then the tug of the clamps on her nipples seemed to be getting heavier. She wanted them removed.

“Please,” she begged, her eyes fixed on the clamps.

“What’s that?” Draco said, tugging on the chain between her breasts once more as Ron delivered another lash, this time to her arse.

Hermione moaned and whimpered at the duel sensation of the bite of the lash and the weighted pinch of the clamps on her nipples. Despite the spasm and heat rushing through her pussy; her head felt light from the pain and she thought she’d pass out if the clamps weren’t removed soon. “Please, Draco, take them off… please.”

“Are you going to be a good girl?”

“Yes, I promise!”

“No sass or back talk?”

“No, Draco.”

He stared at her for a moment before reaching over and unclipping the right clamp on her nipple. Hermione hissed at the pain of the blood flowing back; it hurt worse than the clamp did while it was on. She tensed as he removed the next one, biting her lips, her nipples pulsing as she waited for the pain to subside.

He stroked them both tenderly. “And, do you really think you can please all of us at the same time?” he asked sceptically.

“I’ll try,” she said determinedly, her voice faltering a little as she thought of the task before her.

Harry walked up to her, staring into her eyes, as he reached up and pulled her by the hair, yanking her head back to look up.

“You’ll do better than try, Hermione, won’t you?” he asked forcefully.

“Yes, Master,” she breathed.

Harry didn’t let go of her hair, instead, his grip tightened. “Is this turning you on?”

“Master?” she gasped. She couldn’t think straight, his hold on her head and the tone he was using was making her dizzy. Her thoughts were scattered.

“The way I’m treating you right now… you like it?” he asked, pulling her hair harder. Something about the way he pulled her hair made her breath catch; she could feel her pussy aching with need; her thoughts were like a sun-drenched mist, rising away.

“Gods, yes… Master,” she moaned.

“She likes it rough,” Harry informed him.

“Obviously,” Draco took her chin harshly in his hand.
“Who would have known that the prim and proper Hermione Granger was such a hungry little humiliation slut,” he asked, moving his hand up and squeezing her cheeks hard.

Hermione let out a low moan at his rough treatment and the feeling of Harry’s hand in her hair.

“Damn, she really likes this,” Draco remarked in mild surprise, his eyes wide and curious.

“I told you,” Harry looked over at Ron who was watching Hermione in fascination.

“Well, she did tell us that,” Ron reminded him.

Harry nodded.

“But, the real question is… how rough does she like it?” Draco squeezed her chin harder.

“Really rough,” she tried to say through her squeezed cheeks.

Draco’s eyebrows went up at that.

“Yeah? Is there something in particular you want?” he asked.

Hermione turned to find Harry quietly staring at her. She read the understanding in his eyes.


“Go on, tell him, Hermione,” Harry said softly. Hermione closed her eyes as she tried to absorb the sensation of being in both his and Harry’s grip, enjoying the feeling of both of them controlling her.

She could hear herself moaning like it was someone else and wanted to see how far they would take it, how raw they both could be… she felt safe asking for it.

“Damn… you’re so fucking wound up right now, you can barely see straight… look at me!” Draco ordered impatiently, gripping her cheeks tighter, demanding that she look at him. “Now, tell me what you want!”

Hermione’s gaze sharpened as she stared back at him brazenly.

“Why don’t you make me!” Hermione spat.

She heard Ron snigger, Harry’s gaze was cautious as his eyes flickered to Draco.

Draco narrowed his eyes, studying her. “What the fuck is wrong with you? Do you want me to hurt you?”

Hermione’s bit her lip and looked up at him hungrily.

“You do, don’t you? You really want me to hurt you,” he said incredulously.

Hermione couldn’t help but twist in excitement from the threat in his voice as she moaned. “Yes… yes, Draco, please… please, hurt me.”

Draco let go of her face, staring at her in guarded contemplation before glancing up at Harry, who let her hair go.

She inwardly cursed herself, thinking that she had gone too far, that they were freaked out by her request, when Harry leaned in close to her and whispered, “Hermione… you want to be slapped?”
Hermione whimpered. “Yes, Master,” she said.

“Hermione!” Ron protested weakly.

“Please…” she begged once more.

She saw Harry and Draco exchange a look and then Harry’s hand was in her hair once more, pulling her head back as he pushed her closer to Draco.

Draco stroked her cheek tenderly for a moment and then tapped it lightly with closed fingers.

Hermione groaned in frustration. “Harder,” she urged.

Draco looked up at Harry, who nodded.

“Yeah?” Draco pulled back his hand before slapping her firmly across the cheek. They all stared at her, studying her face to gauge her reaction. She let out a soft whimper and then moaned, staring back at Draco, asking for more.

Draco seemed relieved. “Like that?” he asked.

She nodded as much as she could with Harry’s hand in her hair. “Yes... Draco.”

When he slapped her quickly once more, she gasped in shock; it had caught her off guard and it was much harder.

“Like this? Is this what you want?” he asked again.

She tried to nod. “Yes... Draco.”

He slapped her again, and this time, Hermione’s eyes rolled in the back of her head as she let out of a low moan.

“Fuck,” Ron murmured, moving closer to them.

“Well, let’s see it then,” Harry said, pulling her over to the bed and pushing her onto her back.

Hermione didn’t have a moment to relax as she felt herself being pulled up into a sitting position as Harry reached down and hooked his finger through the ring of her collar. It made her feel completely controlled and very much like property, and she felt herself floating in her previous trance. Her body light, her vision out of focus.

He lifted her in his arms, and she felt herself being laid down in a different position, so that her head was at the foot of the bed, and her feet were facing the headboard.

She looked up, and Draco was on her in a second, stroking her cheek where he had just lain his last assault. “Tell me what you are,” he demanded in a raspy voice.

Her brain felt muddled by his proximity, and the awareness that Ron and Harry were moving onto the bed, surrounding her on both sides.

What does he want to hear? I’m their slut, their submissive, their Mudblood?

She thought of her tattoo, and said what came easiest. “Yours.”

One eyebrow went up as Draco pulled back, settling down to straddle her legs.
“Ours, yes… our what?”

She looked up to see that Ron and Harry had completely disrobed, and Draco was pulling off his t-shirt, and undoing his trousers. And then fingers began to pinch, prod, and explore her. She was overwhelmed from the anticipation of what was about to happen, and couldn’t speak, as she began to writhe under their attentions.

“Can’t hear you, Hermione, what are you?”

Incoherent, she thought as Draco rose up, taking off his trousers and pants while Harry’s fingers begin to slide inside of her and Ron continued to massage her breasts, his cock dangling over her face.

“Huh?” Harry asked again, glaring at her.

“I’m… I’m your fucktoy… Master,” she moaned, her hips grinding to meet the thrust of Harry’s fingers.

“Yesss,” Harry hissed.

She groaned as he removed his fingers, and moved up and buried his face in her neck, kissing and nipping her, leaving room for Draco to return to his position.

Ron’s brow furrowed. “Fucktoy,” he scoffed “You’re my slut… aren’t you, Hermione?”

“Uhhh, yes… yes, sir.”

“Her’s whatever we want her to be, isn’t that right?” Draco said, slapping a firm hand against her thigh, causing a sharp stinging pain.

“Yes, Draco… whatever you want,” she murmured.

A low moan escaped her as Draco replaced Harry’s fingers with his own, only his movements were much more demanding, and Hermione found herself closing her eyes, imagining it was his cock as she began to fuck herself against his hand.

“That’s it, fuck yourself for us,” Draco rasped. And she tried, tried to find release; she wanted to come, and as the pressure began to build, her body felt out of control as she bucked against their mouths, hands, and fingers, her head thrashing from side to side.

Draco’s movement slowed, and she groaned as Harry’s mouth drew back and Ron removed his hand from her breast.

She stilled, afraid to open her eyes and see them all appraising her and then she gasped at the sudden sensation of a hot wet tongue pressed against her pussy. She didn’t have a moment of reprieve as another tongue invaded her mouth, and then someone was pushing his finger against her arse. She bucked her hips up against Draco’s mouth, revelling in the way he was devouring her.

She felt his saliva seeping against the finger pressed against her arsehole as it began to slip inside her. She found herself getting more excited as she pushed against both of them, wanting more than ever to be completely filled at both ends.

She ventured to see who was kissing her and saw messy black locks. She reached up to wrap her arms around him, but before she could, Ron grabbed her left wrist, and she looked up to see him guiding her hand over his large erection.
Ron began pumping himself into her palm as Harry broke the kiss, moving down her neck to give attention to her breasts once more, taking one of her sore nipples into his hot mouth. She hissed as his lips closed over the tender flesh there.

She was so close… she was going to come into Draco’s mouth, and if someone wanted to push their whole hand up her arse while he was doing it, she wouldn’t care right now; she felt wanton and completely open and began to sob into Harry’s mouth as her orgasm approached. Draco’s tongue flicked over her clit twice more. She couldn’t breathe. Had to breathe. The fullness of the fingers inside of her arse was becoming more pronounced as everything inside of her began to squeeze and tighten in anticipation for her release. She broke the kiss with Harry, feeling rather than hearing herself cry out as the shockwaves moved throughout her body.

It felt as if she were on a broom, on the brink of falling, as Draco continued to lick and suck on her. Finally, when she could do nothing more than whimper, he pulled back.

She slowly opened her eyes to see him licking his lips and grinning down at her. She smiled back and looked up at Ron and Harry when she felt herself being pulled down the bed roughly. Draco had both of her legs in his hands, and was spreading her out further as he pushed himself against her.

She could feel his hard cock rubbing against her thigh, as if warning her of what was to come. And despite still reeling from her orgasm, she wanted that more than anything. For a second they all paused, staring at each other, the boys watching her from their positions over her as she gazed back up at them.

“Fuck me… please…” she finally begged.

“You’ll have to beg better than that, cunt.” He smirked, as if waiting for her to protest. But that was the furthest thing from her mind. She wanted him, wanted all of them, right now. Slave, submissive, whatever… semantics be damned.

“What do you want? Hermione?” Harry asked. There was only one answer, she needed it, needed them.

“Please… please fuck me.”

“Louder,” Draco demanded.

“Please fuck me!” she said much louder.

“Tell us how much you love cock,” he ordered.

Oh, God, this is humiliating. She flushed. But you love it, a small voice whispered.

She looked up at Harry and Ron, who were also waiting for her to comply.

“I-I love… oh, god…”

“Say it!” Draco insisted.

“I love… cock, so much… I need it, please…” she finished, her cheeks burning.

Draco leaned over her, teasing her clit with the head of his cock, sliding it over it and then pushing at her entrance but not any further. Hermione whined, trying to pull him into her by wrapping her legs around his waist and pushing up.
“Stop it!” he said, pulling back. “Or you won’t get any, I promise you that.”

Hermione looked up to see Ron and Harry watching the interaction with lustful fascination; they were both stroking themselves as if waiting for their turn.

“Now,” Draco said as he resumed rubbing himself against her, leaning over to whisper in her ear. “Say it again… just for me,” he whispered in her ear.

“Please… Draco, please, fuck me… I need it. I need to be….” She couldn’t find the words… not those words anyway.

“Stuffed?” Draco offered.

“Yes, I need to be stuffed,” she said, her eyes clenched shut.

“You’re a nasty little cock-hungry slut, aren’t you, Hermione?”

His words sent a jolt to her pussy; everything he was saying seemed to be true.

“Yes… Draco.”

“Good girl, yes you are… just ours though,” he reminded her.

Hermione nodded. “Yes… just for you.”

“I want to watch my nasty little cock-hungry slut suck Weasley’s fat cock while I’m fucking her brains out,” he said. “You think you can handle that?”

Hermione nodded furiously, twisting her hips against his hard length to increase the friction and entice him to take her.

“And Harry is not to be neglected… you will please him too.”

Hermione’s eyes widened as she looked up at Harry, who was staring down at her darkly as he wanked; he grabbed her hand and replaced it where his had been, moving it over his length, showing her how he wanted her to masturbate him.

“You’re going to please all three of us, right here, right now, aren’t you?”

“Yes… Draco,” she moaned as he pushed himself against her entrance once more without penetrating.

It was maddening. She didn’t know how much more teasing she could take.

“That’s my Mudblood,” he whispered softly, kissing her ear before sitting up and glancing up at Ron.

Why the hell does that turn me on?

She heard someone scoff, and knew it was Harry. “Um… I’m going to pretend like I didn’t hear that.”

“Ron, come here,” Harry said, motioning with his head towards the bed.

Ron looked over at Hermione lying on the bed with a sort of hesitant expression and glanced back up at Harry.
“Go on, Weasley, feed her,” Draco said.

Ron nodded, pushing his hard cock against her cheek, but away from her mouth, and when she bowed her head to kiss it, he pulled it back and smacked it against her face firmly.

Hermione stared at Ron, her eyes wide.

“Please…” she whispered breathlessly, leaning over once more to kiss the head of his cock. This time he let her, throwing his head back, and taking her face into his hand as she did.

He groaned. “You think you could manage to fit it down your throat?”

“Now who could manage that, Weasley?” Draco asked. “Even I think that’s cruel.”

Ron smirked. “Well, she can at least try. I wouldn’t mind hearing her gag on it a bit. You’d like that, too, wouldn’t you?” He was staring down at her, his eyes hard, demanding.

The image of Ron trying to stuff himself completely inside of her mouth made her feel both dirty and special at once. “Yes, sir,” she said eagerly.

“Ron?” Harry whispered. Hermione noticed he was staring at Ron with a question on his face.

“What?” Ron asked as if he wasn’t whether he had said something inappropriate.

Harry shook his head and smiled. “Nothing. Carry on.” He grasped Hermione’s hand to move her hand over his cock at a more acceptable pace.

Ron climbed over her face, straddling it, “Open your mouth, Hermione,” he said. She complied, and opened her mouth wide.

“That’s it,” he said tracing her lips with the head of his cock, before dipping it inside; she began to close her mouth around it when he pulled it out of her reach.

She craned up her head up off the bed so that she could try to resume sucking but he pulled back even further.

“I like hearing you beg for it,” she heard more than saw him say.

“Pease, sir. Please let me suck your cock,” she said, staring at it. It was beautifully large, hard, red, and swollen, and it was just for her. She wanted to taste it, wanted to adore it with her mouth, to show him just how much she enjoyed it.

He moved closer to her. “You goin’ to take it all for me?”

She was pretty sure she couldn’t do that, remembering how difficult it had been to take a fair amount of it when Harry had forced her mouth on it. “I’ll try, sir.”

“I don’t think you can,” he said, rubbing it over her face.

She reached up to lick the head once more, and Ron responded by plunging himself into her mouth. She gasped and coughed around it as it hit the back of her throat.

“Don’t kill her,” Draco said.

“I’m not… she can do it, can’t you, Hermione?” he asked as he slowly pushed down a bit more.
“Hmm-hmm,” she moaned over his cock, trying to relax her throat. Tears were beginning to form in her eyes from the pressure of Ron’s cock. When he withdrew again, she inhaled sharply – her throat felt tender.

“You alright?” he asked.

She nodded quickly, opening her mouth once more.

Ron moved over to the side of her face, and Harry moved up, positioning his cock over her face across from Ron’s. She stared up at both of them to see Harry studying her.

“You think you can manage sucking us both off at the same time?” he asked.

“Well…” she started, considering how she would manage that.

“Just do it,” Ron said, pushing his cock against her mouth.

She opened her mouth, licking the head, and then felt Harry’s cock pushing against the other side of her mouth and tried to open wider to accommodate space for both. It was impossible. Harry groaned as he began pushing himself further into her mouth and against Ron’s cock.

They finally settled on alternating who pushed into her mouth, understanding that they couldn’t both be fully encased in it at once. She reached up and grabbed both of their cocks by the base so that she could wank Harry while sucking Ron. When she felt Ron had received enough attention, she switched, releasing Ron from her mouth and taking in Harry.

She was concentrating so hard on the task of pleasing them both that she jerked in surprise when she felt hands grabbing her ankles. She had momentarily forgotten about Draco, but he was making his presence known as he spread her legs wider and slid his cock against her wet opening, teasing her.

Hermione moved her hips in tight little circles trying to urge him on, and found herself becoming frustrated when he didn’t push farther.

“You want to be fucked, Hermione?” he asked.

Hermione moaned in affirmation.

“Huh? Can’t hear you,” he said.

“She can’t talk right now, Malfoy,” Ron said with a snigger.

Draco sighed in disappointment, and pushed forward, fully burying himself inside of her.

“Gods, what a tight cunt,” he groaned as he began to fuck her steadily, lifting one leg and positioning it against his shoulder. He thrust in and out of her, tightening his grip on her leg and pulling her as he continued.

She fucked him back, trying to meet his thrusts while trying to pay attention to what she was doing with Harry and Ron’s cocks. She was enjoying the feeling of being pinned on her back, having Harry and Ron pushing themselves in and out of her mouth, Ron’s hand feeling her breasts as Draco pounded into her.

She could feel an orgasm building, and then Draco shifted. He slowed his pace, now gripping her thigh and waist with both hands, grunting with each thrust. And then Ron pulled out and began to wank over her face, allowing Harry full access to her mouth. Harry began to fuck her mouth, but
then slowed and then suddenly stopped.

Hermione looked up to see Harry gripping Ron’s shoulder to brace himself; he looked faint.

“You alright, mate?” Ron asked Harry in concern as Draco paused in his stroke to see what was wrong.

“I—I’m fine,” Harry said, closing his eyes briefly and then opening them, pulling himself out of Hermione’s mouth.

“Harry?” she asked.

“Hermione… you’re forgetting yourself,” he said in a stern tone.

“I’m sorry, Master, but you look sick,” she said.

“I’m… I’m just close, that’s all,” Harry said dismissively.

“Well, then, we should get to it,” Draco said, withdrawing from Hermione and sitting back. “How do you want to do this?

“Perhaps Harry should lie down…” Ron suggested.

Harry nodded and started to recline on the bed when Draco shook his head.

“No, if you’re going to do that, you should lie that way,” he said pointing to the foot of the bed.

Harry sat contemplating and then nodded in agreement, lying down beside Hermione, “Ride me, Hermione,” he ordered, turning his head to her.

Hermione rose up on her knees and turned to straddle Harry. She positioned herself over him, teasing him for only a moment before slowly sliding down his length. She smiled that he and Draco felt very much alike in both length and girth.

She wiggled around on his cock and then rose up almost completely off of it before sliding down once more. Harry’s clear gaze was fixed steadily upon her as she rode him, smiling, and then she saw him look above her. She tried to turn her head to see what he was staring at but then she felt Draco’s hands slide down her shoulders and then her arms. She rotated her hips over Harry, enjoying the feeling of him completely inside of her as Draco swept her hair in his hands away from her neck, dipping his head down so that he could kiss her there.

Hermione sighed at the tenderness of Draco’s touch, and lifted one hand to comb through his soft hair as she braced herself by planting her palm firmly down on Harry’s chest.

She was jarred when Draco disentangled himself from her. She felt him leave the bed and then quickly return.

“Umorio, is it?” he asked.

“Oh,” Harry and Ron said together. Draco pushed Hermione’s back so that she was leaning farther over Harry. She braced her hands on either side of Harry’s head, and Harry reached up and kissed her. They kissed for several moments, and she could feel herself melting, as she began to relax. She sighed into Harry’s mouth as he his hands slid down her lower back, grabbing her arse, and spreading her cheeks open. She knew what was coming and braced herself for the painful intrusion.

She listened as Draco muttered the spell and her backside became slick with moisture. A moment
later, she felt the head of Draco’s cock pushing against her arsehole. She tensed.

“Relax; you’ve done this much before, right?” he asked softly. She exhaled and tried to think of the time she had taken both Ron and Harry in the Shrieking Shack. Of course, she had been lying on her side then, so it had been much easier. This position was more demanding of her body and she could feel so much more. They were all surrounding her, their hard bodies, hands, mouths, and cocks pressed against her. She felt overpowered and overwhelmed in every way.

She began to focus on her breathing and tried to relax. Harry lay still, allowing Draco to work himself inside of her, and Hermione moved her hands to Harry’s chest, clutching hold of him, waiting for pain.

Draco began to push in cautiously before pulling out a little, and then repeating, going a little farther each time, moving her over Harry’s cock with each effort. She threw her head back, hitting Draco’s chest, and then opened her eyes to see that he was on one bended knee behind her. She felt him breach the inner circle within her and whimpered, fearing once he passed it, he wouldn’t be so careful.

“I’m not going to hurt you now; I promise,” he said as he pushed a little harder. She felt herself becoming wetter from the sensation of having both Harry and Draco’s cocks rubbing against each other as Draco sank into her deeper.

“Oh… Oh, my god,” she moaned; she was utterly pinned and being stretched and filled, her body felt both taxed and blessed all at once.

“See… I’m in,” Draco said, leaning in to kiss her shoulders, as he began to pick up his pace, sliding in and out of her slowly.

Harry began to move underneath her, trying to work with Draco’s rhythm as he squeezed her thighs and pushed up against the force of the two above him.

Harry moaned as Hermione began move back and forth against both of them.

“Fuck, that’s it…” Draco groaned into her hair as he gripped her shoulders.

Ron cleared his throat loudly above them.

She opened her eyes; he was watching her from where he stood at the foot of the bed, stroking his cock. She opened her mouth, taking in a deep breath as he placed his hand on top of her head, pushing it closer to his cock.

She leaned over Harry, feeling Draco plunge completely inside of her at a different angle, which seemed to emphasise how completely full she was. She cried out, which only seemed to arouse Harry more as he met Draco’s thrust, grinding against him inside of her.

Ron placed both hands on either side of her head and guided himself in her mouth, this time, being more gentle and rolling his hips. She moaned as the sensation and awareness that she was completely filled overtook her.

She felt herself being stretched wider and Draco’s cock rubbed more forcibly inside of her against Harry’s. Harry pushed up and groaned, as Hermione shifted her hands from Harry’s chest to Ron’s thighs, holding onto them as the force of them fucking her shook her body back and forth again. Hearing and feeling their need only made her want to please them more; it felt glorious to be able to satisfy all of them at once in this way and she wanted to make sure that they all came, however long it took.
Ron’s grip in her hair tightened and he pushed into her mouth, the head of his cock hitting the back of her throat, causing her to cry as she tried to breathe through her mouth and not think of the muted pain of Draco and Harry sliding against each other inside of her. It was a strange feeling, not so much pain, as fullness and slight discomfort, stretching and filling her that was almost overwhelming.

“You’re doing well, Hermione… you can take it…” Harry groaned as he reached up to cup her breasts.

“Hurts?” Ron asked.

She tried to nod, but Ron was pulling her hair, she looked up at him as much as she could, her face wet from saliva and tears. Ron loosened his hold on her hair, and wiped her face with his free hand.

“It’s alright,” he said.

Draco grunted and leaned over her, kissing along her fevered skin up to the collar encircling her neck. “That’s it… work through the pain. Do it for us, Hermione; show us what a good girl you are,” he whispered pushing into her farther.

Hermione moaned loudly around Ron’s cock and pushed back onto Draco, feeling Harry’s cock move in response as he twisted one of her nipples. Her vision was blurry with tears and sweat, and she closed her eyes, concentrating on the way it felt to be completely filled with all of them at once.

She was aware that Ron had wound one hand in her hair as the head of his cock continued to hit the back of her throat while Harry sucked on her nipples. A muffled moan escaped her as Draco pulled both of her arms behind her, using them to pull her against him and Harry as he continued to loosen her up with every thrust.

Harry bucked up to meet Draco’s rhythm, and several times she could feel them sliding against each other inside of her. There was an audible buzz about them and she could feel her body tingling all over as the electricity in the air became tangible. She felt as if she were swimming, about to be taken into the undertow, and couldn’t tell if the blue and green sparks flickering in the air were a sign of her approaching release or whether it was their magic colliding.

“Oh, oh…” she heard Harry groan as Draco’s grip on her tightened, and he and Harry began to move against her more erratically, pounding into her without their former cautious care. There was no more pain now, just a great pressure building inside of her, an orgasm so powerful she was almost fearful of its approach.

Her mouth tightened around Ron’s cock as Draco’s nails dug into her and she knew she must have scraped him with her teeth, but he didn’t seem to notice, as his grip in her hair became more urgent.

She heard a crackle in the air, and opened her eyes; this time, there was no mistaking it: there were multicoloured sparks twinkling all around them. She shut her eyes again and began to push herself back and forth against them, reaching for the inevitable. It was going to be so good, and she wanted it… wanted it right now.

In the next moment, there was a collective moan and then she felt Draco stiffen behind her and he dug his nails into her wrists, as he came. She was next, moaning loudly around Ron’s cock as her third orgasm swept through her, causing her to clench around both Harry and Draco at once. Harry grunted and pushed up one last time. She could feel his warm release shooting deep inside her just as Ron let out a strangled groan, and then swore as the hand in her hair clutched almost painfully. Warm, bitter come coated her tongue, and she continued to suck and swallow until every bit of it was gone.
Draco fell back, withdrawing from her, and Harry stilled under her, gasping before going very quiet. She shook her head at Ron, trying to pull her head back.

Ron sighed, finally opening his eyes in confusion. “What’s the matter?” he asked, letting go of her head.

She pulled back and looked down at Harry. His head lay to one side, and his eyes were fluttering; his breathing was rapid, and his forehead was furrowed the same as when his scar hurt.

“Harry, are you alright?”

He didn’t answer, instead lay gasping, trying to catch his breath.

Hermione rose off of him, and Draco came around to look at him, while Ron knelt down at the foot of the bed. “What’s wrong, mate?”

“I don’t know… I almost passed out,” he said.

Draco smirked. “Here we were, worried about Hermione, and you’re the one who can’t handle it.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “I’m fine… I suppose I’m just more exhausted than I thought I was; I’ve come more in one week than I have all year.”

They all smiled at that.

“Well, that was a pretty good effort, I’d say,” Draco said.

“Did you see it?” Ron asked, his eyes spellbound.

Draco and Hermione nodded. “Yes.”

“What?” Harry asked. “What did you see?”

“Our magic, it was… visible.” Hermione gave him a worried look. “You didn’t feel it, Harry?”

Harry shook his head, rubbing his scar. “I felt something… I wouldn’t call it magic though,” he chuckled.

“You look green, mate,” Ron said in concern.

“Too much action for him, I think. Maybe passing out is a good idea; it’s nearly 2:00 am, and we have to be up by 6:00am to get out of here,” Draco said, doing cleaning spells on himself, Hermione, and the duvet.

They all nodded in agreement.

“Hermione, you can take the concealment charm off now,” Draco said to her.

“But why?” Hermione asked.

Draco gave her a sly smile and wink. “Just do what I say, alright?”

“Yes, Draco.” She rose from the bed and gave a quick search before finding her wand. She waved it quickly, ending the spell.

Harry also arose from the bed to get under the covers but as soon as he was on his feet he faltered.
and swayed for a moment. Draco quickly slid over to him on his knees, holding both of Harry’s arms to steady him.

“You sure you’re alright? It looks like you’re really going to faint,” he said in concern.

Harry nodded quickly. They all looked at him in concern.

Ron moved quickly and lifted Harry into his arms, as Draco pulled back the covers for him.

Harry smiled. “Maybe I should get light headed more often,” he said to Ron who snorted before laying him down in the bed and sliding in beside him.

Ron snuggled closer to Harry, wrapping his arms around him protectively, watching his friend in concern. Draco slid into bed beside Harry. He lay on his back, staring at Hermione who was standing at the foot of the bed staring at all three of them tentatively.

“Well, are you coming to bed or not?” Draco asked.

She smiled in relief. “I didn’t know whether I would be allowed to… Draco.”

“I think you’ve earned it,” he said with smile.

“Ten times over,” Harry muttered.

“I’ll say,” Ron agreed.

She wiggled her way between Harry and Draco, and rolled over so that she was lying on her back. Turning her head to face Draco, she was perplexed to see him staring up the ceiling, his eyes unfocused and distant.

“Draco?” She reached up to run her hand along his jaw line.

His eyes came back into focus, as he turned to regard her. “Hmm?”

“What’s wrong?”

He shook his head. “Nothing,” he said leaning down for a kiss. He began kissing her softly, turning over completely to wrap his arms around her.

“Are you alright?” she asked when the kiss broke.

Draco shrugged. “I’m alright, I suppose,” he sighed.

She watched him for a few more moments before deciding it was best not to press him about it any further.

He leaned in to kiss her cheek. “Sorry…” he whispered.

“For what?”

“For slapping you…”

“I asked you to,” she said.

“I know, but, well, I still can’t believe you liked it,” he said.

“There’s a lot you don’t know about me, Draco,” she teased with smile.
“I see; well, we’re just going to have to work on that,” he said.

“Yes, we most certainly shall,” she said smiling up at him, feeling a sense of hope that something more could develop beyond the situation they were in right now.

Draco kissed her once more, and this time when the kiss broke, Hermione saw two pairs of eyes staring at them curiously.

“What?” she asked somewhat defensively, waiting for a snide remark.

“Nothing,” they both responded. Ron snuggled into Harry’s body, running his hand over Harry’s head affectionately.

She could feel Draco’s eyes on her, but when she turned to meet his gaze, he began speaking to Harry and Ron. “I was thinking, in the morning, we should discuss a few things before we get back to school.”

“Like what?” Harry asked.

“Like, how she should dress, how she should show respect to us… general rules of conduct for our submissive,” he said airily.

Hermione opened her mouth to protest.

“In a way that won’t reveal our agreement,” he finished quickly with a smirk.

“Good idea, I want you collared at all times,” Harry said.

“That’s not possible without making a spectacle of myself!” she protested.

“We’ll see,” he said. “Let’s get some sleep and get up early to talk about it.”

Hermione looked between them suspiciously. They both gave her sneaky smiles.

“Malfoy,” Ron said. “Is there any particular reason why you had Hermione take off the Concealment Charm, or are you more pervy than I thought?”

“Oh, yes… Nox,” Draco said, putting out the lights.

They lay in silence for several moments before Draco broke it. "So, Hermione, do you think Snape is sexy?" he asked, his voice booming in the dark silence.

Hermione didn’t answer immediately. "No, of course not… his nose is terribly large and his hair is terribly greasy," she replied loudly.

Ron and Harry sniggered.

"Shhh, he's probably watching us right now," Hermione said giggling.

"So what? it's not like he's wanking or something disgusting like that," Draco said mockingly.

“You know, at his age, he probably can't get it up anyway," Harry said.

They all laughed at that before growing quiet.

“Goodnight…” Draco said smugly.
“Goodnight,” Hermione, Harry, and Ron replied with smiles in their voices.

Snape glared at the back of his cabinet, unable to see them in the dark, still able to listen as they made fun of him.

*Those little shits.*

He made a mental note to himself that the next time he took points from Gryffindor, it would end in double digits.

“And perhaps a few hundred from Slytherin as well. Let Hufflepuff come out first this year; see if I care,” he murmured before taking a sip of his cognac.

It was fine, really; he had heard worse before… he smiled. If it took making fun of him to strengthen the bond, so be it. His smile dropped as he thought of the way Harry had swayed when he rose to his feet.

He wondered briefly how the destruction of the Dark Lord would affect Harry. Of course they had a connection, but he and Albus had already discussed this… it was merely an imprint, a leftover of the powerful magic that had seared its mark into Harry’s skin, nothing more.

Still he found himself trying to clear his head from thinking of other possibilities. Things he hadn’t allowed himself to consider, and the one thing he vowed he would never let happen.

His thoughts drifted to Peter. The Dark Lord had sent the rat to spy on him. Of course, he trusted no one.

But if Snape knew Peter, he knew he wasn’t confident enough to report what he had seen until he had more information. He’d spent enough time in the company of shady characters to guess Peter’s next move. And he knew that the rat would be concerned with his own survival first above the possibility of being rewarded for uncovering betrayal.

Snape thought of the messages he had sent out earlier that evening. One message insisted on a meeting tomorrow to discuss the prophecy and hand over the torch to someone in event that he met an early demise. The other message, carefully concealed on a piece of charmed parchment set to disintegrate after being read, was meant to avoid the possibility of death.

He sighed and took another sip, hoping that his letters to Remus and Lucius had reached their destinations without any interception.
A New Reality

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Part III: Her Dark’s Own Light

For even as love crowns you, so shall he crucify you.
Even as he is for your growth, so is he for your pruning….
He kneads you until you are pliant;
And then he assigns you to his sacred fire.

--Khalil Gibran

Back to life, back to reality
Back to the here and now.
Back to life, back to the present time
Back from a fantasy….

-“Back to Life” by Soul II Soul

Excuse me, were you saying something?
Nuh, uh, you can't tell me nothing,
(Ha ha) you can't tell me nothing,
Nuh, uh, you can't tell me nothing…

-“You Can’t Tell Me Nothing” by Kanye West

Lucius looked out the dark window of his study, basking in long-overdue solitude. So often now, he had to focus on keeping his mind blank, making his thoughts scatter like wind-blown leaves.

He blamed himself for his predicament. A madman was living in his home, controlling his life and that of his family because he had made a mistake. He had pledged loyalty to a cause that even he had to admit was compromised by the motives and execution of its maniacal leader.

His belief in pure-blood values and the protection of wizards from those who didn’t understand or regard magic as special had somehow been twisted and fed as bait to lure the naïve and zealous into a slavery contract.

Lucius had had time to think during his brief stint in Azkaban. After the prison break, Lucius had been forced to open up his home to play host.

Witnessing how broken and fragile Harry was after Sirius’s death in the Ministry revealed that the boy’s only true power lay in his strong circle of friends. Lucius had no doubt that if Dumbledore had
not arrived, Harry would have been killed. He wanted to believe that destroying the Dark Lord was really Harry’s purpose, but he also believed that Harry would surely die in pursuit of that purpose.

He felt trapped with few options, wanting nothing more than to be free again and for his family to be out of harm’s way.

The patter of rain against the windowsill brought him out of his habitual late-night mental scolding, and he looked intently out of the window…waiting.

Thankfully, Severus’ letter had arrived by way of a very clever owl that had been instructed to wait until Lucius was alone. The letter had disintegrated into thin air less than ten seconds after it was read. There were only two words written upon it, the only two words he needed to know.

_Pettigrew knows._

So the meddlesome rat was actually on to something. Lucius had warned Severus that trying to orchestrate a sexual prophecy within his own home was too risky, but the evidence that the old Headmaster was doing his own spying had persuaded him that it was the only course of action.

When Snape had finally persuaded him that the other prophecy had a real chance at working, demanding that he come and see for himself, the last of his dying hope for an escape from his hell had won over. He had accompanied Snape to his home and actually saw Draco lying there with all of them and had nearly lost his dinner. But if he hadn’t seen it for himself, he would have never believed it possible.

He had sent an elf to awaken Narcissa for tea, and in the meantime, he had to think through how to handle the rat.

It didn’t take long before the wards of the Manor alerted him of a visitor and he saw the familiar figure of the stumpy man coming down the long footpath. It was time to play on Peter’s insecurities and create enough doubt about the Dark Lord’s trust in Peter to prevent the man from disclosing what he knew.

He turned around, hearing soft footsteps approach.

“Lucius, darling, tea’s ready… although, I must say, it is quite late,” Narcissa said softly, poking her head through the door.

“No matter, Cissy, I can’t sleep… you don’t mind keeping me company, do you?”

It was a demand, not a request, but he was never crass when he gave orders, especially to her.

Narcissa understood immediately, and a small forced smile graced her delicate mouth. “Of course not, dear,” she said, turning towards the living room to wait for him.

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When Peter Apparated outside of the Manor’s gates, he was tired, wet, and cold, but very excited. The path leading up to the Manor entrance seemed miles away as he walked as fast as he could up the footpath. He had to seek out Lucius immediately to find out how much he knew about Draco’s assignment.

When he came in, he found the Manor deadly quiet apart from the crackling of the fire in the hearth, but there were shadows against the egg-white wall around the corner. He tiptoed cautiously to find
Lucius and Narcissa sitting across from each other having a nightcap in complete silence.

They seemed quite comfortable, almost as if they were having a non-verbal conversation. Surely, the Dark Lord’s presence at the Manor had changed how they communicated and interacted since he detested any show of affection or conversation that held promise of romance or love.

“Oh, hello, Lucius, you’re up so late,” he said, curiously eyeing the elder Malfoy closely, his eyes darting to Narcissa at length.

Lucius gave a brief sniff as if something malodorous had passed under his nose and then looked up at his wife, who had brushed her robes.

“Ah, Peter, where have you been? Out in the garbage looking for dinner? Or are you hiding from more adept predators?”

“Oh Lucius, always so amusing… I wonder, though, if you will still have jokes to tell once the Dark Lord discovers what your son has been up to.”

A puzzled expression crossed Lucius’ face as he glanced up at Narcissa, and then he chuckled in amusement.

“I must say, Peter, it’s a wonder you’ve managed to survive this long with your incredibly dull sense of reasoning. But, I’ll indulge you. What conclusions have you come to, based on your limited knowledge of Draco’s assignment?”

Peter gave Lucius a sly, knowing smile. “Wouldn’t you like to know? Don’t worry though, I’ll make sure to inform the Dark Lord right away; he will be very interested.”

Lucius’ eyebrows rose. “I’m quite sure he won’t, since he is the one who gave Draco the assignment at the outset.”

“Oh, I doubt the Dark Lord assigned him to be where he was when I last saw him.”

“Do you mean at Snape’s house, with the Mudblood, Potter, and the Weasley boy?”

Peter’s mouth dropped open, he was taken aback.

Lucius shook his head, taking another sip of his tea. “Really, Peter, surprising you is far too easy. I can see why the Dark Lord doesn’t trust you enough to discuss his plans. Surely you don’t think he is capable of being fooled by a sixteen-year-old boy?”

“But—”

“I certainly hope not. Actually, I rather think he would be offended by the suggestion. But if you feel compelled to inform him of what he already knows, who am I to stand in your way?”

Peter’s face tightened as the familiar shame of humiliation slapped him in the face. Once again, it was clear that Lucius was more favoured by the Dark Lord. Once again, Lucius had bested him. And what was most hurtful was that it was clear that the Dark Lord did not trust him enough to tell him anything. He suspected that his mission to spy on Snape had been for the Dark Lord’s amusement.

His eyes darted to Narcissa, who gave a small taunting smirk before sipping her tea again.

“Now, if you don’t mind, Narcissa and I are having tea, and… you smell of something most foul. When was the last time you bathed?”
Peter narrowed his eyes. “Where is the Dark Lord?” he asked suddenly, looking around.

Lucius looked back at him bemused. “If he doesn’t think you’re important enough to tell, why should I? Don’t trouble yourself over it; I’m sure he’ll call on you if he wants to something from you.”

Narcissa stifled a chuckle as she dabbed the corner of her mouth with a napkin and gave Peter a pitiful look before turning her eyes on her husband.

Peter clenched his fists tightly and forced himself to turn abruptly from them and stomp downstairs to the basement where his bed lay.

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At exactly 5:00am, only three hours after they had gone to bed, Hermione’s bag began jumping up and down, bouncing on the floor, and flinging itself at the bed repeatedly like Ron’s owl Pig.

“What the hell?!” Ron groaned, pulling his pillow over his face. Hermione rose promptly, and stretched.

“My alarm.” She yawned, sliding down and watching her bag in its spastic dance before leaning over to pick up her wand to end the alarm spell.

Harry grunted and rolled over; Draco stirred.

“We have to get up, straight away: everyone has to shower, dress, eat, and head off to school,” she said in an instructional tone.

Ron sat up suddenly. “Can someone explain to me again why we’re waking up so early when there are two trains? And come to think of it, we can’t even take the train… we’ll risk being seen by my parents when they bring Ginny to the train station,” he said with wide eyes.

“Then we have to beat the first train, so that people think we stayed over break, Ronald,” Hermione reminded him.

Draco rolled over. “Right, we’re not taking the train, Weasley, we’ll use Snape’s Floo; it’s connected to his quarters at school.”

Harry rolled over to face Draco. “When did we decide to do this?”

“Do you have a better idea? I know you how fond you are of making a grand entrance, but really, the Floo is the best way,” Draco said airily.

Harry continued to stare at him. “You seem to know an awfully lot about this place. How many times have you been here?”

“I don’t know… what difference does it make?” Draco replied as he yawned and stretched. “Who wants to shower first?” he changed the subject.

“I do,” Hermione said.

“You do, what?” Draco asked in irritation.

She huffed. “I want to shower, Draco... honestly, I’m not going to be calling you ‘Draco’, or Harry ‘Master’, or Ron ‘Sir’ once we get back, so give it a rest already.”
“And why not?” Harry asked, sitting up.

Hermione gave Harry a scowl as she slid down to grab her bag.

“Oh, and leave your collar,” Draco said, holding out his hand.

Hermione gave him a tight smile. “Gladly,” she said, unbuckling it and pulling it off. “Here you go…Draco.”

She turned on her heel without another word, disappearing into the bathroom and slamming the door.

“What’s her problem?” Draco asked.

Harry shrugged. “I suppose she’s not turned on right now.”

“Yeah, and she can be rather cheeky when she’s not turned on,” Ron said with a small smile. “You know, I think it’s going to be hard for her following ‘the rules’. I will bet she doesn’t last the week.”

“I’ll wager she does; she just needs the proper guidance,” Draco insisted.

Ron scoffed. “Alright, you’re on, Malfoy. What are the stakes?”

Draco considered Ron’s proposition for a moment. “Alright, Weasley, if she lasts the week, you owe me the best blow job you’ve ever given to completion.”

“We’re making a bet, and you can have anything you want, and you choose that? I must have left quite an impression,” Ron smirked.

Draco rolled his eyes. “No, I just think you can do a lot better; you’ve had enough practice with Harry,” he said snidely.

Ron narrowed his eyes. “And if I win?”

Draco shrugged.

“Then you’ll have to suck my cock, Malfoy,” Ron said.

“Fine, but when I say she can last, we have to allow for some misbehaviour, she’s not a robot.”

“Alright, then, not lasting the week means outright refusing to obey an order, or giving up and putting an end to this game.”

“It’s not a game, Weasley,” Draco said wearily.

“Whatever, when she says that, you lose. And it’s going to happen before Friday,” Ron said.

“We’ll see,” Draco said, extending his hand. Ron gave him a firm handshake.

Harry shook his head. “I’m staying out of this one,” he said rising, grabbing his bag, heading for the next bedroom.

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After they had all showered and dressed, packing and securing their bags, Draco cleared his throat.

“What?” Harry asked
“We should have… let’s call them reminders of your place,” Draco said.

Hermione narrowed her eyes. “Excuse me?”

“It’s very common for a submissive to dress in a manner that pleases their owner,” Draco said with a saucy smile.

“I’ve never heard of such a thing!” Hermione was indignant.

“Two days ago, you probably had never heard of nipple clamps either,” he retorted.

“He’s got a point,” Harry said with a smirk.

Hermione huffed. “I should remind you, you’re not to humiliate me or reveal the terms of our agreement, so whatever it is you require of me can’t be obvious to anyone else.”

“That’s fine; what I want you to wear goes underneath your robes,” Draco suggested looking her over.

“Wha—?”

“We’ll need access to your body, at all times,” he continued.

Hermione’s breathing became heavy as she tried to look back at him impassively and not seem affected. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that if I see fit, I want to be able to bend you over and shag you senseless wherever we are. I should be able to lift your robes and do that without fussing with a lot of clothing.”

“And how do you suggest going about that?” she asked in bewilderment.

“No knickers…” Draco said quickly.

“Never?”

“Never….”

“And what about my period?”

“Well, when’s that come on?” Draco asked, looking ill at the thought.

“10th of the month,” Harry and Ron replied quickly.

Draco made a face. “Fine, you can wear knickers during your period.”

“Well, the contraception charm I use restricts the flow to three days,” she informed him.

He sniggered. “Your mouth is going to be sore after those three days.”

“Oh goody,” she said, smiling.

“You’re a monster,” Draco said in mock horror.

“Your fault,” she teased.

“So, no knickers and green thigh highs and garters,” he said.
“Green?” Harry and Ron both said in disdain.

“Malfoy, come on, how’s that going to look?” Ron asked.

“It’s going to look fantastic when her legs are spread for me, Weasley.”

Ron gave him a disapproving glare before turning his attention to Hermione. “How about you wear your House colours… a red garter belt and thigh highs with yellow garters.”

Harry smiled. “I like the sound of that.”

“No! She’s my submissive as well and Slytherin colours should be represented,” Draco insisted.

Harry huffed. “Fine, how about she wears red, gold, and green.”

“That’s horrible!” Hermione said in repulsion.

“Yeah, that sounds like one of my mum’s sweaters,” Ron said, shuddering.

“Do you have a better suggestion?” Harry asked.

Hermione began to strip. The boys stood and watched as she peeled off her clothes until she was only wearing her undergarments. She waved her wand over the full length of her body, casting a Transfiguration Spell. The boys mouths dropped open at the sight of her clad in black thigh highs, black garters, and a black plaid garter belt with red, green, silver and gold interwoven into the fabric; there were matching plaid bows at the tops of her thigh highs and a matching bra.

“Nice.” Draco smiled approvingly.

“Very nice,” Harry said as Ron adjusted his trousers to hide his erection.

She smiled and then looked down at herself. “But I can’t wear this every day! I need more than one.”

“Are you a witch or not?” Draco asked, with a smirk.

Hermione rolled her eyes.

“What’s that?”

“Yes, Draco, I will make duplicates.”

“Good.”

“And you have to keep your collar on at all times,” Harry reminded her.

“Where is it?” Ron asked looking at Draco.

“Right here,” Draco said, pulling it out of his pocket.

Instead of a thick black leather collar with a silver hook in the front, he dangled a white gold chain necklace with a white gold lock in front of her. The lock had a raised heart over it with an infinity symbol wrapped around it.

“What’s this?” she reached up to study it.

“Your collar,” Draco replied as he moved behind her to put it on her. Ron and Harry leaned in close to have a look as Hermione held it up to stare at it.
“This symbol, it’s—”

“It’s the polyamorous symbol,” Draco finished.

Ron raised his eyebrows, to which Draco responded with annoyance. “Polyamorous, Weasley, it means—”

“Relationships involving more than two people… you’re not the only one who knows big words, Malfoy, so shut your trap,” Ron snapped.

Draco gave him a small impressed smile, turning his attention back to Hermione.

“Thank you,” Hermione said with a smile, looking up at him.

“You’re welcome.” He smiled back.

“Is that a real lock?” Ron asked.

“Yeah,” Draco said.

“Well, who has the key?” Ron asked.

“I do,” Draco said smugly.

Harry and Ron gave him an once-over and glared.

Draco shrugged. “It’s more symbolic than anything. There’s no reason to even use it.”

Harry and Ron waited in silent demand.

Draco sighed. “Fine, I’ll make a copy for you later.”

“Right now,” Harry demanded.

“Alright, but it is steel; it’s only plated in white gold, so it’s not easy to duplicate.”

“Give it a go anyway,” Harry insisted.

Draco pursed his lips, pulling the key from his pocket, taking several minutes until he finally managed to duplicate the key perfectly. He handed it to Harry.

Ron folded his arms. “One more…” Ron said.

“Taking this seriously now, are you?”

“Just make me a copy, Malfoy,” Ron demanded.

“Fine,” Draco said, turning around to make another copy for him.

“Anything else you care to discuss?” Hermione asked.

“Not right now,” Draco said, turning towards the glass case.

“What are you doing?”

“Taking a few souvenirs,” he said with a sly smile.
“That’s stealing!” Hermione said in protest.

“Relax, Hermione, think of it more as borrowing a few things to help us work on the bond,” Draco said with a wink. Harry smiled and moved closer, considering the contents.

Draco pulled the cat-o’-nine tails and threw it down on the floor and then put the nipple clamps in his pocket.

“Want anything?” he asked as he bent down to pick up Hermione’s leash to fold it up and place it in his robes.

“The flogger,” Harry said, holding his hand out. Draco handed it to him.

“What’s that thing in the corner?”

“The ball gag? We didn’t get to use this,” Draco said, looking at Ron curiously.

Ron nodded. “I’ll take that, and… that,” he said pointing at the cock ring.

“I thought you hated the cock ring?” Draco said sceptically.

“It’s not for me,” Ron said with a dark gleam in his eye as he stared back at Draco.

Draco snorted. “Good luck; you’ll never get a chance at that.”

“We’ll see,” Ron said.

“What about paddle you used last night?” Hermione asked softly.

Draco smiled, turning around to retrieve it.

“Don’t you think he’ll notice all of his toys missing?” she asked, as she started getting dressed once more.

“Right, we should leave a note,” Harry said with a mischievous grin, pulling out a quill and parchment from his bag.

_Hope you don’t mind, but we borrowed a few things that may help us defeat Voldemort._

The others read the note and sniggered. Harry placed camouflage on the words so that the parchment appeared blank and then placed it inside the case, closing it.

“Well, that’s it, back to school,” Harry said resolutely.

They all stood staring at each other in silence for a few moments before picking up their bags and heading upstairs to stand by Snape’s hearth.

“Draco,” Harry said. “Don’t forget about your coin. If your housemates, or anyone else gives you any trouble—”

Draco shook his head. “They won’t, trust me.”

They all looked at him sceptically.
“I guess we’ll see you around,” Ron said, giving him a small smile.

Draco nodded his head sombrely.

And then one by one, Ron, Harry, and finally Hermione stepped into the Floo, arriving in Snape’s private quarters at Hogwarts.

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Once the Trio had all come out on the other side into Snape’s private quarters, they stood in silence for a few moments.

“I thought I’d be glad to be back, but it’s not going to be the same, is it?” Ron said.

“It won’t be so bad,” Harry said. “Besides, we can keep busy by prepping for classes tomorrow, and going over Quidditch plays for our first practice.”

Ron shook his head. “Now I really don’t want to be here,” he said as Harry clapped a hand on his back and walked out with him.

When they reached the common room, they noticed only a few people there who probably had stayed over the break; the Hogwarts Express had not arrived.

It was deadly quiet; the fire was the loudest sound in the room, as the last of it crackled down to a soft smoulder. Outside the wind was howling, and they sat around and listened as the rain began to pour more rapidly, pounding against the window. And although it was nearly 7am, the sky appeared as dark as night, limiting visibility of the school grounds.

Something at the window caught Hermione’s eye, and she rose from the couch to stop and stare out of the window. A dark shadowy figure with a paper-white face with a mask of sorrow appeared, the eyes sad and drawn down, and its mouth turned into an exaggerated frown. A low mournful song emanated from the creature, and Hermione could hear it clearly, as if it were in the room. She didn’t even realise she was screaming until Harry and Ron appeared at her side.

Despite Ron’s hand on her back and Harry’s on her shoulder, Hermione’s eyes remained locked on the window.

“What is it? Are you alright?” Ron asked in concern.

She let out a long breath. “I just saw…” She finally tore her eyes away from the window and stared up at Harry. “A Banshee. I just saw a Banshee.”

“Blimey, that’s creepy… I thought Hagrid said they were rare in these parts,” Ron whispered, looking out the window.

“It’s true, they are,” Hermione said.

“That’s the second one to appear this year, it must mean something,” Harry said.

They all stared back at the window in silence until the sound of a crowd of voices teetering with excitement grew louder. The footsteps of their classmates approached, and the portrait of the Fat Lady opened, admitting Gryffindors of all years. Many of them looked at the Trio in surprise and speculation.

Hermione smiled when she saw Ginny and Parvati approaching her.
“Hermione!!” Ginny beamed, practically running to her with her arms open.

“Ginny! Parvati!” Hermione said, hugging them both.

“How was your break?”

“Absolutely boring,” Parvati said, shaking her head. “It’s good to be back.”

“It was fun, a bit less so with you three gone,” Ginny said, looking back at Harry and Ron over near the fire talking to Neville and Dean. Seamus was noticeably not involved in that conversation.

“Well, what happened? Why were you three not there? And why weren’t you on the train?” Parvati asked.

“Independent study…” Hermione said quickly.

“With Snape,” Ginny added with a grimace on her face.

“Oh, gods, during break? That sounds more like punishment than extra credit,” Parvati said.

“It wasn’t so bad,” Hermione said. “We actually got a lot done, and we got to spend some time together.” She wiggled her eyebrows.

Ginny blushed and shook her head, while Parvati’s eyes widened as she clasped Hermione’s hands. “I do hope you plan on telling us more.”

“I’ll only discuss Potions, Parvati, so don’t even ask.”

Parvati pouted.

“Mum and Dad are really happy you’re starting to rub off on Ron,” Ginny said, changing the subject. Hermione smiled.

“Hermione, you’re absolutely glowing,” Parvati said suggestively.

“Thanks, but I’m actually very tired,” Hermione said.

“Well, there’s no time to rest, really; this term is going to be an absolute nightmare with N.E.W.T.s coming up,” Parvati said. “What do you think you’ll do yours in?”

“As many as possible, but I’m especially looking forward to doing Ancient Runes, Charms, Transfiguration, and Defence Against the Dark Arts.”

Ginny and Parvati looked back at her in surprise.

“I’ve developed a certain appreciation for it this year,” Hermione said thoughtfully.

“Well, they’ll be serving breakfast soon, we should go down,” Ginny said.

Parvati and Hermione both nodded. Hermione glanced back over at Harry and Ron, Ginny followed her gaze.

“Would you like to wait for them?” Ginny asked a little stiffly.

Hermione shook her head. “That’s alright, I want to hear all about the rest of your break,” she said, which made Ginny smile as they headed down to the Great Hall for breakfast.
Breakfast was scattered, with people chatting or rushing through their meal after coming down late from catching up with friends.

Hermione looked across at the Slytherin table and noted that Draco was absent while Pansy, Nott, Crabbe, and Goyle were there chatting it up.

Pansy glanced in her direction, giving Hermione a pointed glare and fake smile before returning to converse with Nott, who looked on with mild interest as Goyle continued to talk. Blaise was absent, but then so were several other students, who probably decided to take the afternoon Hogwarts Express.

Harry and Ron came down late, and barely had time to eat before Hermione was running off a list of things they needed to brush up on in order to be prepared for classes the next day.

“Do you remember our agreement or are you giving up on being owned?” Ron asked eagerly.

“Would you have her any other way? Besides, she can be as bossy as she likes right now, she’ll only pay for more later,” Harry said with a satisfied smile.

Hermione’s jaw set. “I’m not being disrespectful, I’m just pointing out that you two were late for breakfast and it’s important to start off the semester properly. This isn’t a free day, you should use it wisely so you won’t fall behind,” she said looking pointedly at Ron.

“Yes, Mistress,” Harry said mockingly.

Hermione pursed her lips and began to walk off.

“You forgot something,” Ron said.

She turned around slowly, looking around to see if anyone was watching them. “What, Ron?”

“Ron, is it?” he said with one eyebrow raised.

Hermione looked around to see if anyone was watching. “Sir?”

He smiled and pointed to a spot on his cheek.

She gave him a small smile, walking back over and reaching up to kiss him on the cheek.

“And one for you too, Master,” she said, giving Harry a kiss as well.

“See, this isn’t so bad, is it?”

She narrowed her eyes. “No… but why do I suspect I’m being set up?”

“I have no idea,” Harry said, looking innocent, as he slid his hand down to squeeze her arse obscenely. She gasped and pulled back, looking between the two of them suspiciously before turning around to head to library.

Once the last of the four was gone, Snape immediately went to Grimmauld Place, where he didn’t even have to knock, because Remus opened the door as soon as he appeared on the doorstep.
“Snape, what is this you wanted to talk to me about a prophecy?”

Snape moved past him into the foyer, making his way quick to the kitchen where he took a seat. Remus followed him and stood, waiting for him to speak.

“Are you going to have a seat?” Snape asked.

Remus looked at him guardedly before pulling out a chair and slowly sitting down.

“I have something to show you, you will find this very interesting,” Snape said, pulling a scroll from his robe pocket and sliding it over the tabletop towards to Remus. "I wasn't sure if you'd have opposable thumbs when I stopped by, so I took the liberty of transcribing this for you," he said snidely.

Remus sneered. "The only way I wouldn’t have opposable thumbs, is if you'd botched the Wolfsbane, Snape. Don’t tell me your potions expertise is slipping on account of your mind going dull?"

Snape sat up. "Unlike your mind, mine is never dull, but keep it up and you might wake to discover that your next batch of Wolfsbane was actually a Sleeping Draught."

"Keep making threats like that, Snape, and one of these days, when you come to visit, I just might forget to take it."

"Just read the damned scroll already,” Snape said, pursing his lips.

Remus took the scroll slowly into his hands, unfurling it and read it slowly. Snape watched as his eyes began to widen and his fingers became tight around the scroll’s edges. He began to shake his head in disbelief.

"Is this what I think it is?” he whispered hoarsely.

“Depends, what do you think it is? Does it remind you of anything?” Snape asked, watching Remus closely.

Remus looked down at the scroll once more, re-reading it; looking up at Snape slowly, his eyes pierced and questioned. He shook his head, swallowed. “No, that can’t be true; there was nobody from the other house.”

Snape stared back at him, arching an eyebrow suggestively.

“No way! You have to be kidding me,” Remus whispered in disbelief. “You mean, we could have destroyed him? The way Lily’s protection over Harry almost did?”

Snape nodded.

Remus shook his head once more in disbelief, placing the parchment down on the table and sitting upright; he stared past Snape, at the wall.

"So why are you bringing this up now?” Remus asked, suddenly anxious.

"Because, Lupin, we are trying again,” Snape said. "The next generation you could say…”

Remus’ brow furrowed. “What do you mean? Next genera— you don’t mean…” Remus said with wide eyes.
“Think about it, Remus, it’s a perfect match,” Snape stated matter-of-factly.

“And who by chance is the Slytherin?” Remus asked sternly.

“Draco Malfoy.”

Remus’ eyes hardened. “No. First of all, it’s sick. The idea that you would suggest Harry, Hermione, and Ron get together in that way…”

“They’re already together, in that way,” Snape said with a satisfied smirk as he watched Remus’ shock wash over him.

Remus clasped his hand to his mouth in shock. “When did this happen?”

“As far as I know, last summer,” Snape guessed.

“I never saw any evidence of it!” Remus insisted.

“I’m sure Po-Harry is worried about your reaction, well… he used to be,” Snape said, averting his gaze.

“What do you mean?” Remus demanded.

“He may have discovered the truth of your relationship with Lily, James, and Sirius,” Snape confessed.

“WHAT?” Remus roared. “How? What the bloody hell did you tell him?”

Snape took a deep breath. He hated admitting being tricked. “Under Veritaserum, which was slipped into my food, I was forced to reveal the nature of your relationship.”

“Oh, no,” Remus groaned, closing his eyes. “He’s probably angry as hell.”

“You could say that,” Snape said, finding relief that Harry would be venting on Remus as well.

“How could you let that slip? What were they doing at your place? Oh, god, you didn’t,” Remus said in disbelief as the realisation of what Snape had done dawned on him.

“Read the prophecy again. I did. And now I need your help,” Snape said resolutely.

Remus shook his head, as if trying to wish it away. “This is insane; they’re not even adults!”

“Neither were you,” Snape replied. “I have no time for you to lament about the loss of imagined innocence; I have a problem.”

“There’s more?” Remus asked in exasperation.

“Yes. Despite my security wards, Pettigrew managed to come close enough to it without tripping any of them. Draco saw him spying by the side of my home. He knows they were there, and I wonder just how much he knows.”

Remus gave Snape a sad smile. “Peter doesn’t know anything about us. We made sure to keep him in the dark about it all.”

“Oh? Just like you thought you were alone that night in the Forbidden Forest? I was there, remember?”
“Well, I’m very certain that Peter wasn’t!” Remus said firmly.

“How can you be sure that Pettigrew never saw you four together? He’s a rat; he could have been easily missed.” Remus opened his mouth to reply, but Snape put his hand up to silence him. “Whether or not he saw you, you really can’t be certain what he knows, but we do know that he has enough information to ignite the Dark Lord’s wrath upon Draco for participating in the prophecy. And now that Draco is tied to others, they all are in considerably more danger than ever. Need I say more?”

“What if Peter has already informed Voldemort?”

“He could still be a problem: the Dark Lord is unpredictable, he could decide to use him, send Pettigrew to do his dirty work. It wouldn’t be the first time. Pettigrew has shown a certain… shall we say aptitude for getting about under the radar, probably because of his Animagus form.”

Remus sat considering Snape’s words, finally exhaling in resignation. “What would you have me do?”

"Follow your nose. All those acute animal senses must be of some use," Snape said with a small sneer.

Remus nodded slowly, staring absently ahead before casting his eyes upon Snape once more. “Don’t you have a job to be at or something?” he asked, rising from his chair and stuffing his hands into his pockets, signalling that Snape should leave.

Snape sighed. “For now.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Remus asked in puzzlement.

“Nothing. You’re right, I really should be going. Find the rat, Remus, and once you do, keep him in your sights.” And without another word, he strode out of Grimmauld, leaving Remus with little option but to find Peter as quickly as possible.

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By dinnertime, all of the students had arrived, and the Great Hall was abuzz with everyone catching up with one another and discussing upcoming events.

When Hermione entered the Great Hall with Harry and Ron flanking her, many eyes turned to gawk at them. Some of the girls were eyeing them with disapproval while, many of the boys stared with a great deal of interest.

“Here we go again,” Ron muttered, lowering his eyes, his face flushed.

“Right, this is going to be loads of fun,” Harry said sarcastically.

As they approached the table, Lavender let out a loud haughty laugh while her friends giggled. “Oh, look, they came together, how cute,” she mocked.

“Just ignore her, Hermione,” Ron said loudly. Lavender shook her head as if she were disappointed in Ron and then turned back to talk to her friends.

Hermione rolled her eyes and took at seat.

Ron and Harry both looked down at their seats as if trying to decide how they wanted to position
themselves in relation to her.

“Oh, stop it you two… Ron, sit down across from me like you always do, and Harry you sit here,” she said, patting the seat beside her.

“Hermione, people are staring; keep your voice down,” Ron said in a fierce whisper as he took his seat.

“I will not! I’m tired of worrying about what other people think,” she said, holding her chin up, and glancing across at the Slytherin table, where Draco was watching her impassively, the shadow an approving smirk on his face.

“Can we at least act normal? We don’t want to give them any more to talk about; the next thing you know, it’ll be in the Prophet,” Ron said anxiously.

Hermione huffed. “What do you mean act normal? There’s nothing wrong with the three of us being in a relationship! We love each other, and to hell with anyone who has a problem with it.”

“Hermione!” Ron whispered furiously.

“Ron, I’m tired of being ashamed! We’re together and the whole bloody school knows it,” she repeated loudly so everyone could hear. “It’s perfectly legal in Britain, and if anyone has something to say about it, they can bloody well say something to our faces. Either way, I don’t care what they think about it!”

The entire Great Hall was silent as everyone stared back at the Trio in shock at what Hermione had just said.

Ron swallowed, and Harry nodded numbly. “Sure, Hermione, whatever you say. Er, Ron, can you pass the butter?” he said softly, keeping his eyes focused on Ron, who was looking wide-eyed at all the curious eyes on them.

“Ron?” Harry repeated.

Ron turned his eyes to Harry and nodded slowly, picking up the butter and passing it to Harry.

Hermione sighed and glanced around at those who were staring at her. She leaned in and gave Ron a brief kiss on the lips and then Harry a kiss on the cheek, to a spattering of gasps, huffs of disapproval, whistles, and claps.

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Across the aisle at the Slytherin table, Draco was having an inner war with himself. He found himself secretly applauding Hermione’s public declaration but at the same time, he couldn’t deny a pang of jealousy as he watched her declare her affections for them exclusively as if he didn’t matter.

Next to him, Pansy clicked her teeth in disapproval at the scene that had just unfolded.

“Granger sure is living up to her reputation,” she said, looking at Blaise and Nott.

Draco wanted nothing more than to hex her at the moment, and an absolutely nasty remark about her reputation lay in wait on the tip of tongue. He looked up to see Blaise considering Hermione and the Trio and then glancing in Draco’s direction before taking a sip of his drink, gave no response to Pansy’s remark. Nott wore a look of disgust on his face. “Typical,” he said as he continued eating.

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“It’s scandalous! If she wasn’t a Mudblood, I’d be embarrassed for her, flaunting her nasty little relationship in front of everyone. No respectable wizard will want her after those two are finished with her.”

Draco couldn’t hold his tongue any longer; it would be better than smacking the chit upside the head. “Are you speaking from experience, Pansy?” he asked casually, not bothering to look up at her.

Pansy smiled at Draco. “Oh, he speaks… finally. And how was your break, Draco?”

Showtime. He forced all thoughts of the Trio out of his mind and kept his face impassive. They all looked up at him curiously.

“It was alright,” he responded, taking a sip of juice.

“Didn’t sound too fun to me. Father said you had to tend to your duties. Nice cover, that… independent study,” Goyle sniggered.

And although he wanted to smack Goyle’s very fat face, Draco managed a small smile. “Yeah, well, whatever works,” he said, continuing his meal.

“Right,” Crabbe said. “But you must have been going mad hanging around Potter, Weasley, and the Mudblood for your break.”

Pansy narrowed her eyes. “So it is true: you were forced to be friendly to them?”

Fear momentarily gripped Draco as he thought about his mother and father once more and the consequences of it getting out that he had an assignment from the Dark Lord to befriend the Trio. If the Trio found out, the proverbial shit would hit the fan, and he wouldn’t have to worry about Peter any longer. Everything would be compromised, and his family and the Trio would surely suffer.

He looked up at Crabbe and Goyle in exasperation and anger.

They both glanced nervously at each other. “Sorry, Draco… it sort of slipped. Besides, Pansy is as good as one of us. You can trust her,” Crabbe said reassuringly.

“That’s right, Draco; you can trust me,” she purred.

He had no doubt that he could not. Pansy’s submissive doormat act belied her capabilities to be cunning and manipulative. He had no doubt that she would do anything to get what she wanted, and when using her body wouldn’t work, he was almost afraid to think of what she would try.

He turned his eyes on her, giving her a cold, hard stare, communicating that he had no intentions of trusting her.

Still, she smiled. “Look love, I’m sorry about before, but you can understand why I was upset - I thought you were being mean to me. I didn’t know it was a part of your mission. What a burden you have,” she said with a pout, putting her hand on his thigh.

Draco felt his body go rigid at her touch and glanced over to the Trio to see if they were watching. Hermione looked like she was in deep conversation with Harry and Ron. Again, another wave of jealousy washed over him and then revulsion as he realised Pansy’s hand was still on his thigh.

“Blaise, your girlfriend has a problem keeping her hands to herself,” he said, pushing her hand off of his leg.
She’s not my girlfriend,” Blaise said in a bored tone.

“I think I’d rather do hard time than suffer through that,” Goyle said, looking back at the Trio.

“You have no idea,” Draco said, thinking fondly of their last night together. If only they could stay at Snape’s, safe, tucked away forever. He shook his head as if disgusted by his mission.

“So…” Goyle started.

“What?” Draco asked curtly, bracing himself for one of the many questions he had anticipated them asking him.

“What is it you’re supposed to be finding out? Did you learn anything?” Goyle whispered.

Draco shrugged. “I’m learning a lot, actually,” he said casually.

“I can’t wait to see you take them down,” Goyle said with a nasty grin.

Draco fought himself from narrowing his eyes at him. It was hard to believe he was like this only a few months ago. Was he ever this awful? Of course, only a few years ago he had expressed that he hoped Hermione was the first to die when the Chamber of Secrets had been opened.

He suddenly felt sick and didn’t want to eat anymore.

“We’ll have front row seats. What is it that you’re supposed to find out anyway?” Crabbe asked.

This he could nip in the bud. “I can’t talk about it,” Draco replied.

“Not even a hint?” Crabbe asked.

“No, Crabbe, and if you ask again, I’ll have to consider it interfering,” Draco warned, enjoying the fear springing up on the other boy’s face.

“Well, even if you can’t talk about it… you can tell us other things, like if they have ménages à trois,” Goyle pressed.

Draco tried not to laugh at Goyle’s immature fascination with the Trio’s sex life. “It’s not like they’re going to shag in front of me,” he replied with his best imitation of irritation.

Goyle shrugged. “I wouldn’t put anything past them now. Perhaps you can even get a little action,” he said, which made Crabbe grin nastily.

“Ewww! Draco, you wouldn’t dare would you?” Pansy asked in horror.

Oh yes, I would, I have, and I will again.

If only he could tell her that and see her pug face crack.

“Well, she may be a Mudblood but she has nice tits,” Crabbe commented, licking his lips.

He wanted nothing more than to pull his wand and hex Crabbe into the next century. No one called Hermione a Mudblood, but him… and her tits were his. He felt his face go tight, allowing himself a small scowl, although for different reasons than Crabbe knew. “Careful, Crabbe, I’m the one on assignment, you’re not. If I didn’t know better, I’d say you have a crush on her.”

Goyle, Nott, Blaise, and Pansy all looked at Crabbe, whose face had turned red as he shook it
furiously in denial. “No way. I would never touch the likes of her.”

Draco smirked and continued eating.

Pansy was about to say something when a loud clanging noise sounded above the chatter.

They all looked up as Dumbledore stood before the lectern, his voice ringing out.

“Welcome back, everyone; I trust you are all settled in and ready for classes tomorrow. We look forward to an exciting new term. I have a few opening announcements before pudding is served. First, because of the recent string of attacks by Death Eaters, we must limit excursions to Hogsmeade this year from monthly to once this term.”

There was a collective groan throughout the Great Hall.

“One visit? That’s rotten!” McCormick yelled with a frown.

Draco inwardly groaned. He was looking forward to the time used for Hogsmeade visits for catching up with the Trio. He glanced over at their table and saw them looking disappointed as well. Harry and Hermione both gave him quick disappointed smiles.

“Yes, I know; it is most unfortunate, but these are troubled times. Secondly, I must also remind you that the left corridor beside the library has been closed off to students. The penalty for using any closed-off corridors will be severe,” he said, his eyes seemed to rest on the Slytherin table momentarily before he continued. “And finally, you may have heard that there have been Banshees sighted on the grounds.”

There was a low collective murmur and whispers as people looked about nervously.

“It is true: a few Banshees have managed to find their way into this region. While they are often considered omens of pending doom or death, I can assure you that they are harmless and that Hagrid, along with the rest of our staff are cooperating with the Ministry to make sure they are redirected back to their usual territory,” Dumbledore said.

Draco couldn’t help but glance up at the Gryffindor table, his eyes resting on Ron’s back as he thought of his father and mother.

Pending death, what if they were already dead?

He began to grit his teeth. Ron seemed to sense Draco’s eyes on his back and turned in his seat to look back him. He gave Draco a brief reassuring smile. Draco felt somewhere between laughing and crying, remembering Ron’s pledge to protect him, before returning his eyes back to the front of the Hall.

It was hard to listen to anyone because the thoughts running through his head were deafening. He wondered where Peter was and if he had already disclosed what he knew. Surely, he would be pulled out of school if the Dark Lord suspected treachery, he would be summoned home. There would be an owl.

Something.

His stomach lurched again as he thought of his family and feigned attention.
Hermione went straight to the library after dinner. This time when she approached Madam Pince’s desk, she was waved off before she could pull out the fake note to gain access to the Restricted Section.

Being the school’s most notorious bookworm did have its perks, she thought, as she went straight to the section where she found the sexual practices book she had found before.

She pulled it out and combed through it when she heard footsteps approaching. She looked up to see Draco stopped in the middle of the aisle, staring at her as if he wasn’t sure if he should keep walking or speak.

She wasn’t sure either. So, instead, she decided to give him a small smile and return to the page she had been reading. If he wanted to talk, he would have to come to her; she wasn’t going to drop what she was doing and kneel before him. This wasn’t Snape’s house.

Relief washed over her as she heard him approaching, and then when he stopped just inches from her, she felt herself tense once more.

Was he going to try to dominate her, here in the library? How would she respond if he did?

“Hi,” Draco said, staring at her.

“Hi,” Hermione said hesitantly. “I thought you had Quidditch practice on Mondays?”

“It’s raining and very cold; no one seems to want to practice that badly, especially with Banshees flying about,” he said in an odd tone, which made him sound uncharacteristically nervous.

“Right,” she said, returning to her book.

“What are you doing here?” Draco asked.

“I’m always here,” Hermione said with a puzzled smile.

“I meant in the Restricted Section,” Draco said.

“Right, Pince didn’t give me a second glance,” she said. “And you?”

“I have a permanent pass from Snape,” he said.

“Nice.”

They continued to stare at each other for a few more moments. She could tell that he was being tentative, and that she wasn’t the only one who was unsure about how to act in their current setting. Draco seemed to be thinking of what to say next when he pointed to her book. “What’s this?” he asked.

Hermione was relieved; he was trying to have a normal conversation, and discussing her research about the ritual was easy conversation. “Oh, yes, well, I’m researching,” she explained.

“Yeah? Did you find anything?” Draco asked, not bothering to mask his excitement.

“Well… just this book,” she said with a knowing smile.

“Is that the freaky sex book?” he asked with a bemused grin.
“Yes,” she said, smiling, trying not to think of where the conversation could lead. “And it does mention sexual rituals.”

“Oh? And is there anything in there about the prophecy?” he asked.

She shook her head. “There’s no mention of it, but it does says that sexual rituals are commonly used in black magic.”

“Black magic…” Draco repeated, nodding.

“Yes, dark magic,” Hermione was concerned about that point.

“Well, we knew it was dark magic when we agreed to do it,” Draco said.

“Yes, I suppose we did,” she agreed hesitantly. “I also found a reference to an Almanac of black magic sexual rituals, so that’s another lead to check out.”

“Really? That’s brilliant…” he said, looking relieved.

She wished she felt the same but she was frustrated. “I don’t know…I’ve searched the entire library, but it’s not here,” she said wearily.

“Well, we can always look for it in Knockturn,” he said, at length.

Hermione shook her head. “Nothing good comes out of Knockturn.”

Draco scoffed. “I’m sure many would say the same of black magic.”

That made sense, and she found herself sighing in agreement. “I suppose you’re right.”

He smiled. “I know it’s hard for you to wrap your Gryffindor head around this, Hermione, but nothing is black and white… never has been. We may find what we need in some place that specialises in dark magic.”

She loved it when he showed himself to be intelligent without demeaning her. He really was at his best like that. Confident, not arrogant. He seemed more handsome than ever then.

She nodded slowly, staring up at him, unsure of what to say next. He seemed to be stuck also and so they stood there, letting the weight of the silence hang between them for several moments. And then she couldn’t help herself; she began to fidget, looking around.

“Well, I better get back,” she said, starting to head out; if he wanted more he would have to initiate.

“Not so fast,” Draco said, putting his arms up on either side of her head, blocking her in. She savoured it and feared it all at once. She looked to her left and right to make sure no one would see them. He was being reckless right now.

“Draco,” she said anxiously.

“What? Nothing’s changed just because we’re back in school,” he said.

She bit her lip with an uneasy expression.

“Or maybe it has. I suppose you think that nothing we did matters until we find the ritual?” he asked bitterly.
She shook her head. “I didn’t say that. Of course what we did matters… but, well, we’re in the library, and in case you didn’t notice, I’m the centre of gossip right now,” she whispered.

He smirked. “It’s hard to pity you; this time, it really is your fault.”

Hermione smirked back. “Well, if they’re going to talk about me, I might as well have a bit of fun with it.”

He pressed his body against her; his body felt so good against hers, and she gasped. “Exactly, pet,” he breathed against her neck before kissing it.

Hermione felt her knicker-less pussy grow wet and her nipples harden. “Draco, you can’t do this, no one knows... about us... Harry and Ron are my boyfriends, you’re not,” she said.

Draco drew back with his eyebrow raised. “I’m not?”

Hermione opened her mouth and then closed it, not sure what to say.

“What’s that?” he demanded.

“Well... I-I don’t know... are you?” she asked in confusion.

“Does this not say that you’re mine as well?” he asked, placing his hand against her mound. Hermione whimpered, and unconsciously pushed herself against his palm.

“And don’t I hold a key to your collar?” he asked, sliding his hand from her mound up her stomach, between her breasts to run his fingers along her necklace.

“Yes,” she half-whispered, half-moaned.

“Well then, if that doesn’t make me your boyfriend, I’m not sure what would,” he said against her lips, just barely kissing her.

A slow smile spread across her face as she stared back up at him. “So I have three boyfriends now,” she said, basking in the thought of it momentarily. It was quite a boost to the ego.

Draco sighed and shook his head. “Yes, and you’re also quite spoilt. But now that that’s settled,” he said. “Lift your robes, so I can see my cunt.”

Hermione pursed her lips. “What happened to quality time? Is everything always about sex with you?”

Draco groaned.

“Well, technically, quality time is a part of our agreement,” she said folding her arms.

Draco rolled his eyes. “And where are we supposed to have this quality time?”

Hermione shrugged. “I’m not going to do all of the work in this relationship... are you my boyfriend or not?”

“Are you my submissive or not?”

Hermione considered his question. “What’s the difference?”

Draco stared back at her sternly and then his scowl broke into a smile. “You know, I really don’t
know.”

Hermione laughed, and Draco chuckled. “I’ve never been in a relationship before…”

“Well, there’s a first time for everything, isn’t there?”

Draco smiled, regarding her closely with fondness. “Yes, I suppose there is.”

“So… where are you taking me for our first rendezvous?” she pressed, bracing herself for a snappy retort or an order to perform some humiliating sexual act.

“You know… the greenhouse is spectacular at night: it has a warming charm and there’s a nice fountain in the back that Sprout covers during classes. She uncovers it at night, I’m pretty sure it’s there to soothe the Screechsnaps, it looks really cool when the glow worms crawl around it.”

She couldn’t help but look back at him in surprise. “Sounds like you’ve been there before,” she said speculatively.

Draco nodded. “I go there sometimes… to think.”

“It sounds lovely,” she said. It really did.

“It is…” he said, looking into her eyes as if he were talking about more than the greenhouse.

Hermione could feel the heat rising in her face, and she tried not to squirm as their eyes locked.

Did he just call me lovely?

Her stomach did a flip as she thought about them spending time together alone, not having sex.

“Isn’t it locked at night?” she choked.

“If you don’t know what you’re doing it is,” Draco said. “So, I’ll meet you there in fifteen minutes?” he said with a strange expression on his face: a flicker of hesitancy, insecurity. It made her feel better about her own nerves. She smiled back at him.

“Alright, Draco, fifteen minutes.”

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Harry couldn’t hold off any longer; it had been nagging at him all day. Having Hermione research the ritual on her own was a shot in the dark, and he knew there was one sure way to get answers.

He thought about where he wanted to meet. He had two people he was mindful of, Peeves and Filch. He hadn’t seen Peeves since they had been back, but he couldn’t predict where he would be. Filch was another matter.

He had noticed that Filch had calmed down in trailing the trio since news of their affair had been revealed, often going out of his way now to avoid eye contact with any of them. However, it would still be disastrous if the man caught all four of them together after hours, and so he made sure to set the location for one that Filch rarely patrolled. He had made it his business to memorise the old bastard’s patrol patterns over the years, and even though they appeared random, they were actually quite predictable.

Filch stayed close to the Restricted Section and more dangerous parts of the castle late at night. Meeting somewhere closer and less secluded would actually be best. He pulled out his coin,
informing the rest when and where he wanted to meet.

After everyone had long gone asleep, he sat up, noticing that Ron was wide-awake in his bed openly glaring at him with irritation at being summoned so late. Harry ignored him and got dressed quietly, making his way to the middle lower dungeon.

Ron came down about five minutes after he arrived, and Draco and Hermione arrived together, looking flushed and annoyed.

Harry and Ron stared at them, Harry with amused expression, Ron with an annoyed one. “And just where were you two?” he asked.

“Don’t worry, Weasley, I still have plenty left for you as well,” Draco said teasingly.

Ron made a face and then turned to Harry. “What’s this about, Harry?”

“Yeah, Harry, this better be good,” Draco said.

Harry took a deep breath, looking around at them all.

“I think we need to talk to Dumbledore,” he said tentatively.

“Harry, no!” Hermione protested.

“Hermione, think about it, he obviously knows about the prophecy - Snape admitted it. Maybe he and Snape are having some sort of row and he could help us out.”

Hermione shook her head. “That’s not what you’re thinking at all; I know how your mind works, Harry.”

Harry huffed. “Fine, I don’t trust Snape, especially after what he told us.”

“And I don’t trust Dumbledore. Father always said he was a bit shady, hiding behind his reputation,” Draco said.

Harry gave Draco a humourless smile. “Don’t take this the wrong way, Draco… but your father has no business saying anything about Dumbledore.”

Draco folded his arms. “None taken, Harry, and I’m sure you won’t take offense when I tell you that your precious Headmaster is a hypocritical old meddler who obviously plays favourites at this school and I don’t trust him.”

“You don’t need to - I do. And I’m going to tell him everything,” Harry said with determination.

“You can’t! What you do affects all of us!” Draco insisted.

“We don’t even know if that’s true,” Harry said.

“You’re right, we don’t. Which is why we all have to agree to do anything that goes against the bond, and I for one don’t think you should be talking to Dumbledore, of all people,” Draco said.

“Me neither, Harry,” Hermione said looking up at Harry regretfully.

Harry looked to Ron for support but only found the redhead with his hands stuffed in his pockets, giving him a small apologetic smile.
“Sorry, mate.”

Harry shook his head and threw his hands up. “This is so stupid! So now we trust Snape over Dumbledore? If Dumbledore doesn’t know what’s going on, he probably is the one person who could help us try to work it out!”

“Then why hasn’t he told us anything?” Draco demanded.

“Maybe he doesn’t know we need to know!” Harry said in frustration.

“Well, he certainly knows about the prophecy,” Draco said.

“And he knows that I may be involved in the prophecy, enough to have me monitored,” Hermione reminded him.

“And not just you; he’s been watching all of us, behind our backs, Harry,” Ron said.

“He could be watching this conversation right now, for all we know,” Draco said, glancing around. Hermione and Ron both exchanged anxious glances.

“And I need to know why he’s doing that,” Harry repeated stubbornly.

“Harry, drop it, alright? It’s late, I don’t want to discuss this any further, I’m tired, and I have an 8 o’clock class. We can talk about this later, but hold off for now, alright?” Hermione pleaded.

He looked at all of them as they eyed him warily. Ron yawned, Hermione was watching him suspiciously but her eyes were tired and begging for him not to drag this into an argument, while Draco sighed and looked back at him disapprovingly.

“Fine, we’ll discuss it later,” he conceded. “I suppose we should head back.”

“Thank you!” Ron said turning his back to head out.

“Wait,” Draco said causing Ron to groan at the extra delay, “I don’t want this shit to happen again. Harry, next time you decide to call a meeting, you better make damn sure it’s something we can’t discuss at another time, or something important, like a good shag.”

Ron and Hermione smiled at that, while Harry rolled his eyes.

Draco flashed him a smile as if trying to erase their previous disagreement. “Goodnight, Harry,” he said in a super sweet tone.

“Goodnight, Draco,” Harry mumbled.

“Night,” he said to Hermione and Ron, who said goodnight to him before he turned and disappeared.

Harry looked back at Ron and Hermione. “I guess we should go back one at a time so it doesn’t look suspicious.”

They both nodded in agreement.

Ron made haste in walking out. Hermione watched him leave and then gave Harry a goodnight hug and kiss on the cheek. He smiled at her and told her to go on, to which she reluctantly pulled away and then headed out.

As he ascended the stairway and made his way into the hall, all he could think was that they were
making a big mistake. They just didn’t know it. He didn't want to go against them, but he knew they were in over their heads and having someone like Dumbledore on their side would only help them. Not to mention, it was clear they couldn’t really trust Snape.

Harry hated taking matters into his own hands, but he felt he had no choice. And so instead of making a right towards the Gryffindor common room, he made a sharp left up the stairs that would eventually lead him to the centre of the castle, towards the Headmaster’s chambers.

Chapter End Notes

Here’s what Hermione’s under garments look like:
http://i289.photobucket.com/albums/ll218/SoftObsidian74/4096.jpg

Here’s her collar/necklace:
http://i289.photobucket.com/albums/ll218/SoftObsidian74/j303651.jpg

This is the Polyamorous Symbol engraved on the collar:
http://i289.photobucket.com/albums/ll218/SoftObsidian74/PolySymbol.jpg
Harry’s resolve weakened as he approached the Headmaster’s chambers. At one point, he almost turned around. It had occurred to him that perhaps there was a way to retrieve the information he needed without breaking the bond. It couldn’t hurt to ask Dumbledore questions; he didn’t have to reveal anything.

He was surprised the statue of the phoenix turned for him after saying the password he had memorised last year.

When he entered, the portraits of former headmasters were all snoring. It was dark except for the glow of a small desk light, and the dying fire in the hearth. He noticed that Fawkes was perched on a beam to the left of the desk, her head folded under as she slept. He could smell pipe smoke, and there were faint ringlets of smoke ascending from the chair with its back turned to him. Harry found himself holding his breath as he wondered if Dumbledore was already aware of his presence.

As if he had read his thoughts, Dumbledore’s chair turned around slowly. Dumbledore gave Harry a small smile as if he had been expecting him. His normally bright blue eyes appeared tired as they regarded Harry. “Harry, what a surprise… what brings you to my chambers at this hour?”

Harry took a breath, wrestling with what he wanted to say. “I’m sorry, sir. I couldn’t sleep.”

“Oh, is there something wrong?”

“Well, yes, sir; I mean, well, I have some things on my mind, and I thought that perhaps you could help me sort some of it out.”

Dumbledore sat up straight and motioned to the seat in front of his desk. “Of course, sit down. It must be very important for you to come to me at this hour,” he said with an appraising stare.

“Well, yes, sir. I was wondering about… prophecies,” Harry said tentatively as he took a seat.

“Prophecies, Harry? Are you concerned about yours?”

Harry shifted. “Well, sort of. I was wondering about other types of prophecies as well.”

Dumbledore’s brow furrowed. “There are many types of prophecies, you know that, Harry.”

Harry nodded. “Yes, but I was curious about how prophecies connect to each other, sir.”

Dumbledore gave Harry’s statement a moment of silent consideration. “I’m afraid I don’t understand
your question, Harry.”

Harry thought for a moment about how he could proceed without specifics. “Alright… what if someone were somehow tied to two prophecies … is it possible that one prophecy could cancel out the other?”

Dumbledore nodded, still studying Harry. “You’re speaking of what some would call the Butterfly Effect.”

“Sir?”

“The saying goes that something as small as the flutter of a butterfly’s wing can ultimately cause a typhoon halfway around the world.”

Harry’s forehead wrinkled.

“It means, Harry, that what one person does can affect several people. One person’s actions can change the course of the future.”

Harry exhaled, feeling relief and disorder, his mind swirling with more questions.

“Your question is a good one. Prophecies, of course, are not law. Those they are tied to are not bound by fate to fulfil them.”

“So, if someone wanted to, they could prevent one prophecy by fulfilling another?”

Dumbledore sat back and studied Harry for several moments until the boy started to fidget in his chair.

“I’m sorry, sir.”

“What are you apologising for, Harry?”

“I know I’m not really making much sense right now,” Harry said.

“Is there something you want to tell me, Harry?” Dumbledore asked softly, his eyes inviting him to continue.

Harry felt his guilt and his desire to tell Dumbledore everything clashing, which only created more anxiety. Finally, he managed to shake his head and hold his tongue.

Dumbledore sighed. “Well, I’m sorry. I’m afraid I can’t be of much help to you unless you tell me more,” he said.

Harry nodded numbly as he stood up to leave.

“Harry…”

“Yes, sir?”

“I’ve always put a great deal of faith in you, and I know if something is bothering you, something you feel is important and may affect you or those that you love, you would do the right thing and seek guidance. You know I care for you, don’t you?”

“Yes, sir. I do.”
“Very well, then; perhaps it’s best you get some sleep and think on it, and then we can discuss this tomorrow.”

Tomorrow seemed so far away right now. Harry wanted answers tonight. “Sir?”

“Yes, Harry?”

“How do you… monitor things here?” Harry asked tentatively, bracing himself for Dumbledore’s patience to wane at such a bold question.

Instead, Dumbledore appeared bemused. “I beg your pardon?”

“I mean, you always seem to know what’s going on, and sometimes you know things that seem hard to know… I just assumed you’re watching over us.”

Dumbledore gave Harry a cheerful smile, taking a puff from his pipe. “Yes, I do watch over the students here; it’s one of my more interesting duties as Headmaster,” he said in amusement.

“Well, how do you do it, exactly?” Harry pressed.

“Ah, you want me to tell you a secret, yet you don’t want to reveal any of your own; that’s not fair, Harry,” Dumbledore said, his expression still amused, giving Harry a wispy smile.

Harry opened his mouth to speak, but Dumbledore held up his hand and forestalled it.

“Why don’t you sleep on it? I will be here tomorrow, and then perhaps we can have a real discussion about what is troubling you. How does that sound?”

Harry nodded, somewhat relieved. “Yes, sir. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, Harry.”

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Draco was caught off guard by how nervous he was before his so-called ‘date’ with Hermione. And being nervous about a tête-à-tête was unacceptable. He had shagged Hermione more times in one week than he had most of the girls he had played with in an entire year, yet he all of his nerves were gathered in his stomach right now, before their meeting at the greenhouse.

He blamed it on his rash insistence that she accept him as her boyfriend. The idea that his submissive didn’t also consider him a boyfriend had pushed him to demand it. But the idea of being her boyfriend and the actual execution of such a relationship were two different things. Of course, he felt that he had every right to be; after all, if it weren’t for him, Harry and Ron would still be squeamish about spanking her arse properly. She was just as much his as theirs.

But deep down, he understood that Harry and Ron had grown up with her: they had been through many adventures together; celebrated birthdays; kept each other company during bad days; and endured shit he didn’t even know about. They had always had each other. And as much as he tried to push the thought away, wanting to be called her boyfriend was about more than sharing equal ownership with the other two boys: he wanted to be a part of their relationship, be a part of something. He had never had friends like that, people he could count on, no matter what happened. Weasley’s offer of protection, Harry’s unabashed concern for their safety, and Hermione’s observations and willingness to go outside her comfort zone to make him feel better made him want them. He had no idea he had been longing for such companionship until he got a taste of it.
But, he would never tell them that, just like he would never tell her that even though she was his first official “girlfriend,” he had no real experience in relating to a girl in a non-sexual way. The promise of friendship with any females was always overshadowed by sex. It had always been that way, and Draco didn’t really know what to do with a girl who wanted more. His usual response was to ditch them, let them sort it out on their own. But this was different. He wanted to know more about Hermione as well. The desire for something more was mutual.

Still, it all made him uneasy. What would she want to talk about? Would she want to hold hands or something goofy like that? How would dominating her be different than dominating any other girl? Did it mean spanking her arse and then apologising and kissing her feet? He refused to do that.

When he arrived at the greenhouse, Hermione was waiting for him by the door. Always the punctual one. She looked about as if she expected to be caught at any minute. His entire body felt like a bundle of nerves, but he would be sure that she never saw it. As he drew closer to her, he saw how uncomfortable she seemed, and his own anxiety abated. So she was nervous as well; well good, she asked for this. He pulled her hand and took her to the side of the greenhouse, hitting a side panel five times with his wand as he muttered the spell he had overheard Sprout use three years ago. The panels before them vanished and he pulled her inside, feeling proud at the impressed smile on her face.

She gasped when she saw the fountain, a huge stone-gray form that had been uncovered in the back. It was outlined clearly by the glowworms crawling all around it, their colour bright green like the Christmas orbs that decorated Diagon Alley during the holidays.

They sat down, not looking at each other, staring at the fountain.

“So…” she said, straightening out her robes as she took a seat.

He found himself trying to get comfortable, but no position seemed to bring him relief. “So?” he questioned, he wasn’t going to bear the responsibility of thinking of conversation as well.

She surveyed the inside of the greenhouse and then returned her gaze to him. “You come here to think?”

“Yes.”

“And you’ve never been caught?”

“Well, almost… once,” he said, feeling a sense of accomplishment that he had not.

“It’s lovelier at night,” she admitted.

He nodded. “Yeah, it sort of clears my head, to be around… plants,” he finished awkwardly.

Why he just say that? What a poof thing to say.

He glanced sideways at Hermione who, to his relief, didn’t appear to find anything amusing about what he had just said. She was nodding and seemed pensive. “Of course, that makes perfect sense.”

He gave her a puzzled look.

“In Herbology, there’s an entire specialisation on Healing which contains spells that can multiply the presence and effects of plant life to increase its influence on our health.”

“Right, I know,” he replied.
“But did you also know that many Muggle studies support the rationale for Healing Herbology.

“Well—” he started.

“There are entire journals published by Muggle scientists on the healing powers of plants. It’s been proven that by simply being in environments rich with greenery or flowers can be more effective in promoting recovery or restoration than when they are absent.”

“Where—”

“Also, psychologically and emotionally, there’s evidence that plants can elevate levels of positive feelings like pleasantness and calmness.”

“Well—”

“And, not only does it improve pleasant feelings, but plants can also reduce negative emotions such as fear, anger, and sadness.”

He closed his mouth and nodded, staring ahead.

“I’m sorry; I didn’t mean to say so much. I do that sometimes… were you going to say something?”

He smiled. “Well, yes… but you pretty much said everything there is to say about the topic.”

Hermione smiled bashfully.

There was more silence, as they listened to the fountain, watching the glowworms inch their way along the edges.

Hermione seemed anxious to fill the silence with sound, and he actually became relieved when she began speaking again. “I like it in here. It always makes me think of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Richmond.”

“I think I’ve heard of those,” he said hesitantly, thinking back to his Muggle Studies classes.

“You’ve never been to a botanical garden?” Hermione asked incredulously.

He shook his head. “No…”

“It’s so beautiful. There are loads of them all over Britain… Oxford, Edinburgh… if you like it in here, I know you’d love it.”

“Well, we do have a huge garden at home,” he said.

“Right… I’m sure,” she said awkwardly as if she felt daft.

“I didn’t mean it like that.” His voice was more apologetic than he had intended.

“I know.”

He swallowed. “There are a lot of… Muggle places I haven’t been to.”

Hermione nodded, watching him.

“Like… I’ve always wanted to go to see the Tower of London.”

Hermione smiled. “I’ve been there. It’s really amazing.”
“Yeah, looks it, from the pictures I’ve seen… if there weren’t so many Muggles about, I’d probably go on my own to check it out.”

Hermione’s brow furrowed. “They’re not going to bite you, Draco. Or perhaps you’re afraid they’ll infect you or something,” she said with some resentment in her voice.

He searched for a way to explain to her what he meant. “It’s not that… well, not really. It would just be… weird. Being surrounded by them like that.”

“Well, how do you think I feel sometimes?” Hermione asked.

“It’s different with you… you really are a witch, you just grew up with Muggles.”

“Well, you can’t get comfortable with something, if you’re always hiding from it,” she said.

He smiled. “I suppose you’re right. And what have you been hiding from?”

Hermione gave him a small smile. “Do you always throw questions back like that?”

“Always,” he said, staring at her intently.

She shrugged. “I’m not hiding anything… anymore.”

He thought of the way he had forced her secret out, and felt a twinge of guilt about how it had all been revealed. “Do you regret any of it?”

Hermione slowly shook her head. “No, I think I like it… well, most of it.”

“Good.”

“I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t, you know,” she said.

He smiled, pleased. “I know. You’re not like some submissives I’ve met.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you’re still yourself, and I can tell that you’d sooner call the whole thing off than change who you were for some bloke calling himself your ‘master’.”

“I don’t think I could ever change completely for someone,” she said.

“No… I don’t think you could either. Besides, I don’t think that would be much fun,” he admitted.

Hermione studied him for a moment. “You know so much about it all, but you’ve never been on a date? I don’t understand that.”

“I’ve done a lot of things with girls that don’t require dating,” he said with a sly grin.

Hermione gave him a sad smile. “That doesn’t sound very fulfilling… just shagging or giving orders to someone you don’t really know. There’s nothing there, but sex. I think it would feel pretty strange, actually.”

He scoffed. “It feels pretty good to me.”

“Perhaps the first few times, but you can’t tell me it’s completely satisfying. Doesn’t it become boring after awhile?”
He considered her question. “Yeah… I suppose it does.”

“So, why do you keep doing it?”

He shrugged. “Opportunity and habit, I suppose.”

Hermione watched him for a few moments and bit her lip as she began to twiddle a piece of her robe in her fingers. “Well… I hope that you won’t get too bored with us… before we can find the ritual, that is.”

Noticing her flushed face, and fidgety hands, he immediately understood her real question. She was really asking him if he would get bored with her anytime soon. Draco looked at her plainly, taking her in, for what seemed like several minutes. For all he knew it could have been only a few seconds. But in that moment, the truth hit him.

In front of him was a girl he wasn’t even supposed to be touching, let alone be in a relationship with. She had more knowledge in her little finger than any of the slags he had ever shagged. And she was wearing his—their—collar willingly, not because she was trying to keep his interest or trade her body for affection, but because she wanted to face her fear of losing control, and because she wanted to be his—theirs.

He couldn’t imagine growing bored with that.

“I doubt it,” he finally managed to say after a long silence.

She smiled as her hand brushed his. He tensed momentarily and then impulsively grabbed it, giving it a firm squeeze before relaxing and holding it firmly.

He wondered; would it be corny to kiss her right now? It seemed like the romantic thing to do, but then, he didn’t really know much about romance. He knew he liked to be held after shagging, and he really enjoyed kissing. But this kiss would be different. It would mean something more. It would be real; the kind boyfriends gave their girlfriends. It couldn’t be corny to reassure her that he wouldn’t get bored, and it would reassure him that perhaps there was something more there as well. He dared to inch closer, his eyes fixed on her lips when he felt a flash of heat near his thigh. Hermione reached in her pocket for hers as well and then they knew Harry was calling a meeting.

They both reluctantly arose from their spot on the bench, but as Hermione began to exit the greenhouse, Draco found that he couldn’t move. He was frozen to the same spot as he watched Hermione’s bushy mane bounce out of sight. He tried to open his mouth to speak, but no sound came out, and suddenly, it was very dark, darker than it had ever been in the greenhouse.

Vines quickly wrapped around his wrists and legs. As dark and tight as Devil’s Snare, the vines began pulling him in opposite directions. His robes and clothing were ripped from him, and then something… someone was ripping his skin. He watched, felt the sharp sting of tiny gashes growing along his chest, arms, and legs. He tried to scream, but still no sound came out. Warm blood began to coat his body, and the pain and shock of the chilly air hitting his open sores made his head dizzy.

“You silly boy, did you really think you could fool me? ME? Do you know who I am?”

Of course, he knew immediately… the hiss in His voice was unmistakable. In the next moment, the darkness was alight with torches, and he found himself no longer in the greenhouse; he was in the basement of the Manor. Fully robed, masked Death Eaters surrounded him. They were all sneering and laughing at him.

Another silent scream strained his throat when his gaze fell to the floor where Snape’s severed head
had been left like an unwanted offering. The head’s black eyes were frozen in terror, staring up at him. And then his eyes searched for Snape’s body. It was on the other side of the room, and its headless form was propped next to something far worse.

He stared back in disbelief and horror, nauseous from the burned carcasses of his father and mother strung up in a cruel imitation of fornication on the wall, the only thing that remained unsinged was their beautiful white locks of hair.

“You’ve been a bad boy, Draco. It’s unfortunate that your dear father and mother have had to pay for your misbehaviour. You, however, will suffer a different fate. You do know what we do to blood traitors, don’t you?” the red-eyed demon asked him in a falsely soothing tone.

He couldn’t speak; hot tears slid down his face as he tried to find a way to breathe and not gape at what they had done to his parents.

“No? Then let me show you,” the Dark Lord hissed. And then Draco felt his stomach tear. The sickening feeling of hot wetness spread as the incredible painful sensation of his body being ripped open overwhelmed him. He watched in horror as his guts spilled out onto the floor in front of him.

Draco woke up, drenched in sweat, a scream he only just barely managed to quell still on his lips as he stared at the curtains of his housemates. He slid his hands over his chest and down his belly as he tried to control his breathing.

When he finally calmed down, he did a drying spell on himself and his sheets before settling down.

What was supposed to be a pleasant memory had been soured by the nightmare of his assignment and the wrath it could bring. It was hard for Draco to get comfortable again; his thoughts were scattered. The Dark Lord. The assignment. Hermione. His mother. His father.

He lay, staring wide-eyed at the ceiling, listening to the snores and breathing of the others, debating whether he really wanted to fall back asleep.

The next morning Ron shot several glares at Harry as they dressed, while Harry did his best to ignore the redhead until they were all at breakfast.

Hermione seemed to notice the tension and watched them, waiting for one of them to crack. Finally, when Ron’s stare had become intolerable, Harry spoke.

“What? What’s the matter?” Harry asked, clearly vexed.

“You know what,” Ron said tersely.

“What is it? What did you do, Harry?” Hermione asked in a scolding whisper.

Harry gave both of them a puzzled look. “I didn’t do anything!”

“Oh, yeah? Then where were you last night?” Ron demanded.

Hermione stiffened. “Harry, you didn’t!”

“No, I didn’t!” Harry whispered harshly.

“Then where were you? You didn’t come back straight away; took you almost an hour after we came back,” Ron repeated.
“I just wanted to walk… do some thinking,” Harry mumbled.

Ron gave him a final warning glare and then his face softened. “I’m sorry, but you scared me for a minute there.”

Harry shook his head. “I don’t know what you’re both so worried about. Even if I had gone to Dumbledore, what’s the worst that could happen?”

“That’s just it, Harry, we don’t know,” Hermione reminded him.

“Well, it’s not going to be life-threatening. Snape said it would be embarrassing or something. And he probably just said that to scare us,” Harry reasoned.

“Let’s just not go testing that theory, alright?” Ron said.

Harry nodded dismissively, reaching for the morning paper. When he opened it, he almost choked on his juice.

“What is it?” Hermione asked.

Harry swallowed and pushed the paper in the middle of the three so they all could have a look.

Hermione began reading, her voice becoming more alarmed as she did. “More Than Friends? by Rita Skeeter. Oh Gods…” she sighed before continuing. “The famous Golden Trio seem to have more than fighting Dark wizards on their minds these days: they also may be facing a losing battle to protect the secret of their forbidden love. Sources reveal that the three are involved in a three-way love affair and that support for the relationship has divided the students and the staff. Hogwarts’ Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, declined to comment.”

“How dare she!” Hermione said, staring furiously at the paper.

“Told ya,” Ron said.

“One day she’s going to have to answer for all of the hogwash she writes,” Harry complained.

“Yes, but this is actually true, isn’t it? I suppose it was going to come out sooner or later,” Hermione said in resignation.

“I’d much prefer later; I’m sure my mum and dad will be contacting me soon,” Ron said, glancing down the table at Ginny.

Harry and Hermione looked back at Ron sympathetically, both realising that they didn’t have to deal with the extra burden of explaining this to anyone else… yet.

“Well, at least you don’t have to explain what else you’ve been up to this year,” Hermione said with a cheeky smile, trying to lighten Ron’s spirits.

“You don’t have to worry about me ever telling anyone about that,” Ron said, shooting Harry another accusatory glance.

Harry gave Ron an exasperated sigh. Ron didn’t blink.

“I’m serious, Harry, you better not,” Ron threatened.

Harry ground his teeth, refusing to respond to that. But as soon as Ron spoke, Harry’s inner conflict was back. Obviously Dumbledore was willing to share with him what he knew; he just wanted
Harry to be forthcoming. It seemed like a fair trade. Harry felt that if Dumbledore was anything, it was fair.

Harry was relieved to see Ron turn his glare onto Hermione. “And what were you and Malfoy doing last night?”

Hermione smiled. “We had a date,” she said softly, glancing up to make sure no one was listening to them.

“A date?” Ron asked as if her answer didn’t make sense.

“Yes, Ron. A date… and it was rather nice, actually.”

“Well, isn’t that sweet?” Ron said sarcastically, glancing back at Draco, who talking to Goyle.

“So,” Ron said, clearing his throat. “When’s our turn?”


“Well, we’ve always just been… us. Isn’t going out for people who don’t really know each other?”

“I suppose,” Hermione said, thinking.

“Well, we already know each other, don’t we?” Ron reasoned.

“Exactly,” Hermione said. “So what’s the real reason you’re asking me out now, Ron?”

Ron cleared his throat. “Well, the point is… if you and Malfoy are going out… then Harry and I should be going out with you as well,” he said, looking to Harry for support.

Harry rolled his eyes.

Hermione giggled.

“What’s so funny?” Ron asked self-consciously.

“Maybe you should be asking Draco out instead. You two need more work than you and I.”

Ron huffed. “We’ve done enough work on it, I’d say.”

Hermione put her hand to her chin. “You know, I’ve been thinking; we should work on a schedule of some sort… so we all stay in touch with each other.”

“Ever the planner,” Ron muttered, apparently not particularly enthused. about the idea.

“Well, until I find the ritual,” she said.

“And what if you never find it, what then?” Harry asked.

They all sat in silence for a few moments.

“I will,” Hermione said with determination. “I already have a lead, and Draco thinks we may find something of use in Knockturn.”

“And how are we going to pull that off?” Ron asked. “We’d need a Portkey and permission to take it.”
“Well, there is the Hogsmeade visit,” Hermione suggested.

Harry shook his head. “That’s not for another two months.”

“Until then, I can send off for some books that may be of use, and Snape is also still looking,” Hermione reminded him.

Harry made a disapproving tongue click at the mention of the Potions professor. “If you guys would just let me talk to Dumbledore.”

“We’re not discussing this anymore, Harry,” Hermione said firmly.

“You know, you’ve been mouthing off a bit too much, Hermione. Did you forget what this means?” he asked, reaching over and hooking his finger under the chain around her neck as he pulled her close.

“Harry! We’re in public,” she said anxiously, glancing around.

“Then you need to mind your tone, don’t you,” he whispered as he let his fingers slide along her neck, playing with the chain.

Ron stared back at Hermione, a small, entertained smile plastered on his face. Harry noticed that there were a few people watching them, so he loosened his grip on the chain. He lightly traced his fingers along her neck affectionately before giving her a lingering kiss on the cheek. Hermione leaned into his touch, a low purr slipping from her mouth.

“I didn’t hear you… what was that?” Harry asked softly, keeping his eyes on Ron as he spoke to her.

“Oh, yes… Harry,” she said softly, glancing around.

Harry pulled away, picking up his juice to drink. “Spread your legs, Hermione,” he said before taking sip.

Shocked, Hermione stared back at him. “What?”

“He said, ‘spread your legs’, Ron reminded her in a hushed tone, sliding his foot between hers so that he could push her legs apart.

“Harry… Ron, please,” she whispered, her breath getting shorter.

“Stop calling me that, or it’ll get worse,” Harry said, avoiding her begging eyes.

“You can’t… we’re in public,” she repeated.

“This is under the table, and no one is watching… except for maybe Draco. Doesn’t he look lonely?” Harry asked with a playful pout on his face as he reached down.

Harry looked up to see Draco talking and glancing every few seconds at the scene in front of him, trying not to draw any attention to it by gawking. But Harry could tell that he had Draco’s attention.

The blond flashed Harry a quick smile and glanced down to regard Hermione’s bottom half under the table. He raised his chin up as if to signal that Harry should raise her robes higher so Draco could have a better view from his vantage point. Harry winked to acknowledge the request and then Draco turned his glance toward Crabbe.

Harry smiled mischievously at Ron, who was watching him in confusion. “What are you doing?” the
redhead asked.

Harry reached down and began inching Hermione’s robes up, they rose higher and higher until he could feel her garters showing, his hand sliding up her thigh as he went, pulling at her as his hand inched toward her centre.

Hermione’s eyes were scanning the room to see who was watching, and when Harry reached her bare mound and looked up to see Draco staring down at her with a satisfied smile on his face. Hermione quickly closed her legs and pushed her robes down. “Filch.”

“See,” Ron said, turning around to give Draco a smug look of victory.

Draco rolled his eyes and resumed eating.

“Doesn’t count… she used her safeword; that’s different,” Harry defended.

“Oh, so now you’re siding with Malfoy?” Ron asked.

Harry huffed.

“What are you two on about?” Hermione asked glancing between them and then glancing over at Draco, who seemed more engrossed in his conversation than before. She narrowed her eyes and scowled at Ron. “Did you make some sort of bet with Draco?”

Ron’s face flushed. “How did you figure that out?”

“Ronald!”

“I don’t remember who actually made the bet,” he stammered.

“What was it on?”

Ron stared back at her.

“Well?”

“That you couldn’t last the entire week.”

Hermione huffed. “Stupid boys,” she said rising from her seat.

“Sit down,” Ron said.

“What?”

“I said, sit down,” Ron said firmly.

Hermione sat down slowly. To her left there were several empty seats; people had already begun leaving for class.

“I don’t have time for this Ronald; first class starts soon,” she argued.

“Are you giving up then?” he challenged.

“Do you remember our agreement?” Hermione asked him as if he were being thick.

Ron nodded, taking her measure. “Yeah, I do… and I remember you saying you didn’t want it to interfere with your schoolwork.”
“Right, and making me late to class violates that,” Hermione pointed out.

Ron leaned forward, his voice firm and low. “So, you’ll be extra careful in the future not to do anything that would make us bend that rule.”

“What do you mean?” Hermione asked.

“I mean, like right now: you’re all mouth. You could have just apologised, and you would be on your way to class, but you’re still sassing me, so now you may be late. If you honour our rules, then they won’t interfere with yours.”

Hermione closed her mouth. Ron smiled. “Now, go on, I wouldn’t want you to start the term off badly. We can talk about this later,” he said.

Both Hermione and Harry gaped at Ron until Harry cleared his throat. “I’d say we all need to get going. Shall we?”

Hermione blinked, regarding Ron in stunned silence before rising to head to class.

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Hermione was happy that she managed to get through Advanced Transfiguration without one glance or smart remark from anyone about her relationship with Harry and Ron. After class was dismissed, McGonagall requested that she stay after.

Hermione gathered her books and made her way to the professor’s desk.

“Is everything alright, Professor,” Hermione asked, anxious to know why she had been asked to remain. McGonagall was her favourite professor and the expression on the woman’s face was uncharacteristically concerned.

“I won’t sugarcoat this,” the older woman said. “Although the headmaster feels that your relationship with Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley is… normal, I feel that perhaps it is something that you three should reconsider continuing. Especially you, Miss Granger.”

“Excuse me?”

“I’ve been a professor here for over twenty years, and you are one of the brightest witches I’ve ever had the pleasure of teaching.”

“Thank you,” Hermione said, flattered.

“But, I can’t help but notice that since this… relationship has been made public, you have changed.” McGonagall sounded disturbed.

Hermione was confused. “What do you mean? I still maintain my studies, and my marks have not fallen.”

McGonagall pursed her lips. “Yes, but… well,” the older woman blushed and regained her composure, sitting up straighter, as she cast a stern look at Hermione. “I saw what occurred at breakfast this morning, and I’m sure I’m not the only one,” she said with more than a little scorn, clasping her hands in front of her on the desk.

“Oh,” Hermione said softly, lowering her eyes, embarrassed.

“Mr. Potter kissing you while Mr. Weasley watched was a rather vulgar display of your
relationship,” McGonagall continued.

Hermione let out a small sigh of relief under her breath, thankful that a kiss was the only thing McGonagall had observed.

“And that was not the first time, either: you have become careless in your public displays of affection with Mr. Potter and Mr. Weasley; yesterday’s scene was most disconcerting.”

Hermione opened her mouth to apologise and then closed it quickly. Why should she apologise?

“Professor, do you have this conversation with everyone who engages in public displays of affection?”

McGonagall’s expression was tight. “As a matter of fact, when such displays become too gratuitous, yes, I do,” she said.

Hermione couldn’t help but narrow her eyes. “And if I may ask, what was gratuitous about the kiss Harry gave me?”

McGonagall’s mouth twisted into a determined scowl. “It was inappropriate.”

“Are you talking about the kiss or my relationship with Ron and Harry?” Hermione pressed.

“Careful, Miss Granger,” McGonagall warned.

Hermione was furious. She had never thought McGonagall would be so judgmental or biased. “Or what? You’ll take house points from me… for a kiss? I always took you for being fair, Professor!”

“That’s enough!” McGonagall said in disappointment. “Now, despite the fact that you turned down the prefect position this year, I was considering recommending you for the position of Head Girl.”

Hermione started.

“But as of right now, I’m not sure that you would be a suitable role model,” McGonagall finished.

Hermione scoffed. “Yes, because Merlin forbid that the Head Girl has a sex life.”

McGonagall wore a wry smile. “Very well, Miss Granger. Fifty points from Gryffindor, and if you say another word, I can assure you will never be considered for the Head Girl position, nor any other position of leadership at this school.”

Hermione stared back at the other woman, still in shock at her previous statement.

“It’s obvious that you have let your heart rule over reason. I do hope you come to your senses soon. I assure you this is not personal. This is about your future. The decisions you make now will have a lasting impact on not only your successful legacy at Hogwarts, but long after.”

Hermione bit her lip hard to prevent from speaking.

“You may leave now,” McGonagall said.

Hermione shook with anger as she turned on her heels to exit.

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For the rest of the morning, Hermione found it difficult to concentrate. She barely contained her fuming. As she sat in her History class, she found that she couldn’t care less about what Professor
Binns said; she was sure that it was something she had already read months ago, and she spent a great deal of class gnawing at the inside of her mouth.

When lunch arrived, she found herself brooding as Harry and Ron discussed their first Quidditch practice scheduled that night. They seemed hesitant to ask her anything; her disgruntled mood was fully apparent.

“What’s wrong with you?” Harry asked, his expression concerned.

“Nothing,” she mumbled.

Harry and Ron both exchanged anxious glances as she continued her lunch in silence.

At the end of it, they all parted ways awkwardly, heading to their respective classes.

By suppertime, Hermione’s disgruntled mood had peaked, and she couldn’t even eat.

“Are you going to tell us what’s bothering you?” Harry asked.

She sighed sadly and played with her food. “I’m fine.”

“Which means you’re not,” Ron said.

“I’m not hungry,” Hermione said, pushing away her food. “Meet me in Snape’s classroom after Quidditch.”


“Just do it, and tell Draco to come as well,” she said, rising from her seat.

“Hermione—” Ron called.

But Hermione was already briskly walking away before he could finish his sentence.

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Hermione sat in the library trying to read for almost an hour, attempting to complete her homework, when she realised that she wasn’t reading the page. She gave up and packed up, making her way down to Snape’s classroom.

As she walked, McGonagall’s scolding voice and words replayed once more in her thoughts. McGonagall was disappointed in her. And her favourite professor’s disapproval hurt Hermione more than all of the gossip she had encountered so far. It was as if she had faced the disapproval of her own mother.

A seething feeling began to bubble up, and she felt as if her whole body tingled from the pressure of it as it did.

Of all the things to express disappointment over, McGonagall had expressed displeasure about Hermione loving two people. And if she only knew that perhaps there was a third…

Hermione paused, stopping in the middle of the hallway, before continuing to her destination, slowly as she thought.

Did she love Draco? She couldn’t… could she? The potential was there. He had proved himself to be much more than they had all once thought, and there were many things she liked about him. But
love, that seemed too strong for where they were at the moment.

She pushed the thought of it away, and it was quickly replaced by another: inappropriate. Hermione clutched the handle of her bag tightly as McGonagall’s use of “love” echoed in her head. There was nothing indecent about loving several people at the same time. There were several historical accounts of such relationships!

So why was she feeling so bad? So dirty… so… inappropriate.

When she finally made it to Snape’s classroom, she was shaking. She entered and found the Potions professor at his desk, reading and stirring some concoction. When he saw her, he quickly shut the book and stood up.

“To what do I owe this pleasure?” he asked dryly, glancing at Hermione in annoyance.

Hermione couldn’t fight it any more. She felt the sting of tears welling up in her eyes, and when Snape instinctively leaned forward with a look of concern on his face, she lost control, allowing the tears to flow freely.

Snape tensed before her.

“I—I, just… I’m just so sick of this! Why can’t people understand that I love them both, and—and they love me, and… they love each other. What’s wrong with that?!”

Snape looked extremely uncomfortable as he observed her.

“And, you know what makes it even worse?”

If Snape’s expression was any indication, he didn’t want to know.

That only made her cry harder. “I think… that maybe I could love Draco as well. I think—well, it’s possible, you know? And I think he needs that… we all need that… it’s like we all fit in some weird way. And I know people think I’m some sort of sex freak or something. But it’s more than that… really it is,” she finished weakly, new tears falling.

Snape put his hand over his mouth, studying Hermione’s state, then relaxed. It seemed like an invitation, as much of an invitation as Snape would ever give. Hermione didn’t think twice about moving closer to him until she was embracing him around the waist in a firm hug, burying her face into his robes.

“It is normal, right? To love more than one person at the same time?” she asked, wiping her face against his robes.

Snape went rigid and didn’t appear to be breathing as he gave Hermione a reluctant hug in return before abruptly pushing her away.

“Miss Granger, get a hold of your emotions, and stop crying like a bloody Beauxbatons witch.”

Hermione’s eyes hardened as she wiped her tears away. “Look, I didn’t mean to do that, but I’m just so frustrated! McGonagall… McGonagall,” Hermione stammered before breaking into fresh tears.

Snape rolled his eyes. “Yes? What did Professor McGonagall do or say to cause this melodramatic display of teenage angst?”

Hermione sniffed, holding in the new batch of tears that she felt coming. She refused to cry again in
front of Snape while he stood, regarding her like a mental patient.

“I just thought she’d be a bit more understanding,” Hermione said in disappointment.

“Yes, well, you should never hold anyone in such high regard that you think they are without fault; if you do, you will continue to be disappointed,” he said coolly.

“Well, I won’t stand for being judged for something that is natural, particularly by a professor. She practically threatened to bar me from consideration for the Head Girl position,” Hermione said angrily.

“Perhaps after things settle, she will see your relationship in a different light,” Snape offered somewhat flippantly.

Hermione snorted. “Perhaps,” she said, looking around, and regaining her composure. “Do you mind if I stay down here to study?” she asked.

Snape gave her a suspicious look. “Should I be expecting anyone else?”

“What would give you that idea?” she asked with false innocence.

Snape closed his eyes and groaned. “I see; so you think you can just waltz in here, try to gain my sympathy with tears to distract me from the fact that you’ve made plans to use of my classroom for such activities?”

“We’re just meeting. It doesn’t mean we’re going to do that, necessarily. But even if we did, don’t you want us to keep working on this assignment?” Hermione asked, glancing up at him apprehensively.

Snape looked tired and defeated. “I suppose it won’t make a difference soon anyway.”

“What?”

“Never mind,” Snape muttered, returning to his desk.

“Professor?” Hermione asked, following him.

“Yes?” he answered with a sigh.

“Is your classroom veiled?”

Snape nodded. “Yes.”

“Concealment charms?”

“Yes.”

Hermione sighed in relief.

Snape shot her a disapproving glare. “Ms. Granger, I will not, I repeat, I will not sponsor or support orgies in this classroom.”

Hermione folded her lips trying not to smile or retort. She looked up to see Snape wrinkling his nose before returning to his desk.

“Here…. Since you have decided to make use of my classroom, you might as well do some real
work. This is a list of things that need to be done,” he said scribbling several tasks down.

“Make sure that you complete everything on this list, and any other… duties you plan to accomplish before I return at 10pm. I don’t want to walk in the middle of anything that’s… incomplete.”

“Yes, sir,” she said, suppressing a smile.

Ron and Harry had Quidditch practice until 8 o’clock, after which they both showered and changed and began the long walk toward the dungeons. They had just started when Harry stopped and told Ron that he had forgotten something, and to go on without him.

“I’ll just wait for you,” Ron insisted.

“No, go on; I have a few errands to run as well. I’ll be down there within the hour, promise,” Harry said.

Ron shrugged and continued walking.

When he approached the dungeons, he heard giggling, and then a low, familiar drawl followed by a chuckle. Jealousy pulled at him, but it was snapped back by a strange flash of lust as he thought of their last night together at Snape’s. He found himself torn between wanting to rush through the door and break up whatever fun Draco and Hermione were having and wanting to join them for perhaps something naughty and much more satisfying than a pissing contest over Hermione.

When he walked in, Hermione was propped on a desk and her robes up around her knees, Malfoy was between her legs and one of his hands was up her robes and the other underneath her hair.

They both turned abruptly when he entered.

“Oi, Weasley, you’re just in time,” Draco said, his smile too eager for Ron’s liking.

“Time for what, Malfoy?”

“Time for your lessons,” Draco said smoothly as he backed away from Hermione, giving Ron an arrogant smile.

“I don’t need any lessons from you, prat.”

“That’s not what I’ve observed. She’s been running all over you and Harry without any sort of reprimand. I wonder: who’s the submissive?”

Ron shot Draco a contemptuous glare.

Draco smiled even more smugly. “Not sure? Well, I think it’s time you had another lesson in how to discipline a disobedient sub properly.”

Ron snorted and rolled his eyes; Hermione huffed defiantly.

“We had an agreement!” Hermione protested.

“Oh, don’t give me that,” Draco said, giving her a dubious look. “You can’t keep getting your way, just because we’re in school. You don’t get to use your discretion about when to follow rules and when not to. That’s our decision.”
“Yes, but—”

“But, from what I’ve observed, you’ve been far too bossy and disrespectful, taking advantage of the moments when we can’t exercise our rights.”

“Your rights?”

“Yes, our rights. Don’t we have an agreement?”

Hermione looked frustrated but didn’t argue; instead, she glanced at Ron to see if he had anything to say about the matter.

Ron agreed with Draco, but he didn’t appreciate the prat telling him he needed lessons in how to manage Hermione. He knew how to handle Hermione, but he didn’t feel the need to make a show of it or to humiliate her in front of the school.

He glared at Draco again as the boy began eyeing her with a hungry expression.

“Besides, you don’t like getting your way all the time… do you? Hmmm?”

“No… Draco,” she replied, her voice laced with apparent anticipation and arousal.

Ron almost gave an exasperated sigh at how easily she caved in to the boy. Although he had every intention of saying something snide, he found his mouth unable to form words as he watched Draco push her robes completely up to her waist, revealing the tops of her stocking, garters, and her bare mound.

“Spread them for me… that’s a good girl,” he said softly, his eyes fixed on her pussy. Draco fingers swept over her thighs and brushed over her mound, when he his smirk became a frown.

“What were you supposed to do, that you haven’t done?”

Hermione glanced up with a puzzled expression before sighing in recognition. “You said to keep it shaved.”

“That’s right, there should never be any stubble here,” he said pulling back his hand and smacking her mound sharply; Hermione flinched and looked at him. Her face showed arousal and apprehension.

“Yes, Draco,” she whimpered.

“Now, how do you plan on maintaining it? A spell, I suppose?”

Hermione quickly nodded. “Yes, Draco.”

“Good, I expect it smooth at all times, and if it’s not, it won’t be touched, understood?”

“Yes, Draco.”

“Now then, I believe you need to be punished,” he said with a mischievous smile. “Lesson Number Two, Weasley, proper spanking technique.”

The blond sat on an adjacent desk and patted his thighs to convey that Hermione should lie over his lap. Ron felt his former jealousy rise again as he watched her climb down from her position on the desk. Before she reached Draco’s lap, he did an upward motion with his hand.
“Nuh-uh, take off your robe,” Draco ordered.

“What if someone walks in?” Ron asked as though Draco were daft.

“The door is locked, Weasley,” Draco said.

“Oh, yeah? Well, I came in just fine,” Ron retorted.

“That’s because I told Snape you were coming,” Hermione explained.

“Oh,” Ron said, shifting as she began to lift the robe over her head. “Well… what about Dumbledore?”

“Concealment Charm,” Draco and Hermione both replied together.

“Oh,” Ron said, taking a deep breath, letting his eyes roam the full length of her newly revealed form. She looked absolutely stunning, her curves highlighted by the garter belt, the way her pert breasts rose with each breath over the matching black plaid trimmed bra. When she turned around to lie over Draco’s lap, Ron made a low hissing sound at the sight of her framed full rounded arse bending over in front of him.

“She wears it well, doesn’t she, Weasley?” Draco asked, his eyes fixed on her arse as well as she got into position.

Ron nodded in agreement, keeping his eyes on Hermione’s bum as she settled.

Draco ran his hand over her arse, seemingly mesmerised by the sight of Hermione’s bare flesh framed by garters. One of Draco’s hands settled onto her back securely as the other one continued exploring her bottom half.

Ron felt his irritation flare when Draco looked up with a taunting look as he grabbed one cheek as though he were palming a Quaffle.

“Sit down, Weasley; this may be a long lesson.”

But Ron wasn’t going to follow orders, especially from Malfoy. He remained standing as Draco pulled back his hand and brought it down firmly across both of Hermione’s arse cheeks. She folded one leg up at the knee in reaction and tried to lunge as though she wanted to escape.

But Draco held her in position as he brought down his hand once more in the same place. Hermione whimpered, but her arse also wiggled in response, prompting several more slaps in rapid succession. By the time Draco stopped, Hermione’s arse was red and splotchy as if it were blushing, and Ron could see her quivering even from his position, her short breaths reaching his ears, making him harder than ever.

Draco began to soothe her bottom, rubbing his palms over the swelling his hand had created. Once again, Ron found himself caught between arousal and jealously as he watched the blond slide his hand between her legs, feeling her wetness. Hermione was his, her cunt was his; it had always been, long before Malfoy entered the picture. It should have been his hands between her legs, feeling her arousal. It should have been him punishing her, not Malfoy.

Ron swallowed as he watched Draco’s fingers explore her, sliding inside of her as she began to move against them. He slid two inside of her and continued to finger her until Hermione was pushing against him with as much force as she could, apparently approaching her climax.
“No,” Draco said.

Hermione made a frustrated sobbing noise. “Please… please, let me come, please.”

“No,” Draco said to Ron as he withdrew his fingers and brought them up to his mouth to suck her juices off.

Ron narrowed his eyes and moved in closer when Draco put up his hand to stop him.

“Hold on, Weasley,” he said. “Are we clear here, Hermione?”

Hermione let her head fall and she sighed regretfully. Finally after a few moments, her breathing slowed and she stopped squirming against his thighs. “Yes, Draco.”

“Good girl… now get up,” he ordered.

She slowly rose from his lap and stood up, her face somewhere between a sullen pout and a scowl.

“No, Weasley, here’s a bonus lesson for… proper shagging,” Draco said rising from his spot on the desk, pushing Hermione back against the desk. Eager to reach the orgasm she had been denied she fell back, opening her legs invitingly for Draco.

“Shut up, Malfoy. I can shag just as good as you can, or don’t you remember?”

“I don’t remember seeing anything impressive,” Draco said apathetically as he stroked the insides of Hermione’s thighs, making tiny circles around her clit as she worked herself against his hand.

“Well, maybe you will remember this: Hermione and I have been shagging a lot longer than you have, and that will never change.”

“And yet until last week, you didn’t even know what turned her on.”

“Draco, stop it, you’re being mean!” Hermione scolded.

“Oh, I’m just playing. Weasley knows that, don’t you?”

“Sure, Malfoy… real funny,” Ron said sarcastically.

Draco gave him a fake smile as he leaned over Hermione, pulling her legs around his waist. “Take me out,” he ordered.

Hermione’s eyes darted to Ron, who stared at the two of them.

She quickly returned her gaze to Draco and then reached down to pull up his robes so that she could unbuckle his belt.

“Here, let me help you,” he said, pulling his robe over his head, and taking off his trousers and pants, his cock standing erect between them.

Hermione eyed it hungrily, grabbing it with her hand and massaging the length of it, which made Draco groan and pull her legs closer to him.

“Lie back. Want to fuck you, right now,” he said as he positioned himself at her entrance. She spread her legs farther, reaching up with her small hands to help him slide in and then placing her palms against his chest as he began to push forward.
Draco was peering down at her intensely, he seemed transfixed by the picture of her passion, and Ron found himself harder than ever.

“That feel good, darling?”

“Mmm… oh yes… yes, Draco,” she moaned.

“It’s barely been one day and you’ve been missing my cock, haven’t you?”

“Yes… oooo… yes, Draco.”

Draco grunted as he grabbed her thigh, gripping it tight as he pulled out a little and thrust into her again, flipping his hair out of his eyes and turning to look at Ron for a moment.

“Taking notes, Weasley?” the blond asked tauntingly before closing his eyes and continuing to sink into her.

Hermione gasped and moaned, turning her head away from Ron, who was watching her face closely as Draco continued to fuck her.

Ron felt himself growing more aroused at the scene in front of him: watching Hermione twist her hips helplessly as Draco’s stroke demanded she meet his, his skin slapping against hers, the desks shaking, making rhythmic sounds in time with them. Ron watched as the blond succumbed in spite of himself, leaning over to rest his sweaty forehead against Hermione’s neck.

Ron didn’t think, he just felt. His cock was hard; Malfoy’s perfect pale ass was rising and falling in front of him, Hermione’s legs resting on his waist. He had inched closer without realising he had been walking, stroking his cock absentely, Hermione’s face hidden by Malfoy form covering it; the only thing he could focus on was Malfoy’s arse. It was exposed, so vulnerable, so fucking smooth, and he hadn’t yet breached it.

Malfoy wanted to teach him a lesson? On shagging?

Suddenly he wanted it, more than he had ever wanted to fuck any bloke.

Ron suppressed a chuckle as he moved closer to Draco, pulling his robes up and dropping his trousers and pants quickly. Draco paused in mid stroke when he heard Ron’s clothing rustle behind him.

“Whoa, what are you—”

Ron grabbed the back of Draco’s neck firmly, pressing his long hard length against Draco’s arse. Hermione stilled and looked up at Draco with wide eyes, trying to crane her neck to see what Ron was doing.

“Ron!”

“Go on: keep fucking her, Malfoy; don’t stop now… I’m learning so much from watching you,” Ron said in a low gravelly voice as he moved his cock against Draco arse once again.

“Get off of me, you freckled git!”

Ron squeezed Draco’s neck harder. “Not a good idea to mouth off right before I’m about to shag your pretty arse.”
Draco tensed even more, and Ron could feel him trembling in his hand. “You wouldn’t… that would be rape,” the blond said, trying to turn around.

Before Draco could protest further, Ron gave him a swift and hard slap to the arse, eliciting a yelp from the boy in his grip. “It’s not rape if you want it, is it?”

“You’ve gone mental, I don’t—”

Ron pushed his pelvis forward, sliding his cock back and forth along the smooth crevice of Draco’s arse, teasing the blond.

Draco moaned. And then Ron leaned forward and began to trail kisses across Draco’s shoulder blades, sinking his mouth into Draco’s pale smooth skin, sucking and kissing the flesh hungrily. And then Draco’s resistance gave way. He moaned once more, only this time much louder, and threw his head back, pushing himself into Hermione and arching his back into Ron.

Ron couldn’t help but leer against his body. “Let’s see if you take as good as you give,” he whispered, causing new goose bumps to form against his lips.

A strange sound akin to a purr emanated from Draco’s throat as he began to twist his hips in response to Ron’s movements. Hermione moaned and pushed her hips up in response.

Keeping his hand on Draco’s neck and his cock pressed against his arse, Ron withdrew his wand from the pocket of the robes bunched around his waist and said the lubricating spell.

Draco gasped as the wetness spread on his backside and over Ron’s cock.

“Weasley,” he croaked.

“Shut up, Malfoy,” Ron growled as he pressed his cock against the blond harder. “Just keep doing what you’re doing; you’re gonna need the distraction,” he warned.

Draco slowed his stroke inside Hermione, looking back over his shoulder as much as he could at Ron.

“You wanted to teach me a lesson, right?” Ron asked smartly.

Draco looked back at him with a warning glare. “Weasley… if you hurt me with that thing…”

“Just keep your mind on what you’re doing to her, and relax,” Ron said softly.

Ron felt Draco tense once more and then jerk. He watched as Hermione’s hands reached up until she was pressing her fingers into Draco’s biceps, pulling him down closer to her.

“Draco, look at me… please… look at me, don’t look at Ron,” Hermione pleaded, pulling Draco tighter to her with her legs.

Draco relaxed once more, focusing closely on Hermione as he continued to move inside of her.

Ron leaned in closer to both of them as she did, loosening his grip on Draco’s neck as he propped one leg on the desk next to him so that he could began to work the head of his cock into the boy’s narrow entrance.

At first, Draco’s arse cheeks clenched in protest, but when Hermione began to buck more insistently underneath him, he relaxed and allowed Ron entry.
“Wait… stop moving,” Draco said to Hermione, letting his head drop against her breast.

Ron’s eyes locked with Hermione’s. She gave him a look that said if he did this wrong, he probably wouldn’t be allowed to do it ever again. He nodded to acknowledge that he understood as he began to slowly settle himself comfortably in the slick wetness between Draco’s arse cheeks. He paused every few moments to allow the blond to become more comfortable as he carefully worked to push against Draco’s tight entrance.

A pained moaned escaped Draco’s lips as he buried his face flatly against Hermione’s breast, rotating his hips to give Ron some assistance.

Watching Draco willingly accept his cock was far more arousing than he had anticipated and Ron found himself trying to hold back from grabbing Draco by the hair and pulling him onto his cock the way he wanted to.

“Fuck, Malfoy,” Ron gasped as Draco’s entrance gave in, the tightness and warmth of his narrow passage swallowing Ron, making his eyes roll back in pleasure.

Another pained groan rang out in the classroom and Ron stopped for a moment to give the blond time to adjust. When his arse began to push back, Ron continued to push. Draco began kissing Hermione as Ron continued to press forward, gripping a handful of the soft flesh of Draco’s arse to anchor himself.

Draco pushed himself back once more, encouraging Ron to give him more. Ron wasted no time pushing himself deeper inside Draco as he looked down and saw Draco doing the same inside of Hermione. Hermione closed her eyes when he did, threading her hands through Draco’s hair as she positioned her legs higher on his back.

Ron removed his hand from the back of Draco’s neck and latched onto Hermione’s legs, uncrossing them from around Draco’s back. He spread them out and pulled on them, pulling both her and Draco closer to his body.

He heard Draco cursing under his breath, grunting as he continued to move back and forth between the witch underneath him and the cock buried inside of him. They moved back and forth in a strange syncopated rhythm until Ron felt himself shaking as his climax approached. He clutched both of Draco’s arse cheeks and began thrusting in and out of the blond more urgently.

Ron opened his eyes to see Hermione’s flushed face, her eyes fogged over as she stared up at him. Her mouth opened to announce her orgasm. The sound of her coming and watching his cock disappear in and out of Malfoy was far more stimulating than he thought possible. Ron threw his head back and groaned as he came inside of Draco.

Draco’s body seemed to be milking him for every drop as the blond continued to work toward his own release. His thrusts became more frantic as he rocked between Hermione, who was holding him tightly in her arms and Ron, who was still buried inside of him as he held onto the blond’s arse. Finally Draco stilled, letting out a breathy sigh as he came, buried deep inside Hermione.

Their breathing seemed loud in the empty classroom. Finally, Ron slowly let go of his grip on Draco as he withdrew from the boy.

Draco rested on Hermione, who continued to hold him close to her as she smiled up at Ron. Ron gave her a small smile in return and then smacked Draco’s arse.

“Oh, Weasley, watch it. I’m sore back there,” Draco said in irritation.
“Yeah? Did a fair job, did I?” Ron asked proudly.

Draco didn’t answer; instead, he slipped out of Hermione, standing up slowly, picking up his wand and doing a cleaning spell on them all. He eyed Ron strangely once he was done.

“What?” Ron asked, wondering if he had been too rough or if perhaps Draco felt humiliated by how it was done.

Instead, Draco gave Ron a small smile and then shook his head as if he was processing what had just transpired. “What do you think, Hermione? Was it good for you?”

Hermione sat up on her elbows, smiling at both boys in contentment. “Other than the crick in my back from being shagged on a desk, it was brilliant.”

“What the fuck?” Draco asked sharply, looked back at her aghast.

“What?” Hermione asked frantically, sitting up fully, and running her hands through her hair quickly as if there may be an insect in it.

And then Ron saw it, a bright red mark that looked like an ugly rash began growing across Hermione’s forehead.

Hermione seemed to sense its presence and moved to touch her forehead. She felt it trying to gauge what it was, and then she began to scratch.

Ron felt something tickle his nose, and so he scratched it. But then the tickle became worse, until it no longer tickled—it just itched like mad. He scratched harder, but the itching sensation began to spread across his face, and then down his neck.

A strangled cry came from Draco, and Ron looked up in shock to see the blond covered in red hives. They were all over his arse as well and then Ron looked down at his own cock to see it also covered with red splotchy rash-like marks, and Merlin, it itched like hell.

The itching was maddening, and they all found themselves scratching furiously, doing a bizarre dance as they tried to soothe themselves.

“What the hell? What’s wrong with us!??” Ron asked, trying to reach around his back to get a particularly bad spot.

Hermione had ripped her stockings to get at an itch near her calves, while Draco was cursing as he palmed his face carefully trying not to scratch with his nails.

“Someone’s cursed us!” he said angrily.

“But no one’s here but us,” Hermione said looking around, her eyes widening. “Ron… where’s Harry?”

“Well, he said he had to go run some errands…” Ron’s voice trailed off and then pain shot up his arm as he unconsciously slammed his hand into the desk in frustration.

Draco paused, his eyes growing wide, reflecting Ron and Hermione’s dawning realisation of what had occurred.

“Harry!”

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He was just about to return to his classroom, hoping that Granger and her little boyfriends were finished when the closest portrait screamed at him, demanding that he go to the headmaster’s office immediately.

As Snape approached the headmaster’s chambers, he got the distinct feeling something was off. Perhaps it was the fact that the centre of the castle, which was often the area where professors frequented during this hour was deadly silent, except for the distant sound of Peeves teasing some unfortunate souls down the hall.

And then there was the fact that the headmaster’s phoenix statue was already poised to take him up, without needing any prompting by a password. When he arrived, almost every professor was there. Dumbledore was speaking in a low tone, and when Snape entered, they all turned to look at him.

McGonagall stared back him with a stern scornful look. Professor Sprout looked scandalised, while Professor Flint gave him a pitiful shake of the head, averting his eyes away from Snape’s. Hagrid looked confused, a blank look on his face and then he dropped his eyes; Firenze stared daggers at him, making Snape glad he was standing on the far side of the group. The only one who looked sympathetic, albeit confused, was Poppy. There was an awkward silence as Dumbledore let his gaze fall on Snape, their eyes locking. Then Binns cleared his throat and muttered something about grading papers, and rushed past Snape with only a shifty glance. All the others followed quickly, stealing looks up at him as they exited.

He was hardly surprised. He had predicted that Potter would run and tell the headmaster everything. Especially since the boy knew that breaking the bond posed no real danger to any of them. Snape had been expecting the headmaster to dismiss him, but he hadn’t counted on him telling others about why.

“Albus…” McGonagall asked quietly.

“Minerva, please, we will talk later; Professor Snape and I need our privacy,” Dumbledore said to her.

McGonagall paused and stared at Snape one last time before exiting quickly like the others had.

Snape looked at the headmaster cautiously. “It appears as if I just missed a staff meeting.” A question in his voice.

“No, you did not,” Dumbledore said plainly.

Snape didn’t reply, but simply waited.

“You’re dismissed,” Dumbledore said with unflinching stare.

“But I just arrived,” Snape said, playing naïve.

“Severus, I think we both know when I said that you were dismissed, I meant that you are no longer welcome to teach at Hogwarts. I expect you to return to your quarters and pack, immediately. You have one hour before I call the Aurors.”

Snape stared at Dumbledore blankly before a genuine smile grew on his face. He chuckled dryly.

Dumbledore’s forehead wrinkled. “I’m sorry; I fail to see what is funny about any of this.”

“Really?” Severus asked.
“Perhaps you think crafting false notices to allow four underage students to have sex in your home during holiday break funny, but I do not.” Dumbledore’s voice was no longer serene, but threatening to crack with the just barely restrained anger that lay just under the surface.

“Is that what you told them?”

“No, Severus. I’m not going to bring scandal to this school. I merely informed them that a student has given me sufficient evidence that you have engaged in inappropriate behaviour with several students. I’ll let them form their own conclusions.”

Snape nodded. “I see, and is that really why I’m being dismissed?” he asked, his eyes holding the glint of a dare.

“Of course. Why else?” Dumbledore asked.

Snape sighed. “Ah, pity. It seems I suffered under the delusion that you’d finally tell the truth.”

Dumbledore gave Snape a sad smile. “I have nothing to hide, Severus; you, however, have proved very skilled in lying.”

“I’ve had an excellent teacher,” Snape said without hesitation.

Dumbledore’s eyes twinkled as he inched closer to Severus. “Insulting me will do you no good. You are wasting precious time; you should be packing.”

“Very well,” Snape said, turning to leave.

“And, you do realise, I will have to inform the Order of this. You will be voted out. Your poor judgment has compromised our goals.”

Snape’s lip curled, his own anger tempered by the comfort of knowing that such a threat would backfire for the old man. “I look forward to the vote. I’m sure they will also be very interested in your activities as well.”

Dumbledore raised his chin, waiting for Snape to reveal what he knew.

“For example, your use of inventions made under the alias Lord Custos to track a student. Hermione Granger of all people. Lying and forging a note so that she would wear a monitoring device for several weeks. And apparently you have the ability to monitor other things as well; although for the life of me, I’m at a loss about how exactly you are doing it. The Order, as well the Governors, may be interested to know that you probably have the entire school rigged so you can play Merlin.”

Dumbledore held up one long finger, pointing it at Snape. “How dare you. It is my charge to watch over the students of this school, and you’ve made it clear that you do not have their best interests in mind.”

“Their interests, or yours?” Snape said.

“My interests are theirs. But I wonder: what interests were you serving by doing what you did?” Dumbledore appeared disgusted.

“I think you already know the answer to that question,” Snape said.

“Oh, come now, Severus. Do you really think pulling Draco into their misguided relationship so that they could have an orgy in your home is really going to destroy Voldemort? I took you to be wiser
Snape felt his tongue loosen, his anger rising to the surface as he clenched his fists. “I know you believe in it, enough to try to stop it!”

“I have no idea what you are speaking of. Are you quite done?”

“You know, I do believe it’s all for the best. I was growing tired of pretending to benefit from your so-called benevolence. At least now, I will have only one mask to wear. I’ll see you at next Order meeting; until then, if anyone is looking for me, I will be at Grimmauld.”

“You can’t stay there, Severus,” Dumbledore said quickly.

“Oh? Watch me,” Snape said firmly.

“Don’t make this any more difficult than it has to be. I’ll be forced to call an emergency meeting tonight.”

“Really? Then you’re prepared to tell them everything, then? There’s so much more to tell.” Snape could hardly keep the satisfied look off of his face.

“I have nothing to hide,” Dumbledore stated simply.

“So, you won’t mind if I point out the number of times Potter’s life has been in danger under your watchful eye in the last five years. If in fact you are using your inventions to watch the students here for their ‘own good’, then why would he be in any danger at all?”

“Severus…” Dumbledore said, his voice strangely cold, devoid of emotion.

Snape tensed, ready for anything, his eyes trained on the old man’s face and wand hand at the same time. “Yes?”

“Get out.”

“Gladly,” Snape sneered before turning quickly to make long strides toward the door.

There was no regret, no fear, no guilt. Only a strange mixture of satisfaction that he had gotten under the old man’s skin, relief of being free from one Master, and concern about the tenuous and uncertain future that lay ahead for the wizarding world and Harry Potter.
Growing Pains

Fear is not afraid of you
But guilt's a language you can understand
I cannot explain to you
And anything I say or do
I hope the actions speak the words they can…

For my pride and my promise
For my lies and how the truth gets in the way
The things I want to say to you get lost before they come
The only thing that's worse than one is none.

-“In Between” by Linkin’ Park

As Harry reflected on his conversation with Dumbledore while he was walking down to Snape’s classroom, he had a sinking feeling he had made a huge mistake. The conversation itself had shed very little light on any of the questions he had intended to ask, but what was worse was that it had sparked even more.

For the first time since Dumbledore had ignored him the previous year Harry didn’t know what to make of the man. The way Dumbledore had spoken about dark and light magic as if they were absolute polar opposites with no grey in between disturbed him.

Harry’s own rigid views about dark and light matters had been shaken severely just the year before when he felt himself succumbing to Voldemort’s intrusion in his head. Sirius’s advice that everyone held dark and light within them was something he had embraced and drew strength from when he had felt the most empathetic to the emotions he sensed from Voldemort.

If there was one thing Harry was convinced of now as a result, it was that there were no absolutes.

He thought Ron had been misguided about the topic, so he had expected better from Dumbledore. What was worse was that now, Harry was sure that Dumbledore had lied to him.

Harry felt disoriented in his thoughts and was acutely aware of his surroundings all at once. As he continued to walk, he tried to push aside thoughts of the Headmaster deceiving him, searching for reasonable rationales for his behavior, for his lies.

Only there was one thing he couldn’t push aside. If Dumbledore was lying to him for a good reason, then Harry couldn’t blame Snape for not being fully truthful either. Perhaps Professor Snape wasn’t as bad as he had believed; perhaps he had even been telling the truth about trying to save Harry’s life.

Harry’s stomach tightened as approached the door to Snape’s classroom. He had no new information about the ritual, no leads about how to find it, and he had betrayed the trust of the others. Dumbledore didn’t even disclose how he had been monitoring things, telling Harry that it would comprise the safety of the school.

Harry felt as though he had broken the bond for nothing. He stared at the door, running his hands through his hair anxiously, trying run through how he was going to confess what he had done and face their scorn.
Perhaps he didn’t have to tell them that he broke the bond immediately...

He opened the door.

When he entered the classroom, he was flabbergasted to see Hermione, Ron, and Draco covered in red splotchy hives from head to toe. Their faces were swollen and they were all scratching terribly. They all turned to glower at him, Draco pulled his wand out, and Harry instinctively drew his and backed up.

“You stupid fuck!” Draco yelled, charging towards him.

“No, allow me, Malfoy,” Ron said, clenching his fist moving forward towards Harry. Hermione clutched onto Ron’s arm and brought her leg up to block Draco from charging ahead, while scratching herself with her other hand.

“Harry, what did you do?!” Harry’s inwardly groaned as he saw the hurt and disappointment in Hermione’s eyes. The look she was giving him pierced his heart, and he had to look away, only to fix his eyes on Ron’s angry scowl.

“It’s obvious, isn’t it?” Ron replied, glaring at Harry. “He squealed. Only you’re not affected like us!” he said bitterly, taking note that Harry’s skin remained unblemished.

Guilt and indignation battled within him at Ron’s accusation. He had good reason for telling Dumbledore, if only they could hear him out. Still, they all looked miserable, and he knew it was his fault. “I’m—I’m—”

“Sorry? Is that what you’re about to say? You think that fixes everything don’t you, Harry?” Hermione asked as she began rub her knuckles into a bad spot on her arm.

Harry winced. “We needed to find the ritual, and I thought that he could help us!”

“Oh, so you did it for our own good, did you? Is that your excuse for stabbing us in the back?” Draco asked, his eyes burning into Harry, his mouth twisted in anger. He palmed his neck furiously to relieve his itching, his normally flawless complexion swollen red with hives.

A lump grew in Harry’s throat as he struggled to respond. What could he say? “I didn’t think it would actually—”

“Cause a reaction?! Snape told us that it would! We stood here last night and told you specifically not to go tell Dumbledore, and what did you do the first chance you got?” Ron scolded, smacking at his chest to soothe his itching.

“I’m—”

“Save it, Potter!” Draco snapped, digging into his scalp. “You fucked up! It’s obvious your word means nothing!”

Harry turned around abruptly as the door swung open hard and then slammed shut. Snape walked briskly past him, not even glancing at him. His eyes were focused on the door of his private study. The four moved to follow him, with Harry following behind the other three at considerable distance.

Ron shot an angry glare back at Harry that made him wish the redhead would just punch him and get it over with.
“Professor, what are you doing?” Hermione asked anxiously as they watched Snape open a bag and enlarge it, spelling several contents from his study into it before heading to his bedroom and doing a general sweep.

“I’m leaving… I’ve been dismissed,” Snape replied simply as he continued to pack.

“You can’t leave!” Hermione cried.

Draco’s face tightened, but he remained silent as he watched the man pack. Harry’s eyes were drawn to his hand that continued to rub furiously at his pale arm. As if sensing Harry’s gaze on him, Draco turned away, walking past Snape’s desk to stand and look out of the study’s window.

“Professor… I’m—I’m sorry,” Harry stammered, feeling his head buzz and his nerves stand on end as he became aware and almost overwhelmed by the implications of what he had done.

“Just shut up, Harry! You’ve said enough!” Ron wouldn’t even look at Harry as he spoke.

Harry had only seen the redhead this mad once before, and it had taken them weeks to be on good speaking terms when that had happened. He tightened his toes, trying to focus on anything other than Ron’s anger, which always made his stomach do funny things. But the weight of what he had done was making it hard to concentrate on anything other than the redhead’s ire and what he had done.

“But Professor, what about the ritual? We can’t just give up now!” Hermione insisted, her voice rising in panic as she eyed him desperately, rubbing her arms against her breasts to discreetly soothe the itching there.

Harry drew in closer to hear what Snape was going to say in response.

“I will continue to search for it,” Snape said quietly. “What is most important is that you be prepared to perform it.”

“Could it be in Knockturn?” Hermione pressed.

“Perhaps,” Snape murmured before sighing in resignation. “I’ve been to Knockturn several times, but there is one shop in particular, Medius. It’s left of the Ghoul’s Tavern.”

“Medius?” Hermione repeated.

“Yes, there is a book there that… won’t allow me to purchase it,” Snape said in irritation.

“What do you mean?” Ron asked, rubbing his thigh furiously.

“I mean, when I go to touch it, it vanishes. The shop owner insists that it’s just attached to its dwellings, but I think it may hold something of importance pertaining to the ritual,” Snape said as he began floating books down from his bookcase into the seemingly bottomless bag.

“What’s the name of the book?” Hermione asked.

“Harnessing Power: The Wizard’s Almanac of Ancient Ceremonies and Rituals.”

“That must be it! Draco, that’s the almanac that I was going to send for!” Hermione said excitedly, lifting her leg to get at a spot below her knee as she looked over at Draco. Draco didn’t respond or turn around as he rubbed his neck.

“I doubt you can send for this, Miss Granger,” Snape said.
“We’ll just go retrieve ourselves, then,” Hermione resolutely.

“Professor, where are you going to go?” Harry asked tentatively, his body tightening as he braced himself for the Potion Master’s deprecation.

“I will be staying at Grimmauld,” he replied, not bothering to look up at Harry at all.

“Why aren’t you staying at your house?” Ron asked, scuffing his arm in frustration.

Snape paused, glancing up at Draco, who continued to stare out of the window.

“What is it?” Hermione asked, her voice apprehensive as her eyes darted from Snape to Draco.

Snape resumed packing. “It’s best if I stay at Headquarters. If you need me, that’s where I will be,” he finished.

“But what about this?!” Ron ran his hands over his swollen face.

“Ah yes, the bond has been broken, and you are suffering from the effects.”

“Yeah, we figured that out,” Ron glared at Harry. “How come Harry isn’t affected? He’s the one that ratted us out!”

“The one who breaks the bond doesn’t suffer the consequences.”

“And why the hell not?” Ron’s words were barely audible through his clenched teeth.

“Because in order to cease the effects of the hex caused by breaking the bond, the offending party must be punished,” Snape said, the shadow of a smirk on his face as he stared at Harry.

“How?” Harry asked resolutely. “Tell me, I’ll do it right now, I swear I will.”

Ron rolled his eyes at his offer. “Please don’t tell me it’s something painful, he loves pain.”

“Not this kind. He’ll have to suffer real pain.”

“What do you mean, like a beating? How severe?” Alarm made Hermione’s voice rise as she contorted herself to reach an itch in the middle of her back. Harry reached up to soothe it for her.

“Thanks,” she replied, reaching out to rub a place on Ron’s shoulder he had been trying to reach.

“Severe enough…” Snape continued, not taking note of anything but the bag he was packing.

“Like until he cries mercy?” Ron’s eyes reflected horror at Snape’s suggestion for the hex’s remedy.

“Or until he cries, whichever works…the point is that penance is due for his betrayal. Harsh, but not maimed, I would say,” Snape replied simply.

“That’s barbaric! “ Hermione looked paler than usual at the suggestion.

“Can you at least relieve us in the meantime?” Ron asked impatiently.

Snape sighed. “Yes, I can do an anti-inflammation spell to relieve the itching, but the hives won’t disappear until Potter makes amends.”

“Fine, I’ll do it,” Harry said determinedly.
“Damn right you will, you don’t have a choice!” Ron snarled, giving Harry a hateful glare. Harry took in Ron’s stare before dropping his eyes in shame.

Snape pulled out his wand, murmuring an anti-inflammation spell as he healed Hermione and then Ron. They both immediately stopped scratching. Ron gave Snape a grateful forced smile before turning and walking out.

Hermione sighed heavily, giving Harry a pitiful look before turning her attention back to Snape. “I’m really sorry Professor,” she said regretfully.

Snape didn’t answer just gave her a tight-lipped smile. She immediately reached out and gave him a tight hug. He didn’t appear to know how to respond at first, freezing up for a moment before returning the gesture with a small hug of his own. He let her go and then turned to resume packing. She turned to leave, but then paused at the door.

“Professor…” she asked.

“Yes?”

“The Protective Shielding Potion…was there another purpose for assigning it?”

Snape paused and considered her, a small impressed smirk on his face. “Very good Miss Granger. Yes, I had hoped that it may be of some use.”

“I thought so… I wondered what was it was really created for,” she said with a question in her voice.

Snape said, returning to his study and continuing to pack as they followed him. “The Protective Shielding Potion was created by wizarding soldiers for use during combat, so it’s meant to work in tandem with others.”

“Really?!” Hermione’s eyes were bright and focused on Snape, appearing very intrigued at this new information.

“Well, if they are wizards…why not just use their wands?” Harry asked.

“Sometimes wands are disabled, broken or taken. This spell was designed to deflect those with the intent to attack while those under its protection found cover,” Snape explained.

“But it’s not very practical, is it?” Hermione said, frowning. “I mean, for what we have to do.”

“Perhaps not, but it may come in handy at another time. Besides, it did serve one useful purpose,” Snape said with an amused smirk.

“And what was that?” she asked.

“It gave you an opportunity to spend time with Mr. Malfoy,” he said before returning to pack.

Hermione smiled, glancing over at Draco who was still staring out Snape’s window as if he was oblivious to everyone in the room.

“I suppose we should go and do whatever needs to be done to Harry, it’s already past curfew,” she said glancing at Harry in disappointment and then at Draco briefly before exiting.

“Professor, if you don’t mind, I’d like to speak to you… alone,” Harry said quietly, glancing up at Draco.
“What is it, Potter?” Snape sounded tired.

“Sir, please,” Harry said.

“I don’t have much time.” Snape said. “Mr. Malfoy, would you please give me and Mr. Potter some privacy?”

Draco slowly tore his eyes away from the window and glared at Harry as he palmed his right arm. He skulked towards them slowly, pausing before Snape, staring at the man’s wand and where he was scratching to signal he wanted the healing spell that was used on Ron and Hermione. Snape pursed his lips at Draco’s silent command but did the healing spell anyway. When he was done, Draco gave Harry one last dangerous look and then exited.

When Draco left, Harry suddenly found his shoes very interesting, unable to look at Snape in the heavy silence. “They hate me,” he sighed.

“You broke their trust, what do you expect?” Snape said curtly, rustling his things as he continued to pack.

“I thought I was helping… I thought Dumbledore could help us,” Harry set his jaw as if ready for a debate.

“And now?”

Harry shook his head. “Now--well now, I don’t know what to think."

“I can’t say I am surprised. I’m actually mildly impressed you made it this far without telling him,” Snape remarked with a hint of amusement in his voice.

Harry was taken aback, and forced his eyes to look at Snape despite the wave of guilt that coursed through him like nausea. “Why would you involve me if you knew I was going to tell?”

“Because some things are worth trying, no matter what the cost.”

“You think really we can do it, then? You think you’ll be able to find the ritual?”

“It’s worth trying. That’s all you can ever do, Potter… try.”

Another nauseous wave of guilt rose up even stronger than before, and he sighed quietly, cursing himself. “I’m sorry, Sir. I didn’t believe you. After you lied about the ritual… and my mum,” Harry found himself staring at his feet once more.

“I didn’t lie about your mother, Potter,” Snape said wearily. “I’ve saved a memory of Lupin telling me of it. You can view it if you like,” Snape went to his desk, unlocking it. Here,” he said withdrawing a vial filled with familiar silvery liquid, handing it to Harry.

“I’ll make sure Lupin contacts you as well,” Snape added.

Once again, for the hundredth time since Snape had confessed he had been with his mother, Harry tried to picture the two of them together, and couldn’t, not at all.

“Sir…” Harry began cautiously.

“Yes, Potter?” Snape stood waiting.

Harry swallowed. “Did you love her?”
Snape stared back at Harry, seemingly frozen before finally nodding. “Yes. I loved her very much,” he said in an uncharacteristically soft voice.

Harry slowly nodded his understanding, not sure of what to say next. Instead, Snape spoke.

“Po—Harry… You broke their trust. Whether you have to face the Dark Lord through this prophecy, or through your own, you will need your friends. Your strength will come from love. That’s the Dark Lord’s weakness.”

“Love?”

“No, Potter… trust. Without it, there can be no love. The Dark Lord rules in fear. No one respects him. They fear him. There is no true power in that. Trust is the foundation to anything meant to last… respect, friendship, love. Remember that.”

The weight of Snape giving him advice on the Dark Lord without any contempt or antagonism was almost overwhelming. He didn’t know what to say, and before he could think of anything, Snape had resumed packing, his back to him once more.

“Sir,” Harry said quietly.

“Yes, Potter?”

“Dumbledore said you gave Hermione the locket,” he posed with a question in his voice.

Snape turned to face him. “And you believe that?”

Harry shook his head.

“So, what do you think?” Snape asked, staring down at Harry with one eyebrow raised in interest.

“I think he’s lying, but, the question is why? Why would the Headmaster lie to me?”

“Did you ever wonder why the previous prophecy failed to occur?”

“You said it was my Dad’s fault,” Harry said, his eyes narrowed.

“I may have overstated that a bit, on the surface, yes, it was his fault…but—”

“Someone else interfered?” Harry offered.

“Yes, I believe someone did…” Snape said, letting the not so subtle hint about the identity of the person speak for itself.

Harry nodded his understanding. “Yes, Sir.”

“You’ll discover, Potter, that despite your idol worship of the Headmaster, he is not Merlin. He can’t see everything. It’ll do you good to keep in mind that this castle is magical. It has a life of its own with its own secrets. It will not allow magic to be used against it in many places. The Room of Requirement is one such place; the corridor on the right side of the library is another, as well as the dungeons.”

His mind and senses flooded with sudden awareness, all Harry could do was give Snape a small grateful smile before turning to leave. Left of the classroom, Draco was standing outside of Snape’s door, a fiery look on his face. Harry held his breath as he walked past him; almost expecting the blond to punch him, instead Draco moved quickly into Snape’s study and shut the door behind him.
Anger, fear, regret, and the threat of panic coursed through Draco as he entered Snape’s study, watching the man finishing up his packing.

“Draco…” Snape studied the boy in concern.

Before Snape could say anything else, Draco blurted out “What will you tell Him?”

“The truth… as much of it as I can; that I was dismissed. In light of the fear of the rising threats committed by Death Eaters, I can inform him that there were complaints about my presence as a Hogwarts instructor and as a result I was dismissed.”

“You’ll be useless to him. He’ll kill you,” Draco said, clenching his robe tightly in one hand as if he were bracing himself.

“No, he won’t. I’m still a member of the Order. I have much value as long as that remains so,” Snape said firmly.

“And what about me? I haven’t got anything to tell him, nothing he wants to hear. What’s going to happen to me… to my parents?” his voice rising considerably as he spoke. He reflexively grit his teeth as he searched Snape’s face for any sign of hope.

“I will try to keep his attention away from you for as long as possible. I’ll let him know that you are very close to forging a close friendship with the others and as result much closer to finding out if they had any plans to fulfill the prophecy.”

“He’ll figure it out! The prophecy calls for four people. He’s not stupid,” Draco said as if Snape was being daft.

“Yes, Draco, but he is self-absorbed and cocky. He’d never believe that a boy would try to outsmart him, the worst thing he may suspect is that you’ve grown too close to them and thus pose a risk of fulfilling the prophecy unintentionally.”

“And then what?” Draco said in exasperation. “I’m still dead!” Draco ran his hands over his forehead and through his hair, trying to force himself calm down.

“Perhaps not…perhaps he would spare your life and try to prevent the prophecy by making you unacceptable to the other three.”

“What are you saying?” Draco asked, narrowing his eyes trying to decipher what Snape was getting at.

“I’m saying that sometimes you have to make sacrifices if you want to protect what you value the most. Have you learned anything in the last few months? Have you come to value anything at all?”

Draco stared back at Snape, silent for a few moments.

“I think you have,” Snape said, watching him.

“And what about Peter?” Draco asked, ignoring his last statement. “He’s probably told Him by now, and if not he will soon,” he said anxiously, searching Snape’s face for some reassurance.

Snape looked at Draco plainly. “He’s being taken care of, but if he does disclose what he knows to the Dark Lord, you’ll need to be prepared.”
“For what?”

“For anything, Draco.”

Draco held his breath. He felt a quickening sense of dread as several dozen scenarios ran through his head.

“I will do my best; that is all I can tell you. I trust that you will do yours as well when the time comes,” Snape said resolutely, before moving into his private quarters again.

Draco stood rooted in place before moving slowly to the door.

When Snape turned and returned to his bedroom, Draco inhaled sharply and fixed his face into an unreadable expression before exiting to find the others.

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Harry watched as Draco emerged from Snape’s study with a deep frown. He decided to hang back in the far corner, watching as the blond made his way over to Ron and Hermione, who were both waiting by the classroom door, Ron was shooting Harry nasty looks while Hermione wore a sad worried expression on her face.

“We do this now,” Draco said, giving Harry a once over and leaving no room for refusal from any of them.

“Where?” Ron asked, glancing at Harry.

“Outside… the forest.”

And then they all heard footsteps, their eyes darting between each other in apprehension.

“Oh no, there’s someone coming!” Hermione said in a hushed voice, pushing them back.

“Shit! Hide in the storage closet,” Ron urged.

They all rushed towards it, pushing each other, Harry folding himself inside last, closing the door behind him. They all clamored to press their faces against the wood panels to peek, but it was Harry who had the best view, his eye rest next to the crack in the door.

“There’s time is up Severus,” Harry heard Dumbledore say.

“I was just leaving,” Snape said airily, with just a hint of resentment in his voice, before he sighed in exaggeration. “Really, Albus, I didn’t think you’d escort me out.”

“Of course I plan to see you out; you’ve proved yourself untrustworthy,” Dumbledore said.

“That makes two of us,” Snape retorted smugly.

“I’m not the one bearing the mark of a Dark Lord, Severus. I’m not the one who got the love of my life killed,” Dumbledore countered.

“Oh, that’s low, even for you, Albus. You know I had no idea…” Snape said, his voice finally breaking with anger.

“Exactly…yet you ran and told Him anyway. The prophecy could have been about anyone, and you didn’t even stop to consider the implications of your actions. And here we stand today and nothing’s
changed. You haven’t learned a thing, Severus. It’s evident that you’re not fit to teach students, you can’t even learn from your own mistakes.”

“Oh, I’ve learned. I’ve learned a great deal… I’ve learned that unchecked power is dangerous whether the wizard be dark or light,” Snape replied.

“Severus, the time for talking is over. Your chance at redemption has come and gone, and now I will bid you farewell. The Aurors are always on standby and you will find that if I need them, they will be very sympathetic to my concerns. As you know Azkaban is currently full of people who would love to get their hands on a known Death Eater,” Dumbledore said, his voice cold with warning.

“Is that a threat?”

Dumbledore chuckled. “No, Severus, it’s simply a fact. Now, do you have all of your belongings?”

“Yes.”

“Good, I will allow you to take the Floo to wherever you like, after which it will be sealed,” he instructed.

“Excellent,” Snape said sarcastically.

“I am truly sorry, dear friend,” Dumbledore said sadly.

“Yes… you are.”

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When they heard Dumbledore leave, the four scrambled out, sneaking outside the castle, walking towards the Forest.

“That was horrible!” Hermione’s voice dripped with disdain. “The way he was talking to Snape… that’s emotional abuse! I can’t believe Snape puts up with that!”

“He probably doesn’t even notice, I mean he’s pretty rude and tactless himself,” Ron sounded dismissive.

Draco glared at him.

They all walked in silence going deeper and deeper into the Forest as they pondered the meaning of the conversation.

“Didn’t Snape say that Harry’s dad not fulfilling the prophecy got Harry’s parents killed?” Ron asked, glancing up at Hermione.

“Well, he must have meant indirectly,” Hermione shook her head. “Because there’s no question that Voldemort killed Harry’s parents, he left his mark on him.”

“So, Snape told Voldemort to kill—”

“No, Harry,” Hermione interrupted. “He didn’t tell Voldemort to kill anyone… Dumbledore said that Snape ran and told Voldemort about a prophecy.”

Harry huffed. “But if Snape told Voldemort about my prophecy, then it is his fault,” Harry argued. “He knew that telling Voldemort would probably lead to an execution!”
“Maybe it’s more complicated than that,” Draco finally spoke.

They all paused, staring at Draco.

“What do you mean?” Harry asked.

Draco sighed. “It sounded like Dumbledore was saying that Snape told the Dark Lord about your prophecy not thinking it would lead to the deaths of your mum and dad.”

“And what do you know about my prophecy, Malfoy?” Harry eyed Draco guardedly. Lucius Malfoy and the tragedy of last year’s fight in the Ministry were suddenly vivid as if they had occurred only yesterday.

“What do you mean what do I know about it? You got my father locked up over it!”

“I got your dad locked up? He did that all by himself!” Harry said angrily, balling his fists, mouth twisting in a sneer.

“Stop it! Both of you!” Hermione gave both of them a stern look of warning. “Harry, I think Draco is right.”

“What do you mean?” Ron asked.

“Listen, Dumbledore said something about Snape’s redemption. Maybe Voldemort did kill Harry’s parents because Snape told him about the prophecy—”

“Bastard—,” Harry said under his breath.

“But Harry, prophecies don’t mention names, do they? It’s one of the reasons why—”

“We know, you think they’re dodgy,” Ron said.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Right. Listen, it was Trelawney’s voice we heard when Snape showed us the other prophecy…”

“Yeah?” Harry asked.

“So, maybe she said your prophecy and the other prophecy back to back,” Hermione, suggested.

“What difference would that make?” Ron asked in confusion.

“Well, what if Snape was around when Trelawney said both prophecies? I mean, how would Snape even know about the prophecy he showed us unless he had heard it for himself?” she asked, her voice reflected the same excitement she often expressed when she deciphering a Runes text.

Ron snorted. “Not so fast, Hermione. A lot of people know about Harry’s prophecy and they’ve never heard it for themselves. And, Snape said that the prophecy was very old and could have applied to four groups of people. Besides, what’s the likelihood of Snape hearing Trelawney tell Harry’s prophecy and other one at the same time?”

“Will you just listen for one moment?” She gave Ron an annoyed look.

“Fine, go on…” Ron sighed wearily.

“OK, let’s just say Snape did hear both prophecies, back to back…”
“Alright,” Harry folded his arms, waiting for her to get to the point.

“Well, think about it. If you heard two prophecies one right after another, would you ever think they were about the same person?”

“No...” Ron shook his head in understanding.

“I suppose not,” Harry muttered as an idea of what could have occurred began to form. He gasped quietly.

“Right, so Snape probably would have thought that one of the prophecies applied to himself, Harry’s mum, Harry’s dad, and Sirius,” Hermione was cautiously watching him as he continued to process what she was saying.

“And that would mean that Snape probably thought that the other prophecy was about some random stranger,” Harry murmured to himself absently.

Hermione nodded, pleased that he finally understood.

“That still doesn’t explain what Snape said about the prophecy being old, it would have dated before Trelawney was even born,” Ron argued.

“Right, but there’s nothing in Divination that says prophecies can’t be repeated,” Hermione said.

“How do we know that unfulfilled prophecies don’t get repeated over and over again until they finally come to fruition?”

They all stood staring at each other, considering that possibility.

Harry shook his head. “Even if all of that is true, how do you explain why Snape ran and told Voldemort about the second prophecy?”

Hermione shrugged reluctantly, her eyes intent and focused as she thought about it.

“Snape probably thought he was protecting himself and Harry’s mum by telling the Dark Lord about the second prophecy. The best way to lie is to give partial truths,” Draco explained.

They all stared at him, disturbed by his explanation.

“You know, that actually makes sense, Malfoy,” Ron turned to Harry. “So really you were right, Harry, Snape led He Who Must Not Be Named to your parents.”

“No, Ron, Peter led Voldemort to Harry’s parents,” Hermione corrected.

Harry felt his anger flash at the mention of Peter and he couldn’t help but narrow his eyes, wondering where the rat was at the moment.

Draco grimaced, staring at Harry. “Is that true?”

“Yeah.”

Draco shook his head. “So, shouldn’t Dumbledore be blaming Peter instead of Snape?! he asked rhetorically, his brow furrowing.

“Yeah... that is pretty rotten,” Ron agreed.

Harry huffed. It seemed too simple to let Snape off the hook completely. “Well, Snape did sort of
lead Voldemort to my parents,” he said defensively.

“But not on purpose, Harry,” Hermione insisted. “It was stupid, but not intentional, especially if he loved her.”

“Oh, so now we’re sympathising with Snape for being a Death Eater as well?” Harry asked in exasperation.

“He obviously feels horrible for it! He didn’t have to come back here, especially if Dumbledore guilt trips him like that all the time!” Hermione’s nose wrinkled in disgust at Dumbledore’s behavior.

“Dumbledore probably knows more than we do about him…maybe Snape deserves it,” Harry said without conviction. He wasn’t even sure why he was defending Dumbledore any more, it seems more reflexive and out of habit than heartfelt at this point.

“And maybe you’re a git!” Draco snapped, stepping closer to Harry threatening, his eyes angry and his arms stiff at his sides as if he were restraining himself from throttling Harry.

“Oh yeah? And why do you care what I think about Snape?” Harry asked Draco.

“Because people change!” Draco practically yelled in Harry’s face. “And you’re too thick to see that. I don’t even know why we’re talking to you right now. This is all your fault!” Draco was irate, the stress on his face visible.

“Look, I told you—”

“Yeah, you told us you’re sorry. Well, we’ll just see about that. On your knees, right here, and take off your shirt,” he ordered, pointing to the ground.

“Draco, it’s freezing!” Hermione’s eyes were solicitous as she glanced up at Harry.

“I don’t care! I’m not going back in there covered in hives. Do you know what that’ll look like? We’re the only three that have them,” Draco insisted.

Ron lifted his robe to slide out his belt.

Harry felt like his stomach was in his chest. He was ready to do anything to ease their suffering, and as he gazed on their red swollen faces he knew what he had to do. He just wanted it to be over with, so he removed his shirt and dropped to his knees without another word. He tried to concentrate on the trees before him, instead of the cold air shaking him to the bones, his back tensing trying to anticipate the pain to come. He was anxious, and he folded his lips, placing his hands on his thighs as he waited for it.

Ron shook his head and swung back but stopped short in mid-air, his face twisted in frustration.

“Dammit, Harry…I can’t fucking do this!”

“Give it here, I’ll do it,” Draco held out his hand. Ron gave him the belt, averting his eyes towards the trees.

Draco didn’t waste a moment, striking Harry hard and swift on the upper back. Harry yelped but steadied himself, trying to focus even harder on the landscape before him, allowing the pain to dissipate, but before he could Draco struck again, this time much harder, and Harry had to fight from jumping, bracing himself so for the full impact of the next one.

“Why? Why would you fucking go and tell him? Huh?!”
“I’m sorry… Draco, I’m…”

“Sorry doesn’t fucking cut it!” Draco’s voice rose in anger as he continued. “Do you know what’s at stake for me?” He brought the belt down against Harry’s back even harder than before.

“Do you know how much shit I’ve gone through to do this? What would happen if this got out to the wrong people?”

Harry held his breath as Draco struck his back again and again. The sting of it burned fiercely. He could tell that the blond was losing control by the high octave and tremble in his voice. More than the pain he felt in his flesh, Harry felt the guilt nearly overtake him as tears welled up in his eyes. It pained him to hear Draco sound so hurt.

“I thought you understood… I thought you, of all people, would respect that my parents are in danger,” he said as he continued to strike Harry. “Why would you trust Dumbledore over us? Over someone like Snape who is trying to help you?”

He didn’t know what to say, and the searing pain in his back made it difficult to speak but he had to, he had to reassure Draco, and let him know he was sorry. “I’m—”

“Fuck you, Harry… fuck you and your sorries… fuck you,” Draco sobbed as his voice cracked. Harry looked up through tear blurred eyes to see Draco’s hands. They were shaking and Draco’s eyes were downcast as if he were afraid to look at any of them. He dropped the belt and walked away towards the trees until he disappeared completely from Harry’s sight.

Harry kneeled on the frozen ground, his back striped and burning as he dug his nails into his thighs. He felt frozen by pain, guilt and fear of what his betrayal had done to Draco. He wanted to run after him, and tell him he was sorry, but he felt helpless. His heart ached that right now his word meant nothing. If he could take it all back he would, but he knew he couldn’t, all he had to offer was himself, his endurance of whatever punishment had to be dealt.

He couldn’t even look up at Hermione and Ron, but he heard their breathing over him and then saw Hermione’s foot beside him as she picked up Ron’s belt to resume what Draco had started.

“We have to finish this,” he heard her say, the sound of apprehension about what she was about to do evident in her voice. “I hate this, Harry… I hate that you’re making us do this,” she said softly, her voice shaky as she came to stand very close behind him.

“Go on, get it over with,” Harry choked out.

He heard her take a deep breath and then rear the belt back. It landed with a loud smack against his back and Harry let out a small groan, not fully expecting that amount of force from her. He could sense more than hear the anguished effort of each lash until finally she broke, her tears audible. She sniffed, and then dropped the belt. And then she was walking away, towards the forest where Draco had disappeared.

Hearing Hermione’s tears was his breaking point and Harry began to sob with his whole body. He felt emotionally torn down to the point that he could no longer feel the cold air surrounding him, only a raw searing pain that ripped at his insides, almost matching the pain he felt in his back.

“Ron,” Harry whispered brokenly seeing the anguished expression on the redhead’s face as he picked the belt up.

Ron’s face wore a deep scowl and he swore under his breath before circling behind Harry. Harry heard him draw back the belt and before he had time to prepare for it, it cut into his flesh. Harry
yelled out at the force of it and fell forward for a moment, only to repositioning himself on his knees for the rest of it.

“Damn you, Harry,” Ron said.” You always think you know best, don’t you? That you’re always in the right. You’re not always right, Harry,” Ron chided as he dealt out two more harsh lashes.

Harry flinched uncontrollably, the pain was searing, but the hurt in Ron’s voice was worse. He wanted it to go away. “I know, Ron… I know,” he choked out through tears.

“No, you don’t. It’s always about you… well now it’s about us, all of us,” Ron said.

Harry rocked back and forth as he grit his teeth, bracing himself for the rest of it. He would endure, even if he wanted nothing more than to collapse on the ground and empty his stomach.

Ron didn’t say another word as he laid into Harry, each lash landing in a different place, as hard as the last until copious tears were running unchecked down Harry’s face from the pain and scorn in each stripe. He didn’t know how to fix this, the stripes would heal, but a wild desperate fear began to take root that his betrayal would not be so easily mended.

And then all of a sudden, the whipping stopped. Harry opened his wet eyes and looked up at Ron. The redhead’s face was no longer covered in hives, but his face was still red for an entirely different reason. He was upset and he looked as if he was on the verge of tears.

Ron stood over him staring down at him for what felt like several minutes before falling to his knees beside him and pulling him into a fierce hug, rubbing his back as he did.

“I’m sorry,” Harry said once more, knowing no matter how many times he said it may never be enough.

“I know that, but Draco…” Ron looked off to where the blond had walked.

Harry looked up at Ron, caught off guard.

“Well, Malfoy, whatever… he’s in tough spot, Harry. You know he could get killed over this?”

“I know that! We all can!” Harry said, feeling guilt stab at him once more.

“Yeah but—”

“Ron, I know what he’s risking, that’s exactly why I did what I did. I don’t want us screw this up. It’s obvious there’s something to the prophecy, we all felt something, I thought I was helping!”

“Well, did Dumbledore give you anything for all of this trouble?” Ron asked anxiously.

Harry’s eyes fell and he shook his head. “No, nothing. And I think Snape was telling the truth… about everything.”

Ron nodded. “Sorry, mate.”

“You know what Dumbledore said?” Harry almost whispered, staring at his knees.

“What?”

“He said that you were right,” Harry studied Ron’s face for reaction.

“About what?”
“About dark and light magic. He said that we should have never been fooling with dark magic,” Harry stared at Ron waiting for a smug response.

Instead, Ron gazed out over the trees, contemplating Harry’s words. “You know what I think? I think I didn’t know what the hell I was talking about when I said that,” Ron said. “Don’t get me wrong, Harry, I don’t think I’ll be taking my N.E.W.T. in DADA but…this doesn’t feel bad or evil… Actually, it’s almost the opposite.”

“What do you mean?” Harry asked, surprised at Ron’s admission.

“When we’re all together, it feels sort of… good,” he said the last chuckling.

“What’s funny about that?” Harry asked.

“I just never thought I’d ever say being around Malfoy felt good.”

Harry gave him a small knowing smile. He understood exactly what Ron meant. “It’s funny how quickly things can change, eh?”

“Yeah, too quick if you ask me,” Ron said his voice revealing some anxiety. “I almost wish I could slow it down.”

Harry gave Ron a puzzled look, confusion setting in as he anticipated what Ron was about to say. Still he listened to see if they were thinking the same thing.

Ron sighed. “Harry, I’m not sure where all of this is headed and to be honest… it makes me a bit uneasy.”

Harry felt some relief that Ron shared his anxiety. He nodded in understanding. “You’re not the only one. But, if it feels right and it’s working, there must be something to it, right?”

“Yeah,” Ron said. “There’s definitely something to it.”

They sat in silence for a few more moments when Ron rose, brushing dirt from his trousers. “Come on, let’s go see about them,” he said, motioning his head in the direction where Draco and Hermione had gone.

Harry winced as he rose slowly to his feet, picking up his shirt and shaking it out before putting it back on, the cloth material of it making him feel as if he were being punished all over again.

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When they made it over to the trees, Harry noticed that Draco was leaning against the trunk with a stick in his hand, twiddling it between his fingers, while Hermione sat beside him, appearing as if she wanted to comfort him but was restraining herself.

She looked up when they stopped just right behind them.

“Hi,” Harry said tentatively.

Hermione gave Harry a steady look that said everything. She was upset, angry, and tired.

“I know you don’t want to hear my apology, but please hear me out,” Harry said.

Ron leaned against the tree that Draco was sitting beneath, while Hermione and Draco set their gaze on Harry, waiting.
“I know you guys told me not to go to Dumbledore, and I really didn’t want to, but… well, here’s the truth: I was scared.” Harry blurted out, looking at the ground, embarrassed to look at them.

“Harry—”

Harry sighed, forcing himself to meet their eyes. “No, Hermione, just listen. Snape presents us with some obscure and random prophecy that he admitted has failed before, ending in the deaths of everyone involved. Deaths! The people who attempted this before us died! And we don’t even know how they died, just that they did. And then on top of that he tells us he doesn’t know how we’re going to do it. But when we were all together that last night at his house, we all felt the effects of it. You guys saw your magic and I— I nearly passed out. I was scared! I did what I did to protect you… all of you,” he said staring down at Draco.

Draco gritted his teeth, and kept silent.

“Harry, we understand but it’s just that… now that Snape is gone, we’re all we have. There is no one else. We can’t trust anyone, not Dumbledore, not the Professors, not even our own friends. No one would understand what we’re doing; they can’t even accept the three of us together. Do you know what would happen if this got out?” Hermione pressed.

Harry nodded. “Yeah, I do, Hermione. And I had no intention of this getting out, I swear, I didn’t. But I figured that Dumbledore already knew most of it anyway, since he gave you the locket, and he’s been watching all of us.”

“And what did he have to say about that?” Hermione asked.

Harry sighed heavily, feeling forlorn, he still couldn’t believe Dumbledore had lied to him. He gulped. “He lied, and said that he didn’t give it to you, he said that Snape gave you the locket.”

Hermione scoffed while Ron shook his head.

Draco finally looked up, his face set in a scowl. “Well there you go… Father was right; he is a shady old bastard.”

Harry didn’t reply just made circles in the dirt with his foot.

“What else did he say?” Hermione asked.

“Well, he said that dark magic can’t win over dark magic; it can only reinforce it. He said that it corrupts anyone who dabbles in it.”

Draco scoffed. “And what about wizards of the so-called light that use their magic to hurt people?”

“Yeah, I said the same thing to see what he would say,” Harry explained. “He said that talk like that was the dangerous logic that dark wizards use to justify themselves. He said the idea that dark magic can be used for good is a lie.”

Draco shook his head, rolling his eyes. “Figures.”

“What else did he say, Harry?” Hermione pressed.

“Well, he said my magic comes from love but that sexual magic is like the opposite, and that there’s no love in sexual magic.”

“I don’t believe that,” Hermione protested.
Harry shrugged. “Well, I’m just telling you what he said. He also said that sexual magic gives off its own light… but he called it the dark twin to love’s light.”

“That must have been freaky… talking about sex with Dumbledore,” Ron said.

Harry smiled. “Yeah, not the most comfortable topic.”

“Well, did he say anything else?” Hermione asked.

Harry nodded. “Yeah… he said something weird.”

“What?” Ron asked.

“He said, I had a purpose. That my prophecy was the only right way to beat Voldemort. He said that it was my destiny.”

“Your destiny?” Ron and Hermione both repeated, staring at Harry in disbelief.

Harry sighed. “I know, strange, isn’t it? Especially since Dumbledore is the one who said that prophecies aren’t law. He also said that I shouldn’t be worried about dying, because everyone dies.”

“That’s a pretty fucked up thing to say,” Draco said.

“Well, he made it sound so logical,” Harry reasoned.

Draco scoffed. “Of course he did, it’s what he does, twists bullshit until it sounds noble and good. It’s one of the most annoying Gryffindor traits—”

“Draco!” Hermione exclaimed.

Draco rolled his eyes but didn’t say anything else.

“He actually said that he thinks you’re going to die, Harry?” Hermione asked anxiously.

Harry shook his head. “No, he didn’t say that, not exactly, but he did tell me that I shouldn’t be worried about death. He said he had faith in me, and that if by chance I did die…” Harry paused.

“What? What did he say, Harry?” Ron urged.

Harry sighed. “Well, he just said that how we die can define who we are in life just as much as how we live.”

“More troll dung!” Draco exclaimed. “Dying only says one thing… you lost.”

“That’s not true,” Harry said firmly. “Many people die, it doesn’t mean they lost! It can mean giving your life for something greater than just yourself. You can win in death.”

“But you can’t bloody well enjoy your victory, can you?” Draco shot back.

Harry looked as if he were about to say something when Hermione interrupted.

“I think we need to make another vow,” she suggested.

“No more magical vows for me,” Draco said quickly.

“No... this one will be sworn on our word, and that will have to be just as strong as any vow,” Hermione continued.
“What good is it if we can’t all keep it?” Draco said. Harry felt his cheeks burn in shame.

“I swear to you…”

“You’ll have to prove it! And I’m not sure you can,” Draco said.

“Fine, I will… I’ll do anything, I’m not untrustworthy, I swear I’m not,” Harry said looking to Hermione and Ron for confirmation.

Ron sighed. “He really isn’t, Malfoy… sometimes he’s a bit thick though…”

“And stubborn,” Hermione added.

“But he’s a true friend, one of the best a mate could have,” Ron added giving Harry a small smile.

Harry smiled appreciatively. “Thanks.”

“Come, let’s shake on it,” she said, putting her hand in front of all of them. The boys all looked at each other and then at her. Harry’s hand covered hers in solidarity and then Ron laid his hand over Harry’s. Draco’s stared at them and grunted, laying his hand over Ron’s.

“Alright, we swear right here and now that no matter what, we’ll never betray each other, the bond remains a secret,” Hermione said.

“And that we’ll continue to work on it and try to find the ritual…” Harry added.

“And if necessary we’ll protect each other. No matter what.” Ron said, looking around them all, his eyes finally resting on Draco who shifted uncomfortably, refusing to return Ron’s stare. Hermione and Harry nodded in agreement and finally Draco looked up and nodded.

“I swear,” Hermione said.

“I swear,” Harry said.

“I swear,” Ron said.

“I swear,” Draco said softly.

As their hands dropped a strange calmness settled over all of them as if a quiet understanding that needed no words had been met. The anger and tension from early had dissipated completely, and Draco returned to sit against the tree, this time the other three joining him, Hermione to his left, Harry to his right, and Ron next to Hermione, his back against the tree, staring up at the castle.

After several minutes had past, Hermione spoke. “I think dating is the best way to continue to work on the bond until we find the ritual.”

“Dating?” Ron asked with obvious skepticism.

“Yes, we could all start seeing each other to maximise the bond’s effects.”

“You mean fall in love,” Ron said almost accusingly.

“Is that so terrible, Ron?” Hermione asked.

“You can’t make yourself fall in love, Hermione,” Ron countered.

“Maybe not, but you can get closer to it. It can’t hurt,” she said, glancing at Draco.
Draco smirked at her and then quickly looked away.

“That’s the plan then?” Harry asked.

“Yes, in the meantime we can plan on how we’re going to make sure we get to Knockturn, retrieve the almanac, and get back here during the Hogsmeade trip,” she finished.

“I can’t go out with Malfoy!” Ron protested half-heartedly.

Draco turned his head, looking back at Ron affronted. “You go out with Harry!”

“That’s different—he’s my best mate,” Ron said defensively.

Draco shook his head.

“You don’t have to make it obvious, Ron, maybe you two can meet up once a week to play chess or something,” Hermione suggested.

“Not a bad idea,” Draco said.

Ron looked at Draco and frowned. “Fine, but just chess, I’m not writing him love notes or holding his hand.”

Draco rolled his eyes.

“And, Hermione, you’re going to regret suggesting this later,” Ron threatened.

“Promise?” Hermione said playfully.

Ron smiled.

“How are we going to do this though, Dumbledore’s watching… and he obviously doesn’t want us meeting up,” Draco said.

“I don’t think we’ll have to worry about Dumbledore,” Harry said.

“Why not?” Draco asked.

“When I told him we couldn’t find the ritual he seemed pleased.”

“He thinks it’s a dead end?” Hermione asked.

“Yeah, he thinks we need the ritual and I think he thinks as long as we don’t find it, it’s not dangerous for us to be around each other.”

“Which means we really do need to find it,” Ron said.

“Still, I don’t like the idea of him watching us…” Draco said with a visible shudder.

“We’ll just have to be strategic,” Hermione said.

“How? Apparently he has eyes everywhere,” Ron said, glancing back up at the castle apprehensively.

“Well, not everywhere, not out here,” Harry said.

“The forest? Are you serious?!” Ron looked back at Harry in incredulity.
“Yes…I am. Snape also said that the corridor by the library…”

“Oh yes, that’s definitely true,” Hermione smiled secretly at Draco.

“Is that where you and Malfoy were fooling around during your study sessions?” Ron asked bitterly.

“Oh Ron, we didn’t actually do anything… well, not really,” Hermione said, averting her eyes.

“Please spare me the details,” Ron said bitterly.

“Sorry,” Hermione said softly.

Ron grunted.

“There’s the Room of Requirement…I don’t think he has eyes there."

“And probably not the greenhouse either,” Draco said giving Hermione a small smile.

Hermione’s smile faded. “But aside from Dumbledore, I think it’s going to be hard for the four of us to be around each other and not raise suspicion.”

“Well, you’ll have to find a way to explain it to your fellow Gryffindorks, but I don’t have to worry about it, not really.”

“And why not?” Harry asked.

Draco chuckled, shaking his head.

“What is it?” Hermione asked.

“Nothing, my housemates are just fine with it, is all.”

“But why?” Harry pressed.

“Yeah Malfoy, why would your friends be fine with you hanging out with us all of a sudden?” Ron questioned.

They all stared at him. Draco took in a deep breath. “First, let’s get something straight. They aren’t my friends, they just think they are. Second…well, this is kind of mental, but…”

“What?” Harry asked, narrowing his eyes.

“They think I’m spying on you three,” Draco said with a small smile to indicate he thought it was funny.

Harry, Ron and Hermione all wrinkled their brows in question.

“For what?” Harry asked.

“For the Dark Lord,” Draco said, his voice strained.

“What?” Hermione smiled before laughing.

Ron snorted. “That’s a good one, Malfoy.”

Harry gave Draco a half-cocked smile. “Actually, it did cross my mind, when you first tried to get to know us. I figured you were up to something like that.”
“Oh yeah, I remember that!” Ron said, amused at the memory of Harry being suspicious about Draco’s intentions.

“Harry can be a bit paranoid. We all thought you were up to no good, but really, the Dark Lord, Harry?” Hermione gave Harry a bemused head shake.

Harry shrugged.

Draco gave Harry a dismissive smile.

“Well, you were an asshole,” Harry said a bit defensively.

“And now?” Draco asked with a hesitant look on his face.

“Now? Now you’re just a prat,” Harry said with a smirk.

“You make it so easy, Potter.”

“How’s your back, Harry?” Hermione appeared regretful.

“Sore as hell,” Harry responded.

“Sorry,” Hermione apologised. “I can’t believe we had to do that to cure the hex.”

“Figures. Snape said that he knew I’d break the bond. I don’t think it’s a coincidence that the punishment was a whipping.”

Draco laughed, to which Harry responded by pursing his lips. Still, it was good to hear the boy genuinely laugh.

“Guys, we should get back,” Hermione warned.

“Yeah,” Ron said, standing up, reaching out his hand to help Hermione up. She looked up at him, and then leaned over to give Draco and Harry both quick chaste kisses on the cheek before accepting Ron’s hand. Ron pulled her up, and she fell against him, letting him hold her as they waited for Harry and Draco.

Draco looked around him and sighed. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to stay out here for a few.”

“It’s cold as hell out here, Malfoy,” Ron said.

“Warming charms, Ron… learn them, the rest of us did two years ago,” Draco replied coolly.

“Will you call me Ron when I’m bollocks deep in your arse again?” Ron teased.

Draco glared up at Ron.

“Fine, stay out here, but don’t let Filch catch you, or worse... Dumbledore.”

“Oooooo, I’m scared, he might try to smother me with more of his tripe,” Draco said in mock fear.

Ron tried to hide a smile at that, shaking his head at Draco. “Come on, Harry.”

“Go on guys, I’ll be up soon,” Harry said to Ron and Hermione.

They glanced between Harry and Draco before Ron wrapped his arm around Hermione to begin the long walk back up to the castle.
Draco and Harry sat in silence for several minutes under the tree, staring off at the trees and the Black Lake that lay just beyond them.

Draco could feel Harry’s unease but stubborn insistence to prove his trustworthiness. He knew that Harry staying behind was his way of showing that.

He found himself chuckling at the Harry’s steadfast persistence to prove he was sorry. When he glanced up, Harry was staring at him curiously.

“Something funny?” Harry asked.

“Yeah… you,” Draco replied.

“Ah, should have known. Well go on; take your shots at me,” Harry said stiffly as if expecting to be insulted.

Draco shook his head. “Don’t need to, you do enough to yourself.”

Harry gave him a half-smile looking back at Draco with humility and a sincerity that made it hard to stay mad at him.

“You know… I wish I had a Time-Turner,” Draco said, staring ahead at the lake through the trees.

“They were all destroyed,” Harry informed.

“I know that,” Draco snapped. "But it doesn’t stop me from thinking of what I would do if I owned one, does it?"

Harry didn’t reply immediately. He let the silence sit between them once more. “What would you do with it?” he finally asked.

Draco looked at Harry for a moment before returning his gaze straight ahead. “I’d find a way to tell my father that he was making a mistake.”

Harry stared at him, studying him. Draco didn’t care anymore; he had been holding things in all day, all his life as a matter of fact. He was tired. “I don’t know how I would do it, but if I actually had access to one…I’d think of a way to talk him out of it.”

“Who’s to say he would listen?” Harry posed softly.

“He would, I would make him,” Draco said forcibly as if saying so would make it so.

Harry sighed. “You know, I think I’d do the same.”

Draco quirked an eyebrow at Harry in puzzlement.

“With my dad I mean,” Harry corrected.

“Your dad wasn’t a Death Eater,” Draco said more bitterly than he had meant.

“No, but he wasn’t always nice either. Maybe things would have been different if he had been nicer or something…I don’t know,” Harry said muttered the last.

“You can’t really change people just by trying to tell them that they’re being pricks, can you?” Draco
smirked realising he could easily be talking about himself as well.

Harry smirked in return. “No, you really can’t… I guess all you can do is hope they’ll change.”

There was more silence as they sat thinking on all that had been said. The thought that Harry thought that his Father was a prick didn’t sit well with Draco. He knew his father was so much more. Even if he did do things that were downright cruel and nasty at times, Draco knew the real reasons behind his actions.

“You know, my dad really isn’t a monster;” he stated, waiting for Harry to protest.

Harry shook his head. “I’ve seen otherwise…”

Draco nodded. “Everything he does, he does for me and my mother. It doesn’t always make sense and maybe it’s not always the right thing to do, but he does it for his family.”

Harry sighed softly, but didn’t respond.

“He’s just… complicated,” Draco continued, not even sure why he felt the need to explain his father to Harry.

“Like you,” Harry whispered.

That was unexpected. Draco turned to look at Harry. “You think I’m complicated?”

“You want the truth?” Harry asked.

“Might as well, since we’re bearing our souls here,” Draco said flippantly, his heart racing faster for a reason he didn’t want to think about.

“I think you’re fascinating,” Harry admitted.

Draco let Harry’s response replay a few times in his head, but then realised he probably looked like a lovesick bird. He tried to quickly play it off.

“Well, I knew that,” he said arrogantly.

Harry shook his head and gave Draco a small shove. “Prat.”

“You keep calling me that, but sometimes I’m a pretty decent bloke,”

“You have your moments.”

Draco smiled. “So… what do you think of Hermione’s plan?”

“Typical Hermione,” Harry was smiling.

“Well, I think it’s a brilliant idea. Maybe now you can teach me that dive move that you do,” Draco said.

Harry rolled his eyes. “Fine, I’ll teach it to you, but if you think about using it against me in a match, you’ll regret it.”

“We’ll just see about that… and how about you throw in a Patronus lesson while we’re at it,” Draco added.
“Wait a minute, what am I getting out of this?” Harry asked.

Draco smiled at him widely. “My company, of course.”

Harry snorted and then broke out in a small laugh, and then winced in pain, his laughter dying down.

“How’s your back?” Draco asked softly.

“Pretty much hurts like hell,” Harry’s eyes were focused on the ground.

“Well, I would say I’m sorry but—”

“I know…” Harry said.

Even though he deserved it and it was called for in order to break the hex, Draco suddenly felt guilty about the whipping. He carefully laid his hand on Harry’s back, biting his lip when he saw the other boy wince. He began to caress Harry’s back gently through his shirt. Harry sighed, relaxing against Draco’s hand.

“Here,” Draco slid his hand down Harry’s back slowly until he reached his waist. He carefully slipped his hand underneath Harry’s shirt to glide his fingertips over Harry’s skin. He heard Harry hiss and then gasp at the contact. Draco had to force himself not to curse as he felt the thick and swollen welts crossing Harry’s back. Guilt tugged at him once more.

“Forget what I said, I am sorry,” he admitted, glancing at Harry regretfully. He hoped the regret he felt was clear, and that Harry knew that it was sincere.

“No, I am,” Harry said, leaning in tentatively to kiss Draco. It was light and cautious, his lips barely brushing against Draco’s. Draco was caught off guard by it, and when Harry pulled back, Draco couldn’t help but stare, his hand pausing on Harry’s back as he searched for what to say.

“Draco, I know it’ll take a while for you guys to trust me again, but I swear, I won’t let you down this time. You can count on me,” Harry’s voice was desperate.

Draco gave him a slight smile. “I believe you, Harry.”

Harry looked relieved. “Good,” he said, leaning in to give Draco another kiss, this one was more deliberate, with Harry’s tongue forcing Draco’s lips apart so that he could explore his mouth and communicate the sincerity of his apology. Draco accepted what Harry offered, giving Harry his own apology in return. When the kiss broke, they were short of breath and intensely focused on each other, understanding that silent words had been spoken even as their lips had been joined.

“I’m scared, Harry,” Draco whispered. It felt surreal admitting it out loud, but Harry had admitted the same, and he felt safe saying so.

Harry was staring back at him, studying him, his brilliant green eyes trained on him with a concerned frown. He nodded solemnly. “I know… we all are.”

“But it isn’t the same is it?”

“I’ve had to face Voldemort before, Draco, more than once, so I worry about it all the time.”

“But, my family…”

Harry nodded. “I know, but I can guarantee you this, we’ll protect you.”
Draco gave Harry a sad pitiful look at his naivety.

“I’m serious, you’re not alone.” Harry reached up tentatively to stroke Draco’s cheek. Draco couldn’t help but shiver at the unexpected gesture, leaning into Harry’s hand.

Harry leaned in pressed his lips to Draco’s forehead, pushing his hand into Draco’s hair as he pulled him closer. Draco didn’t even think about it, he just instinctively wrapped his arms around Harry, holding him in a firm hug, allowing the other boy to rock him.

“You’ve got the protection of three Gryffindors, it doesn’t get any better than that, ” Harry whispered.

Draco snorted into Harry's arm, squeezing him tighter, the twisted humour lifting some of the tension he felt.

“We’ll get of this, alive…I promise.”

“You shouldn’t make promises you can’t keep, Harry.”

“I told you, I can keep my promises. I’ll just have to show you. I’ll make sure nothing bad happens to you, to any of us, I swear it,” he whispered.

And even though Draco knew that every word Harry said was borne from false hope and vain optimism, he felt a measure of security and affection that he had never felt before and he didn’t want to let it go. He knew that if he said anything it would ruin the moment, so he decided not to say anything at all.

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When Draco finally slipped back into his dormitory, Crabbe, Goyle, and Blaise were up talking. They all paused when Draco entered.

“Oi, there he is… late night eh, Draco?” Crabble asked.

“Yeah, I suppose it is, “ Draco replied.

“Hanging with your new friends?” Goyle had a laugh in his voice.

Draco nodded his head, watching them all cautiously. Crabbe and Goyle appeared eager for more information, while Blaise held an impassive gaze.

Crabbe cleared his throat, glancing at Goyle who gave a sideways glance to Blaise. Blaise rolled his eyes and shook his head. “Whatever, go on and discuss your little Death Eater plans, see if I care,” he muttered, closing his curtain.

“Thanks,” Goyle said, getting up to spell a silencing charm around Blaise’s bed and tip toeing to do one on Nott’s as well.

“So?” Goyle’s voice reflected the same sort of excitement that it did when he was about to plot some cruel joke.

“So…” Draco said, disrobing and getting ready for bed.

“Well, what’s going on? You must be pretty close to whatever it is he wants,” Goyle said, glancing at Crabble who nodded in agreement.
“I told you, I can’t discuss it, Goyle, stop asking!” Draco’s replied in a fierce hushed whisper.

“Yeah, alright, look,” Goyle glanced at Crabbe and then eyed Draco suspiciously. “You got to give us something. We all need to cover our bums here.”

“Are they planning something? At least tell how we can help you!” Crabbe’s lips thinned in irritation.

“You can help me by staying out of my way!” Draco snapped.

Crabbe narrowed his eyes at Draco, while Goyle cracked his knuckles, an angry disappointed frown on his face. “You know, Draco, you’re the last one of us who hasn’t been marked.”

“Yeah, that’s true,” Crabbe agreed.

“What do you mean? Nott isn’t marked, Zabini isn’t marked.”

“Zabini’s mother is too busy banging old rich buggers to commit to anything meaningful, and the Dark Lord doesn’t want Nott.”

Draco could barely hide his surprise at this information, but of course, he did “What?” he snickered.

“Didn’t your Dad tell you?”

“We have better things to discuss than what Nott does;” Draco threw a rankled glance at Nott’s bed.

“Well, he won’t admit it, but my Dad told me that Nott’s father has requested that he be marked twice, and the last time, the Dark Lord threatened to cut out his tongue if he ever suggested it again.” Crabbe was smug.

“Yeah, he said that Nott’s dad was barely fit to be marked and he said that he won’t weaken his circle with any more inferiors. Only the best will do,” Goyle seemed proud of himself as he glanced at Nott’s bed.

Draco had to fight to keep from laughing. The idea that Goyle or Crabbe had been accepted to be marked over Nott was surreal. Nott’s father must have pissed the Dark Lord off big time to be humiliated in such a way.

“We’re here to help you, Draco, but I can’t say that about everyone; Nott’s pretty pissed off he can’t get marked.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “Who cares? Nott’s opinion means nothing to me or the Dark Lord.”

“That may be true, but you have an assignment, and so far it looks like you’re just having a lot of fun with Potter and his friends. Some would say too much fun.”

Draco narrowed his eyes threateningly causing Crabbe to drop his eyes fearfully and glance at Goyle whose face softened.

“Listen, I’m not saying you’re not doing what you’re supposed to, but you should know Nott has it in for you. He may not be marked, but his dad is,” Goyle warned.

“Yeah, you’re being watched, so just keep us informed, alright?”

Draco nodded slowly. “Alright.”
“So?” Goyle pressed.

Draco sighed wearily, pulling his covers over him, watching Crabbe and Goyle with sleepy eyes. “So, the truth is… I’m just now earning their trust.”

“Yeah? And what have they told you?”

Draco shook his head. “Not much, but I think they’re planning something major…. I just need a couple more months.”

“Months!?” Crabbe and Goyle looked exasperated.

“Yeah, but it’s big. I’m telling you, if I can just keep going the way I’m going, we might be able to totally destroy them from the inside out.”

Crabbe and Goyle grinned at each other wickedly and looked back at Draco in admiration.

“Is there anything we can do?”

Draco nodded. “Yeah, just, let me go about getting closer to them. Keep everyone here off my back. I don’t care what you tell them but make sure you keep them off of their backs as well. One misstep and I could lose their trust just like that,” Draco said, snapping his fingers.

Goyle and Crabbe nodded solemnly.

“Don’t worry, Draco, we’ll take care of it.”

“Thanks guys,” Draco yawned. “I better turn in, Quidditch practice tomorrow.” He closed his curtain.

“Goodnight, Draco,” they both replied in unison.

He watched as they closed their curtains after saying goodnight to each other. He turned over to stare into the darkness, willing himself not to think of what would happen if the ritual was never found and he couldn’t deliver on his promise to produce information that would be useful to the Dark Lord. Harry’s words played in his head again and again, until he finally drifted to sleep with the memory of reassuring kisses and the promise that there were three people who cared enough to protect him, even if he didn’t believe that anyone really could.
'Cause the sex was good, you had my mind
And I let you come back every time
You would violate and cross the line,
And you knew that I would be the type
To always wait so patiently…
… all that I needed (real commitment)
I really couldn’t see it (Not the real man)
You said you would be it (In this relationship)
So many men think all a girl needs is to be sold a dream
But I won’t fall for it…

“Enough Cryin” by Mary J. Blige

Two weeks later…

As the Trio left lunch for free period, Hermione felt a familiar tide of resentment welling up for the sixth day in a row. Harry and Ron wanted to have a shag, once again. It had been a reaffirming act at first, a way of soothing Harry and a show of their love for each other, especially after the whipping incident in the forest. But now, the boys’ sexual cravings were becoming more taxing and less satisfying with each tryst. Something was missing: ah, yes, what she wanted.

She felt Ron’s large hand on the small on her back and Harry’s smaller hand grabbing hers as they walked on.

“Hi, Harry… Ron,” a cute blonde fifth-year Hufflepuff said, batting her eyelashes at both of the boys like Hermione wasn’t there.

“Hi!” Harry and Ron said in unison, turning to glance at the girl’s backside as she passed.

A low rumbling from Hermione brought their attention back into focus and onto her.

Hermione didn’t even bother to look up as she scolded, “Honestly, you two act as if—”

“Hi, Ron… Harry,” another voice said; this time it was a sixth-year Ravenclaw, and Hermione noticed that not only had she greeted Harry and Ron with a seductive smile, but she’d flashed an evil eye at Hermione before resuming her flirtatious stare at the boys. It was so quick that if Hermione hadn’t been looking for it, she would have missed it.

“Did you see that?” Hermione asked, affronted, but Harry and Ron were both smiling and glancing at her backside as well.

“Argh!” Hermione growled, pulling away from both of them and walking briskly ahead.

“Hermione!” Ron called.

“Get back here! You’re being silly,” Harry ordered.

“No, I’m not, and you two are daft if you don’t see it.”
They both jogged to catch up to her, Harry putting his arm around her shoulders when he reached her. “So, we’re a bit more popular, is that really so bad?”

“I don’t care how popular you are; you don’t have to eat it up the way you do and watch them walk like that. It’s rude! You’re both acting like no one has ever paid any attention to you!”

“Well, it is a nice change,” Ron said with a pleased smile on his face.

Hermione rolled her eyes and stared accusingly at Harry. “You, especially, should be used to it by now.”

Harry shrugged. “I never got this much good attention before,” he said with a sheepish grin.

Hermione scowled.

“Come on, we’ll make it up to you,” Ron said, giving her a kiss on the cheek as they walked on.

When they reached the lowest dungeons, Harry checked the map and cast a Concealment Charm. Once again, they pulled Hermione into a familiar corner and surrounded her. Ron kissed her deeply while Harry outlined her body with his hands, pulling up her robes so he could explore her more intimatey.

It wasn’t long before she was being pulled down onto the floor, where Ron sat, into his lap. As she began riding his long, thick length slowly, her legs wrapped around his back while he gripped her waist, controlling her pace as Harry stood over them, driving himself into Ron’s mouth.

When Harry withdrew from Ron’s mouth he grabbed Hermione’s head and pulled it back, dangling his cock over her face. “Lick it for me,” he ordered.

The order sparked a tingly feeling, and she found herself sliding her tongue along the underside of his cock to oblige him.

“You like being my slut, don’t you, Hermione?” he whispered, staring down at her.

“Mmm hmmm,” she moaned as Harry grabbed his cock and smacked it against her lips.

“You’re a good little slut, too…” he said.

“So you are you, Harry,” Ron murmured as he leaned over to help Hermione lick Harry’s wet prick.

Harry threw his head back as his best mates slid their tongues around and over each other while he rocked his hips back and forth, trying to create more friction.

“Open wide, pet,” Harry said, his hand firmly in Hermione’s hair, pulling her head back at an awkward angle.

“Uhmmh,” she whined.

“How ‘bout you turn around and ride Ron backwards?” Harry proposed.

Ron grinned up at Harry. “Good one, mate.”

Harry gave him a wink.

Hermione huffed, rising up off of Ron and turning her back toward him. Ron gripped her hips and positioned her cunt over his cock once more before pulling her down onto it, causing them both to
Ron relaxed behind her and leaned back against the wall as she continued to raise her hips up and down over him.

“Yeah, that’s it, Hermione. Fuck, yeah,” Ron groaned as he slapped her arse and then patted it playfully as she rode him.

“Beautiful,” Ron murmured.

Harry grabbed a fistful of her hair, pulling it painfully toward him as he positioned himself at her mouth. “Open wide,” he ordered.

Hermione almost snarled, but instead, relented and opened wide, which elicited a low moan from Harry. “Yeah… oh, yeah, you’re so good at this… oooh, gods….”

He continued to work himself inside her mouth as she moved over Ron until she felt the hand in her hair tighten and Harry still, Hermione swallowed everything Harry had until he withdrew, falling back against wall before her.

She looked at Harry. He wore a small, lazy grin and motioned for her and Ron to continue, or rather, just her. Hermione found herself growing more frustrated by the minute. Riding Ron’s big cock was fun when he was vigorously engaged, talking dirty to her and spanking her, but he was just lying there, letting her do all of the work.

Frowning, she turned her head to see what he was doing. Ron’s eyes were closed, and he seemed relaxed, content in letting her ride him as he gripped her waist. She looked back at Harry, and he seemed to be resting in satisfaction as he watched the couple.

She restrained herself from groaning as Ron made a guttural sound beneath her. As soon as he was done, she climbed off and did a cleaning spell, pushing down her robes.

“Well, I’d better get to my tutoring session.” She sighed, moving toward the door.

Ron sat up straighter. “That’s it? Wham-bam—”

“Thank you, guys,” Harry finished with a grin.

Hermione pursed her lips. “I’ll see you later,” she said stiffly.

Ron’s brow furrowed. “Hermione, you alright?”

Hermione huffed. “I suppose it went unnoticed by either one of you that I didn’t get off!”

“It’s not about you, Hermione, remember? You’re here to serve,” Harry said teasingly. Ron sniggered at that.

Hermione scowled. “Harry…”

“You mean, ‘Master’…” he corrected.

“Harry, what about what I want?”

“I don’t get you; I thought this is what you wanted!” Ron asked in confusion.

“How would you know what I want, Ronald? You haven’t stopped to ask. Just a few weeks ago,
you hadn’t even heard of kinky sex, and now you’re an expert?”

Ron grew red in the face. “I know that you asked to be… owned, and that means you don’t get to call the shots!”

Harry gave Hermione an apologetic look and shrugged. “That’s true.”

Hermione felt a twinge of betrayal and disappointment as she looked between them. “I have to go; I’ll see you later, perhaps…”

“Yeah, alright,” Ron said as Harry gave her a weak smile before she opened the door and exited.

As she made her way to the library, Hermione once again debated over how to tell the boys she was not pleased with their new relationship. She didn’t want to hurt their feelings and imply that the sex wasn’t good, because that wasn’t it, exactly. But something was missing. Yet she also felt it would make her look fickle because she was the one who had asked for this.

And then there was the bet Ron and Draco had made that she couldn’t handle being a submissive. She also didn’t want it to appear as if she was wimping out.

But with Harry and Ron drawing more attention, it seemed that their egos had been affected, and with each day their demands seemed to become more self-centred. Hermione became increasingly resentful that neither one of them seemed interested in what she wanted.

Hermione was deep in thought when she passed a group of huddled girls whispering. She barely noticed it and continued without a second glance in their direction. Whispering had become commonplace around the castle in the last few weeks, and it was futile to try to speculate whether people were whispering about her, Snape’s dismissal, Draco hanging around the Trio, or about the Trio’s sexual relationship. It was all fodder for gossip.

A few days later…

As Ron walked alongside Harry on the way to the Quidditch pitch for practice, he couldn’t stop the sick feeling rising in his stomach.

“What’s wrong, mate?” Harry asked.

“I just spoke with Ginny,” Ron groaned.

Harry looked at him in puzzlement. “And?”

Ron shook his head. “This is bad, Harry. My parents always owl me when they want answers. Now they’re owling Ginny about me, instead of owling me directly.”

Harry sighed. “I wish they hadn’t sent those letters out. Loads of people will be speculating. And I don’t think Sprout is the best choice. Teaching Potions and Herbology will probably be too much for all of us,” he complained.
“Besides that, the fact that my parents haven’t contacted me probably means they think the rumours about us are true, which means I need to work out how to tell them,” Ron said, thinking.

Ron hated the pitying look Harry was giving him.

“Sorry, mate…. Well, if there’s any way Hermione and I can help you… maybe we should all talk to them together?” Harry offered.

Ron shook his head. “No, I think that may make it worse. I’ll work it out.”

Harry seemed to be trying to put on a cheerful face. “Let’s get into something fun after practice, to get your mind off of it…."

Ron grimaced. “I can’t. I have a… er, appointment.”

Harry’s eyes widened with realisation. “That’s right, I forgot about your rendezvous.”

“Appointment, Harry. It’s an appointment.”

Harry chuckled. “Right.”

“I hate this schedule Hermione made. It doesn’t make any sense, really.”

“What doesn’t make sense about it? Hermione and Draco meet up on Tuesdays, I meet him after his Quidditch practice on Wednesdays, you meet him after our practices on Fridays, and we all hang out on Saturdays,” Harry rattled off matter-of-factly.

Ron shook his head.

He’d noticed that Harry and Draco had settled comfortably into their routine after Quidditch practice, where Harry would teach Draco some of his more strategic Seeker moves, which was usually followed by some sort of sexual exchange behind the bleachers, in the locker-room, or in the bush.

Sometimes Ron had joined them for their drills, but he’d never stayed for their trysts, always leaving when he sensed that they wanted to be alone.

For his part, Ron was still adjusting to seeing Draco talking, playing, and mysteriously disappearing with Harry. Getting used to Draco being with Hermione had been tough as well, but he was slowly coming around to the idea.

Dating Draco, or rather meeting up with him once a week to play chess, was another matter entirely.

“You know, I think you secretly like it,” Harry teased.

“Speak for yourself,” Ron said. “Let’s go over that new play you came up with again.”

“Alright…”

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In the locker-room after Quidditch practice, Ron found himself messing with his hair once again.

He jumped when he saw Harry in the mirror behind him. “What are you doing, mate?”

“Fixing my hair—do you mind?” Ron snapped.
Harry chuckled. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you primp so much. Not even for the Yule Ball.”

Ron’s and Draco’s first meeting had been awkward before they’d fallen into comfortable, teasing banter. Their second meeting had started out with playful insults, but somewhere in the middle, Draco had said something a little too harsh, which elicited a nasty reaction from Ron. By their third meeting, things had cooled off a bit, and they struggled through casual conversation. Near the end of it, the game and conversation began to flow well. But then, one of Ron’s chess pieces destroyed Draco’s by crushing it, sending bits of it flying. Draco’s hand was cut in the process and without thinking; Ron had reached out and grabbed Draco’s hand to inspect it. When he did, everything came to a standstill. Draco allowed Ron to inspect his cut hand, but the longer he did, the sweatier both of their hands became. They had decided to end the game soon after, both departing in an awkward haste.

Since then, Ron had been thinking a lot about Draco. A little too much for his comfort, and now, here he was trying to get his hair to fall and behave better.

“Bugger this,” Ron said, realising he had had spent entirely too long in front of the mirror as Harry smirked behind him. “Shut it, Harry.”

Harry stifled a snigger. “Have fun with your… game.” Ron glared at Harry before heading off to meet Draco.

When Ron showed up at the back of the empty dining hall, Draco was there, sitting with the chessboard open, a frown on his face.

“Hey,” Ron said as he approached, suddenly feeling awkward, like his body and movement were clumsy and uncoordinated.

“You’re late.” Draco scowled.

Ron didn’t like Draco scolding him, but it didn’t escape him that the blond being irritated by his lateness meant it mattered in some way… he mattered.

He swallowed. “Sorry… Quidditch practice ran over a bit.”

Draco grunted.

“H-how have you been?”

Draco shrugged. “Fine.”

“Harry says you’re learning the Patronus Charm.” Ron gave him a small admiring smile. “How’s it coming?”

“Alright, I suppose; I made a sliver of one appear the last lesson,” Draco said proudly.

“That’s good.” Ron surveyed the board. “Let me guess, you’re going to go with black again?”

“Of course,” Draco said.

Ron nodded. “That’s a defensive game, you know. I prefer to take things head on.”

Draco smirked. “But white makes you more vulnerable.”

“White is only as good as its player.”
Draco nodded. “That’s true, but I suppose the same could be said for black. It’s really all the same,” he said slowly, appearing deep in thought.

Ron called out his piece, and then a pregnant silence fell between them. Ron could tell Draco had something on his mind, but wasn’t going to ask. If he wanted to talk, he would.

“I wonder if it’s like that with everything, really,” Draco finally said.

“What do you mean? Bishop to D3…”

Draco remained quiet for a few moments and studied the board. “Pawn to E2. When did you know?”

“Know what?” Ron asked, glancing up.

Draco shifted in his seat. “When did you know that you were… you know….”

Ron sat back. “No, I don’t. Just spit it out.”

Draco sighed. “That you liked boys and girls.”

“Oh, that,” Ron replied, staring at the board before shrugging. “I’ve never really thought of it in that way.”

“What other way is there to think of it?”

Ron stared at the chessboard, thinking. “It’s just always been Harry and Hermione. They’re just… Harry and Hermione to me.”

“But, when you first kissed Harry…” Draco said cautiously.

“I didn’t even think about it, really; it just seemed right, you know? And Hermione and I, we just knew together,” Ron said matter-of-factly.

Draco looked at Ron sceptically. “I think my dad would kill me if he knew I was sort of a pouf.”

Ron gave Draco an apologetic look. “At least, I’m pretty sure of it…” Draco continued. “I mean, I’m expected to carry on the Malfoy name, and poufs can’t have babies.”

“Stop saying ‘pouf’!”

“Sorry, but you know what I mean,” Draco explained.

Ron sighed. “Yeah, I suppose I do.” Ron’s thoughts once again went to his parents. “I really don’t know what my parents would think. I don’t suppose they’d care much; I suspect Percy’s gay.”

“Really?” Draco looked surprised.

Ron shrugged. “I think so, but I’m not sure. Still, I think Mum would freak if she knew I was with sleeping with both Harry and Hermione.”

Draco gave Ron an irritated glance. “And me….”

Ron nodded quickly, feeling a strange guilt and apology forming. He tried to keep it down though. “Yeah… well, that’s another matter entirely.”

They both stared at the board, the silence hanging heavy between them until Draco glanced up with
speculatively. “How’s that going to work? I mean, when you guys leave Hogwarts? Have you ever discussed it?”

Ron shook his head. “Not really, but it’ll work out; we know that.”

“I don’t think too many people would understand.”

“They can all sod off, the lot of ‘em. We’ll make it work,” Ron said.

Draco smirked. ‘I’d love to see that. I’m sure there’ll be plenty to read about it.” Ron stared back at Draco, feeling suddenly irritated by the boy’s comment. “Not going to stick around, are you? As soon as this prophecy thing is over with, I suppose you’ll be moving on to the next bint.”

Ron watched as Draco’s eyes hardened. He felt a sense of satisfaction at that; maybe they did matter to him. He wanted to know, but he’d be damned if he was going to ask. Draco dropped his gaze, staring at his pieces, seemingly contemplating his next move.

Ron continued to watch Draco carefully, trying not to crack his knuckles as the tension that he thought had been managed earlier returned.

“Pawn to E8,” Ron said softly. “So, ah, you and Harry…”

“Yeah? What about us?” Draco’s voice was flat but his face was guarded, his eyes focused and watchful.

Ron swallowed. “You seemed to be getting on alright.”

Draco nodded. “That we are.”

Draco and Ron locked eyes once more. “You and him—”

“Don’t worry, Weasley. I’m not going to steal him from you; he really is in love with you. Talks about you all the time,” Draco said with an exaggerated sour expression.

Ron couldn’t help but smile at hearing that Harry did think about him, even when spending time with his newest lover. “I’m not worried about that. Never have been,” he fibbed. “But, are you and him… er…”

“Yeah, I think so,” Draco said softly.

Ron nodded. “And you and Hermione?”

Draco shrugged again.

“And what’s that supposed to mean?”

“Look, Ron, I don’t know; it’s up to her, really,” Draco said with resignation.

“Is it? I’ll ask you again– do you care about her?”

Draco stared back at him for a moment before nodding slowly.

Ron contemplated the significance of that. He knew for a fact that both Harry and Hermione cared deeply for Draco. If Draco was being sincere and really was falling in love with both of his best friends, his lovers, then that meant he didn’t have to worry about the boy hurting them. An unexpected sigh of relief escaped Ron, and then another question occurred to him; one that he had no
intention of ever asking Draco.

Draco seemed to pick this up and smirked, causing Ron to blush. “What?” Ron demanded.

“Aren’t you going to ask if I’m falling in love with you, as well?” Draco teased.

Ron sniggered, and they both laughed a little, breaking the tension.

“Honestly, I don’t think that’s even possible,” Ron said with a bemused grin.

Draco smirked. “Right, the most we can ever hope for is to hate each other a little less,” he said.

“Well, in that case, Draco, you should know that I hate you much less than I did before,” Ron said teasingly.

“The feeling is mutual, Ron.”

Ron paused at the hint of genuine affection in Draco’s tone, staring back at him in curiosity, when Draco smirked and resumed studying the board.

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The next day…

Hermione had mixed feelings during the match between Slytherin and Gryffindor. Every time Draco raced after the Snitch, her heart sped up, and she wanted to cheer him on along with Ron and Harry. She found she was more interested in their individual performances than the teams as a whole; still, she was conscious of the curious eyes on her throughout the game. The whole school was interested in why she and her lovers were consorting with Draco all of a sudden. So when Draco made a skilful dive she recognised as one of Harry’s signature moves, she restrained herself from cheering.

Gryffindor prevailed, with Harry catching the Snitch. Hermione watched Draco’s face discreetly to see if he was terribly upset. He did appear slightly annoyed, but less menacing than usual after a loss. She remained in the bleachers, waiting for the boys to shower.

When they came out, she greeted them down on the pitch like they had agreed, so they could walk down to the lake. There was none of the usual tension that followed a match between their houses. There was a silent camaraderie among them. She smiled at the progression their relationship had taken.

As they walked on, Hermione felt eyes on her back and turned to glance. There were many faces pressed against windows and standing out on the balcony of the Tower; the whole castle was watching them.

“They think we’ve gone barmy,” Ron said, looking behind him, spinning as though he had seen a ghost.

“Maybe we have,” Draco said softly.

“I’m surprised Dumbledore doesn’t come down here and put a stop to it himself; the whole school’s talking about it,” Ron said.

“I told you he won’t interfere unless he thinks we’re onto something,” Harry reminded him.

Hermione looked back once more at the dozens of eyes peering in their general direction.
“Have you three had to answer any questions yet?” Draco asked.

“Not yet,” Ron said with a grimace. “But it’s coming, I’m sure.”

Draco nodded as they all stopped at their familiar place near the rocks by the lake. “Now, let’s talk about Hogsmeade…”

“Right, I’ve been thinking about it,” Harry said. “Someone just needs to get permission to use the Portkey. We can ask for permission for wherever…The rest of us can just follow.”

“And get into trouble,” Hermione scolded.

Harry shrugged. “What’s the worst they can do? Dumbledore isn’t going to kick us out.”

“He kicked Snape out, Harry!” Ron reminded him.

Harry sighed. “That’s different, Ron, and you know it.”

“Fine,” Ron relented. “But let’s just say we did sneak off together. Then what?”

“Well, Snape gave us the location, we just go there and get it,” Harry said.

“You think it’ll be that simple?” Draco asked, obviously sceptical.

“Sure, and I think we can make the trip a bit more interesting,” Harry said, wiggling his eyebrows.

“What are you on about, Harry?” Hermione asked in concern.

“I’ve been thinking; we really need to mark our property…” Harry said, giving Hermione a devilish smile.


“But not permanently,” Harry hastened to add. “You should have something more significant to show our ownership.”

Draco smiled. “You mean a real tattoo?”

“No, I was thinking of a piercing,” Harry said cautiously.

“Piercing? As in needles? No way! I’m not getting pierced!”

“You’ll do as you’re told,” Harry said firmly.

Hermione set her jaw. “Filch!”

Harry huffed. “Hermione, we’re just discussing it right now!”

“Filch!”

“You know you’re being—”

“Filch!”

“—a total—”

“Filch! Filch! Filch!” she said stubbornly, folding her arms.
“Alright!” Draco shouted. “We get it! You don’t want to be pierced!”

“Some slave you’re turning out to be. You complain more than anything,” Ron mumbled.

Hermione’s anger flared at Ron’s cavalier comment about their new relationship, and his continued misunderstanding of what it was. It didn’t help that Harry and Draco seemed to agree, or at least support his view. She narrowed her eyes at him and put her finger in his face, causing Ron to draw back in surprise. “Get this through your thick skull, Ronald: I am not a slave! As a matter of fact, I think our ‘quality time’ for today has come to an end. I’m ready to go back now,” she said as she turned toward the castle.

She heard the crunch of rocks behind her and turned her head to give them one final glance. The boys were staring at each other uneasily as they began to pull themselves up and follow behind her in silence.

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When Harry, Hermione, and Ron returned to their common room, accusatory stares and whispers greeted them.

“What now?” Ron asked, no longer bothering to hide his impatience with being the centre of gossip. Being Harry Potter’s best friend and being involved in a triad with his best friends had gotten him accustomed to attention, but this was ridiculous.

As soon as he asked the question, many of their housemates looked away, but Ginny did not. Ron braced himself for his sister’s legendary scorn when he saw her approaching with a scowl on her face.

“Ron—” she started.

Ron stiffened, lowering his voice. “What, Ginny? What’s all this about; why are people staring at us now?”

“Well, it’s bad enough you three have let your relationship out of the bag, but now you’re hanging out with Malfoy, too?” Ginny sounded exasperated.

Ron swallowed and looked back at Hermione and Harry. They looked as unsure as he felt about how to address questions about Draco.

Hermione sighed before stepping up and putting a hand on Ron’s shoulder to let him know she would handle this. “Ginny…”

Ginny shook her head, eyeing Hermione with a scolding look. “Hermione!” she whispered fiercely. “I thought you were sick of the gossip going on!”

“I am!”

“Then why would you invite more of it? What’s going on between you three and that rat bastard?”

“I’d like to know that myself,” Seamus said, strolling over, with a few other Gryffindor boys following him. Dean and Neville huddled by the fire, staring up at the confrontation with decidedly non-committal expressions.

“What’s it to you, Finnigan?” Ron asked, a threat in his voice.
Seamus narrowed his eyes. “I think we’d all like to know if we missed an announcement about an adopt-a-Slytherin service project.”

“It’s none of your business, so stay out of it!” Ron snapped.

“It’s all of our business, Weasley. You three have already brought enough embarrassment to Gryffindor this year, and now you’re hanging around with the ferret? We have a right to know why,” Seamus declared, looking around his small group for support. Several people in the room nodded and stared at the Trio expectantly.

Harry scoffed. “Not that we owe you an explanation, but just to make things clear, Malfoy is our friend now, and if you have something to say about him, you’ll have to deal with us,” Harry said, his voice sounding steely as he spoke.

There were several gasps, followed by murmurs and stares of disapproval.

“Malfoy? Draco Malfoy is your friend now? How do you reckon that? Have you gone completely nutters, Potter? His dad tried to kill you last year!”

“Yeah, Harry, and that’s not all; he and his lot have been arseholes to everyone in our House since they got here. What are you saying? You’re going to forget all of that?” Dean asked from across the room.

Everyone in the room stared at Dean and then turned their head to look to Harry for his response.

Harry shook his head. “Look, people change….”

Seamus scoffed. “I’ll say, it’s been less than a year and you three have all gone barmy. Ever since you got back, you’ve all been off. Maybe The Prophet was right.”

“Say one more thing, Finnigan,” Ron threatened, balling his fist.

Ginny stepped in between Seamus and his crowd, and Harry and Ron. “That’s enough! Seamus… if Harry says Malfoy has changed… then,” Ginny looked back at Harry with disbelieving eyes before taking a deep, measured breath. “Well, then, I trust him… We have to trust him.”

Seamus shook his head in pity at Ginny. “You don’t have to side with them just because you had the misfortune of being born in the same family with one of them, Ginny.”

Ron began to rush forward toward Seamus, with Ginny barely holding him back.

“Oi, cool your pants, Weasley!” Seamus warned. “There’s no way any Gryffindor with an ounce of pride would be friends with Draco Ponce Malfoy!”

“Gryffindors also have common sense, Seamus, and they’d know better than to let you bully them into dictating who their friends should be,” Hermione shot back.

“Friends?” Seamus laughed; several of the other boys joined him. “Is that what you call it? You’re shagging Weasley and Potter here… for all we know, you might have added Malfoy to your collection as well.”

Hermione’s face turned bright red, and she pulled out her wand. Seamus ducked. A few of his friends moved back to avoid being hit.

She continued to point her wand at them, smirking in satisfaction at their reaction. A few of the
Gryffindor girls sniggered at the boys, while some of the boys in the room appeared embarrassed for Seamus.

Ron laughed as Finnigan looked around the room frantically.

“Another word, Finnigan, and I’ll collect your bits as well,” Hermione warned.

Ron continued laughing, while Harry stood staring at her, impressed.

“That goes for all of you,” she said, glaring around the room, waving her wand around, which caused many to freeze. “If any of you have a problem with us being friends with Draco, then tough. Grow up, and get over it. You’re no better than what you believe a Slytherin to be if you think you can look down your nose at someone.”

Ron saw that Parvati was smirking, while Neville’s eyebrows shot up. Seamus looked back at her, Ron, and Harry with a humiliated expression before pushing through them to head out. No one followed him. Several of the students in the common room returned to their studies acting as if things were normal, while others stared back at Hermione in shock before resuming conversation.

Soon, everyone was back to normal, aside from Ginny.

After the Trio took a seat on one of the big couches in the corner, isolating themselves from the rest of the room, Ginny joined them. She sat next to Ron, who rolled his eyes before conjuring up a chessboard. “Look, Ginny, don’t start, I’m not in the mood,” he whispered.

Ginny’s mouth tightened. “Ron, what are you doing? Is any of that rubbish Harry said true? You’re ‘friends,’ now, with Draco Malfoy?

“Ginny—”

She shook her head, staring at Harry and Hermione. “What’s really going on?”

The Trio all looked at each other and sighed.

“Gin, he’s really not a bad bloke. I mean, he is a bit full of himself, and he does still act like a prat most days,” Ron explained, feeling half surprised he had said it.

“Ron, that’s not very helpful,” Hermione said in frustration.

“So, why are you hanging out with him, then?” Ginny pressed.

“What I meant was that even though he’s still like that, he’s actually pretty harmless… sometimes he’s even nice… and he’s sort of funny, too.” Ron said with a whimsical smile that made Ginny cackle. She shook her head in disbelief at her brother and then shifted her stare to Hermione. “What have you done with my brother? I want him back.”

“Leave Hermione out of this, Gin. I consider Malfoy a friend now, end of story,” Ron said firmly.

Ginny studied Ron. “Do you know what Mum and Dad will say when they find out your friends with a Malfoy?”

Ron seemed to stop breathing, concentrating on the chessboard, his body going stiff.

Ginny leaned in. “It’s bad enough you have to tell them you’re shagging your best mates!” she added.
Ron winced. “Well, they don’t have to find out about everything at once, do they?” he asked rhetorically in a pleading tone as he glanced up at Ginny.

She shook her head. “I just don’t understand. What happened? Suddenly you trust Draco Malfoy? He’s a bigoted prat.” She directed the last to Hermione with an incredulous expression.

“He’s trying to change, Ginny,” Hermione said.

“And I’m supposed to believe that? Come on, Hermione, you’re smarter than this… do you know how this is making you look? Especially you.”

Hermione pursed her lips. “Ginny, people make mistakes, sometimes they don’t think about what they’ve done until later, and they wish they could set it right. That can happen to Gryffindor and Slytherin alike,” she said, giving Ginny a long, meaningful look.

Ginny’s face flushed at Hermione’s suggestion, lowering her eyes.

Ron stared between the two girls in confusion. Harry bit his lip, glancing away with a guilty expression.

“What’s going on here?” Ron asked.

Ginny shook her head firmly. “Nothing, Ron… nothing. Look, I just hope you guys know what you’re getting yourselves into. Don’t expect anyone here to get excited by your efforts at… inter-house unity,” she said, before turning to rise quickly, leaving them to themselves.

“What was that all about?” Ron asked.

“Leave it be, Ron,” Hermione said, glancing at Harry. He shrugged. Ron narrowed his eyes at both of them, suspecting that they were all in on something that they were hiding from him, but decided he was too tired to think on it. Finally, he sighed, glancing around the common area.

“You know, I’m tired of explaining myself to everyone. They can all just piss off,” he declared loudly before leaning over and pulling Harry’s head down for a saucy kiss while Hermione smiled on, pulling out a book to read.

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When Draco returned from the foursome’s spot by the Lake, he was greeted with interested and curious looks. They were quickly averted by his icy grey glare. He was grateful that Crabbe and Goyle seemed to be sticking to their promise to keep the Slytherins off of his back.

It didn’t, however, stop suspicious glances and scowls from the more rabid house members. Draco noted that Blaise had seemed to be watching all of this with a very poorly disguised appearance of indifference, but was relieved that the boy wasn’t going to get in his way by asking a lot of questions. However, as soon as he plopped on the couch, Blaise joined him.

“Enjoying yourself, Draco?” Blaise inquired with a knowing smirk.

Draco stared at Blaise, waiting for his usual speech about pure-blood propriety, but instead got, “I can’t believe how thick those two are. I mean, we’ve always known they were mildly retarded, but this is a new level of stupidity, even for them,” he remarked.

“What are you on about now, Zabini?” Draco asked guardedly.
“Crabbe and Goyle, of course. They’re not too quick on the uptake, are they?”

Draco shrugged. “Not sure I’m following you.”

“Well, let me lay it out for you, then.” Blaise sat back with a pensive expression. “Back in September, you started playing nice with the Mudblood.”

Draco tensed.

Blaise chuckled in amusement at Draco’s obvious discomfort with the term. “Oh, I’m sorry… Granger. Is that better for you?”

Draco stared at him evenly, which seemed to amuse Blaise even more.

“Right… As I was saying, you and she have been playing nice since Snape set the Potions assignment, and you even defended her in class—as a matter of fact, you defended all of them and almost got yourself kicked out of your dormitory for it.”

“Your point?” Draco asked.

“It’s amazing; if it really is true that you’re doing all of this just to spy on them for the Dark Lord, why didn’t you just admit to it before? It would have saved you loads of trouble.” Blaise’s tone was smug, but Draco didn’t show his hand.

“Zabini, it wasn’t anyone’s business. Of course I’m not going to announce it; defeats the purpose and would put me at risk of ruining it.”

Blaise stared at Draco. “That’s sounds convincing enough, only, I’m not convinced.”

Draco glared at him; he had had enough of Zabini’s games. “Oh? What is Nott plotting now?”

“Draco… you underestimate those you’ve used to accomplish your ‘task.’ There are some daft blokes in our house, Crabbe and Goyle, for example. But then there are others who are good at playing dumb in order to get what they want, and when they don’t, they’ll turn on you.”

Draco had some ideas about whom Blaise referred to, but wanted to hear him say it. “Who?”

“Think about it,” Blaise said as they stared at each other in silent understanding, until Draco narrowed his eyes.

“What’s your angle, Zabini? Whose side are you on?” Draco asked, realising how dangerous Zabini’s seemingly ambivalent loyalties could be to him and the Trio.

“I’m not on anyone’s side. But if I’m going to watch the world blow up before my eyes, I’d like to make sure that everyone is armed with their best; it’ll make the fireworks so much prettier,” Blaise said.

It suddenly dawned on Draco that he should keep a better eye on Pansy.

“Oh, speak of the devil and she will appear,” Blaise remarked, looking past Draco.
Draco turned around as they entered the common room: Crabbe and Goyle, Pansy, and Millicent with Nott trailing not far behind. Pansy said something to Millicent, who gave Draco a small smirk before heading over to join the other Slytherin girls in the corner.

Nott took a seat directly across from Draco, his eyes on focused on Draco. His mouth melted into a grimace until a younger Slytherin girl drew him into conversation.

Draco felt something like the caged animals he had seen in a Wizarding zoo. There were no bars, just wards there, and if he breached the wrong one, he would be ensnared without any warning of the consequences. Blaise resumed his usual bored expression, but Draco could feel the boy’s eyes intensely trained on him. He was about to excuse himself when Pansy plopped down, halfway on his lap, causing him to cringe. She placed her arm on the back of the couch behind his head. Draco stiffened and shifted uncomfortably, wanting to fling her across the room, but understanding the importance of not appearing too standoffish, especially now. He listened, instead, as Crabbe and Goyle launched into their daily report of gossip and pranks they had played and were planning. Trying to concentrate was difficult; Blaise’s previous words and hard stare were distracting.

When Pansy’s hand wandered up to the back of his head, Draco snapped, forcibly removing her hand. “Don’t you have a boyfriend? Go sit next to him!” he said, glancing over at Blaise.

Pansy laughed shortly. “You have to be kidding, Draco… You know Blaise and I were just fooling around. Just like you’re known to fool around with a witch or two. It’s nothing serious.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “And when you thought I was a loser for helping Potter and his friends in Potions, were you fooling around then, as well?”

Pansy pursed her lips. “Oh, come off it! None of us knew what you were up to back then. I was just being loyal to Slytherin. I’m very proud of you, you know. You’re practically a hero now, and we all know every hero needs a witch beside him. Speaking of which, how is your assignment going?” she asked, inching closer.

Draco shifted, suddenly uncomfortable with Pansy being so close, too close. He glanced up and looked to see who was watching them. “None of your business, Pansy,” he muttered.

Pansy narrowed her eyes disapprovingly. “I, for one, think that this is getting out of hand. You’ve spent the last three weekends hanging around them. I understand you have an important assignment, but really, it’s doing nothing for your social life. Besides, you can’t be satisfied,” she purred, stroking his arm.

Draco yanked her arm away. “Pansy… don’t.”

“Don’t tell me she’s putting out for you, as well!” Pansy blurted out.

Draco stared at her flatly. “You know she is actually more of a lady than you’ve ever been. What a waste of pure-blood training. You’re pathetic, really.”

Pansy narrowed her eyes at him. “I’m anything but pathetic, Draco. What I am is strategic. Now that Crabbe and Goyle have made things a bit… clearer, I can finally tell you what I want.”

Draco glanced back at Crabbe and Goyle, who were engaged in laughter, and then at Blaise, who had been pulled into a conversation by a seventh year girl, before turning back to Pansy with a scowl.

“Let’s get something straight, Parkinson: I don’t care what you want.”
Pansy smiled. “Don’t worry, I’m not going to chase after you any longer.”

“Thank Gods,” he muttered.

“Not that I have to, anyway; there are a lot of blokes who would love to be with me.”

“Go find them, then!”

“First things first, Draco; you owe me,” Pansy said with a deadpan stare.

Draco fought to keep from raising his voice as he stared her down. “What?”

“Did you think you could play me like a Hufflepuff… or even a Gryffindor? I know you used me as a pawn in your little spy game with the Mudblood and her friends. Or don’t you remember that you practically promised to make me your girlfriend?”

Draco watched her carefully, trying to discern if she was bitter, angry or had moved past that into cold, calculated revenge mode. That would be much worse.

She smiled, her face giving away nothing. “Like I really cared about being your girlfriend, anyway,” she said dismissively. Draco saw right through that. He knew how much she cared about that, at least she used to.

“Oh, and that stupid party… the way you paraded me around, it was so humiliating…” she said in exaggerated lament.

Draco scoffed. “It’s not my fault you fell for that, I didn’t force you to do anything!”

“I didn’t fall for anything, you cocky prat. That stupid speech you gave me about not wanting to be hurt…” she chuckled dryly. “Did you really think I believed any of that?”

Draco stared at her, his face impassive and revealing nothing, not even the slight surprise he felt at her words.

Pansy smiled. “That’s your biggest weakness… you’re too arrogant. I have to admit, it’s rather sexy sometimes, but it’s going to be the death of you. You underestimate everyone, especially me,” she said, putting emphasis on the last.

Draco’s blood felt like it had suddenly turned cold. His mind raced with theories on what she was after, what risk she posed, and how he could quickly manage her. His stomach felt queasy as he realised with much self-scorn that he had been treating Pansy like she was a daft first year. But then, he reasoned, she had played herself like one, as well.

She was a sixth year Slytherin, and he hadn’t ever looked at her as a threat. He straightened and pulled back, considering her closely with new eyes.

“Now, Draco,” she continued in a low, firm voice. “You’ve put me through a great deal of humiliation, pain, and suffering this year… for all I know you’re shagging a Mudblood now. I’ll admit, it’s for a good cause, but you still you owe me.”

Draco stared at her hard for a several moments. He was determined not to think about what price she was going to propose for his so-called debt to her. He was tired of playing games. “What do you want?”

Pansy smiled, and it wasn’t pretty. “You, of course.”
Draco shook his head. “No.”

“You don’t have to be in love with me, Draco. Just act like you are.”

Draco looked at Pansy in bemused pity. “Why? Why would you want me to pretend?”

Pansy shrugged. “Payback… it is very sweet, and it wouldn’t hurt my options regarding prospective suitors, either. It’s always easier to get the attention of a bloke when you already have one, especially a fine catch like yourself.”

“And if I don’t?”

“You don’t want to know the answer to that.”

“You don’t scare me, Parkinson,” he said evenly.

Pansy smiled at him with pity and then glanced at Nott.

Nott appeared entranced with a young witch who was tracing his hands with hers while staring into his eyes adoringly. If only he could make that git disappear. Draco’s eyes shifted to Blaise, who was still engaged in conversation and flirting hard.

“Unlike the rest of you, I’m not scared of Nott,” Draco said confidently.

“Maybe you should be… you’re not exactly following your assignment to the letter, are you? I saw you in the woods with Granger before break…” she suggested.

Draco tried to hide his surprise, remembering Blaise mentioning that Pansy saw them going into the woods. What else had she seen?

“Now, tell me, what part of making new friends requires one to take long walks into the Forbidden Forest for a near-kiss?”

Draco narrowed his eyes.

“And then there was that day in Hogsmeade when you went missing. I’m sure you were doing your duty and checking up on your assignment, but perhaps you got a little greedy and joined in their little group sex activities, hmm?”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said dismissively.

“It doesn’t matter. All I have to do is suggest that you’ve gotten in over your head. Maybe you no longer care about spying on them, maybe you care about them… one, in particular,” she said with a fair amount of resentment.

“Like anyone would believe that,” Draco said challengingly.

“Does she polish your knob like she does Potter and Weasley?”

Draco balled up his fist.

Pansy chuckled. “On second thought, don’t answer that. I’m sure I don’t want to know. But if someone else were to even think that was the case…”

“I get it, Parkinson.”
Pansy smiled, satisfied. “Good. Now, where were we, love?” she cooed, her hands wandering back up into Draco’s hair as she leaned in, pressing her body against his.

Draco stiffened, glaring at her before softening his expression. A slow defeated smile replaced his scowl, and Pansy appeared victorious as she took it in.

He contemplated using a memory charm on all of them. He could Obliviate her, but he had never done it before. If he did it incorrectly, there would be traces that would be hard to cover. All it took was one simple wand test. Perhaps there was a potion he could use. His mind frantically searched for memory of one, but when nothing came to mind, he realised it was something he would have to research later.

For now, he would play this game. He didn’t have to consent to her twisted little offer to lead her on and let her think she had gotten what she wanted. After years of watching power games between his father and mother, and his housemates, he had learned that one way to control someone was to let them believe they were in control. That was the game Pansy had been trying to play all along.

And so he didn’t pull away from her. Instead, he forced himself to relax into his seat and allow her to pet him while she ground her body against him suggestively as he turned to listen to the rest of Crabbe’s story.

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In Potions, Professor Sprout was clearly stressed with the workload of taking on an extra class and running between her Herbology class and Potions. She decided that, where possible, the two classes would be combined, and so they were now meeting in a large, unused classroom near the fourth greenhouse that could accommodate the amount of students that two classes usually held.

Unsure of what Snape had been teaching the class and deciding that the Protective Shielding Potion was a waste of time, she abandoned the project and chose to focus on an easier Potions lesson.

“Professor, if it’s alright with you, I’d like to keep the remainder of what everyone was working on,” Hermione said.

“Whatever for, Ms. Granger?” Sprout asked in confusion.

“I’d like to compare the properties and progression of the potion for each pair. I would still like to finish mine, alone, if that’s alright,” Hermione said deferentially.

Sprout gave Hermione a strange and pitying look. “Oh, alright, if you insist, but I won’t be held responsible if anything goes wrong with it and causes you harm. I don’t know what Snape was trying to pull, assigning such an advanced potion to sixth years.”

“Perhaps my research will be useful,” Hermione suggested.

Sprout shook her head. “I doubt it, no one even uses this potion anymore with all of the advanced hexes and defensive spells around now. The use of potions for battle is quite outdated, and insufficient, I might add.”

“Still, if it’s all the same to you—”

“Oh, fine, do what you like. I’ll give you a key to Snape’s classroom so you can retrieve them, but don’t dally down there.”

“Yes, professor,” Hermione said, pleased.
“Professor,” Draco spoke.

“Yes, Mister Malfoy?”

“If it’s alright, I’d like to help as well,” he said.

Sprout’s eyebrows rose high at his suggestion. “Oh?”

“Yes, professor. Potions is my specialty, and it’s one of the subjects I plan to take my N.E.W.T. in it next year.”

“But—”

“I believe I read somewhere that elements of the Protecting Shielding Potion have been used on more advanced military devices used by the Ministry,” Draco continued.

“Oh?” Sprout seemed caught off guard by Draco’s knowledge.

“Yes,” Draco continued. “And the second stage progression alone is worth studying in order to have a good understanding of the way potions interact with living tissue. Whatever research Granger here is doing may be helpful in my studies.”

Sprout appeared fairly impressed with Draco’s answer. “Very well. You and Granger have my permission.”

Draco smiled at Hermione, who was smiling back at him with an impressed look.

Seeing her smile at him like that made Pansy’s glare from across the room almost inconsequential.

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As they descended the stairs to the dungeons, Draco noticed that Hermione had a very serious look on her face.

“What are you up to? Why did you really need access to Snape’s classroom?” he asked.

“We need to collect the remainder of the potion, just in case,” she said darkly.

Draco sighed. “I know what you’re thinking, but remember Snape said it wouldn’t work.”

“Not for us… or maybe. I don’t know, but I do know that this potion is rare and may still be useful. We should cover all our bases, and I would like to see what it does in its final stages.”

Draco was watching her; she couldn’t tell if he was impressed or thought her to be a freak of some sort—his face was always so bloody impassive!

She smiled at him. “By the way, that was a very impressive case you made for yourself.”

“You’re surprised?” he asked.

Once they reached Snape’s classroom, Hermione shut the door behind her and went straight to the side wall where all of the cauldrons from the assignment were lined, while Draco went to the closet to get beakers, vials, mixers, and two spoons.

They began to scrape and pour the cauldrons in silence, when Hermione turned to look at Draco.
Draco noticed, giving her a puzzled look.

“Do you remember when Snape first paired us up?” she asked.

Draco nodded. Thinking of Snape right then made him anxious.

“I thought I was going to die,” Hermione said with a chuckle.

“Yeah, well, I wasn’t exactly jumping for joy either,” Draco said a bit more harshly than he wanted to.

“But then it got better, didn’t it? We used to talk,” Hermione said, appearing eager to assure him she meant no insult to him.

“Right,” Draco said, with a mischievous smirk.

“Not about that, perv. We talked a lot about different things. Don’t you remember?”

Draco nodded slowly. “Yeah, seems like a long time ago.”

“But it wasn’t…”

“Well… we weren’t involved before.”

“What’s that have to do to anything?”

“Relationships, sex… feelings,” Draco said with a grimace. “They mess things up. Everything is simpler before you shag someone.”

He noticed with annoyance that Hermione was smiling. “Why are you smiling?”

“You said feelings, as if having them is a bad thing,” she said teasingly.

“Well, they can be,” Draco said, feeling suddenly awkward as he averted his eyes.

“Is that why you ditch girls once you’re done?” she asked cautiously.

Draco didn’t reply to that, so she resumed collecting residue from the cauldrons.

He watched her for a few moments before sniggering softly.

“What?” Hermione asked curiously.

“We’re really doing all of this backwards, you know… you’re supposed to romance someone before you shag them,” he said with a sarcastic laugh.

Hermione smiled. “True, but I’d like it if we’d at least go back to talking more like we did before.”

“Just talk, Hermione?” he asked, giving her a dubious stare.

Hermione flushed. “Well, perhaps a bit more than talk… but I don’t want it to be just that.”

Draco sighed. “Alright then, pick a topic, any topic.”

Hermione eyed the ceiling curiously for a few moments. “Hmm. Why don’t you tell me about your mum,” she posed.
Suddenly, Draco regretted giving her the choice of topic. “My mum?”

“Yes, your mum, Draco. They say the way a man talks about his mum can tell you a lot about who he is and how he’ll treat you,” she said matter-of-factly.

Draco rolled his eyes. “Where did you read that one? Witches Weekly?”

“As a matter of fact—”

“Oh, gods, I thought you were cleverer than that!”

Hermione huffed. “Well, not everything they publish is rubbish. There’s research to back up the mum theory.”

“Right. There’s always research.”

She quirked an eyebrow. “Waiting.”


“Draco…”

“Oh, alright… she’s nice. She likes to read. She reads a lot, actually,” he said, thinking.

“She’s very pretty,” Hermione added, watching his reaction.

Draco nodded. “Yes. Very. But that’s not everything. She puts up with a lot of crap from my father sometimes. I wish she would stand up to him more.”

“Does he abuse her?” she asked in concern.

Draco gave her exasperated look. “No… nothing like that! For fuck’s sake, you three really do think we’re all monsters, don’t you?”

“Well—”

“I’ll have you know we’re human! I mean, my mum doesn’t really even approve of half of what my father does; she just sort of goes along with it,” he explained.

“Why?” Hermione asked, her expression disapproving.

“Because she’s his wife. My father makes the decisions, and she obeys,” Draco said.

Hermione wrinkled her nose at that. “I suppose that’s how you think it should be between men and women.”

Draco shrugged. “Not really. That’s just how it is with my parents. If a woman wants to be in control, she can be… she just needs to find a bloke who likes that sort of thing. It just wouldn’t be me.”

Hermione remained quiet, sensing he wanted to say more, which he did.

“I do wish she wasn’t so submissive to him. Things might be different… for all of us.”

“You ever talk to her about it?” she asked hesitantly.

“Of course not. No point in it. What Father says, goes. End of story.”
“What do you think he would think of you shagging me?” Hermione asked softly.

“Honestly? Don’t get offended, but he’d probably think it was repulsive.”

She nodded.

“But still, that wouldn’t be as big of a deal as me being your friend. That changes everything.”

“Typical,” Hermione muttered with resentment.

He didn’t like the way this conversation was going. He didn’t like Hermione making comments about his parents, despite the fact that he found himself angry with his father for many of his beliefs. He just couldn’t win here.

“Can we not talk about my father?” he asked.

“It’s hard not to,” she replied. “He’s the reason why you think the way you do.”

“The way I used to think, Hermione.”

“Right,” she said sceptically. It annoyed him. She still thought he was a bigot. He set his jaw and then another thought occurred to him. He studied her, trying to imagine her response to his question, but he couldn’t, so he forced himself to ask in spite of his reservations.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Go on…” she said, staring up at him.

Draco couldn’t help but smile in slight embarrassment for the subject he was about to broach. He stared down at the floor, not sure how to begin.

“What is it?” Hermione pressed.

“Well… is it true? Do you get turned on when I call you a Mudblood?”

Hermione began to blush, clearing her throat. “Well, it er—it depends… not all the time, it’s—”

“It’s how I say it, right?”

Hermione looked away. “This is weird.”

He nodded. “It is… but still fascinating.”

“I don’t like it,” she said firmly. “I don’t like that it turns me on.”

“No, I suspect you don’t, but you can’t really help that, can’t you? Do you ever wonder why it turns you on?”

She nodded, considering his question. “I have. What’s your theory?”

Draco shrugged, reflecting on the way he enjoyed being submissive to Harry and how it made him hard to dish it out, as well. “Who knows why certain things get some people hot. I mean, I still don’t know why I like some of the things I like.”

“You don’t think about why you like them?” she asked in surprise.

He shrugged. “Not too much. I like what I like. But you getting turned on by me calling you that…”
even I think that’s pretty kinky.”

She nodded. “I think it has something to do with power.”

Draco perched himself on the nearest desk. “Explain.”

Hermione sat down opposite him. “Well, I think, even though you’re not supposed to want me because of who I am, you still do. You’re willing to break the rules to have me. No matter how many times you call me a Mudblood, you can’t deny you want me in spite of it. There’s a lot of power in that.”

He stared at her. “Only you’re not a… Mudblood,” he said, his revulsion with the word increasing by the minute. Looking at her and thinking of the vile and hateful sentiments that word was meant to inspire made him angry now. “You’re a Muggle-born witch, and my girlfriend, and I don’t think I’ll be saying that anymore.”

Hermione looked at him quizzically. “Draco… are you developing a conscience?”

Draco scoffed. “Not really. It just doesn’t do anything for me anymore.”

“How do you know?”

“I just do,” he whispered, giving her a meaningful stare.

She parted her lips slightly, gripping the table, and Draco couldn’t stop himself from leaning in to kiss her.

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They held hands halfway up the stairwell from the dungeons and then promptly dropped them as their footsteps hit the sunlit portion. When they emerged into the hallway, Draco caught sight of his Slytherin ‘friends’ and turned his back, hoping Hermione would quickly fall into step beside him. However, as soon as he did, Pansy’s falsely sweet voice rang out behind him.

“Draco!”

Draco suppressed a groan and glanced sideways at Hermione, who stopped in her tracks, giving Draco a strange glance. Draco turned around slowly, gritting his teeth as Pansy, Nott, Crabbe, Goyle, and Blaise approached.

“Draco! Where are you going? Haven’t you spent enough time on your project already?”

Draco narrowed his eyes at Pansy. “And what project would that be, Pansy?”

“Whatever you and the Mudblood are working on.” She smirked.

“Lay off, Pans… you know Draco has to keep his marks up… and Granger is helping him,” Goyle said quickly, giving Pansy a warning glance.

Pansy quirked an eyebrow. “I suppose sometimes it pays to drudge through the mud if you want come out on top,” she said with a sneer.

Draco caught sight of Hermione’s hand twitching in her robes. He tensed, hoping that she was not fingering her wand. Although Draco didn’t want to see Hermione duel, he wouldn’t blame her for wanting to take Pansy down.
Pansy gave Hermione a nasty glare and opened her mouth to say something, when Draco instinctively stepped between them. He made sure to face Hermione, as she was the most rational one of the two. “Right, well, this is interesting but—”

“Hold on, love,” Pansy said, grabbing Draco’s arm and pulling back. He exhaled in frustration as she threw her arms around his neck. He gave her a sympathetic look but didn’t move to disentangle himself her arms; instead, he spoke to her in a soft, stern voice with a look to match. “Pansy…”

“What the matter, love? Since when do you turn down a willing kiss?” she asked before quickly planting a big wet one on his lips, her hands pulling him down into it.

Draco heard a small gasp from Hermione’s direction.

Draco felt frozen, his eyes wide as Pansy ran her tongue over his lips and moaned softly. When she pulled back, she had a smug smirk on her face. Blaise and Nott looked on in fascination at the scene before them.

Crabbe and Goyle, on the other hand, appeared quite confused and worried. For the first time in a long time, he felt their anxiety about the mounting tension present between Pansy, him, and Hermione.

“Now that’s more like it,” Pansy said just before turning toward Hermione. Her smile was smug.

“Granger, you act like you’ve never seen two people kissing before. I know that’s impossible, considering you’re shagging two blokes,” Pansy said snidely.

“You’re not very witty, Pansy, but of course, wit requires intelligence,” Hermione retorted.

“I doubt they spend much time kissing,” Nott sniggered.

Pansy laughed loudly. Her eyes, however, told Draco a different story; he could tell that she was expecting some sort of reaction.

But he refused to give her one; instead, he focused his glare on Nott. “Give it a rest, Nott,” Draco snapped.

Nott shrugged with a daring gleam in his eye, which made Draco want to hex his bollocks off.

“Er, I’ll see you later,” Hermione mumbled, beginning to turn away. Something in Draco’s head screamed for him to run after her, but he couldn’t. The caged animal feeling returned. He felt trapped, helpless, and guilty for allowing Hermione to endure that. But what could he do?

“Much later,” Pansy called after her. “Tonight, Draco will be… busy,” she said suggestively after Hermione, who continued to walk on down the hall alone. The image of throwing Pansy against the wall and shaking her silly rose up strong, and he had to force his anger down by digging his nails into his palm.

“What the hell was that?” he demanded after he was sure Hermione was out of earshot.

“Oh, what’s the big deal, Draco? It’s not like you two are shagging or anything, right?” Pansy asked pointedly. Crabbe, Goyle, Blaise, and Nott all stared at Draco waiting for his answer.

Draco gave a small laugh, pretending that Pansy had said something truly ridiculous. “Me? Shagging Granger? There’s mission and there’s insanity. That’s disgusting,” he said with a grimace.
“Well, you were beginning to worry me for a minute there,” Pansy said, with a mock look of concern. “I thought you two were going to kiss right here in the hallway when you left class,” she said in exaggerated disgust.

“Gods, no,” Draco lied. “The assignment is friends… friends only. But keep at it, Pansy, and you’re going to ruin everything. If that happens, I’ll make sure it gets back as to why.”

Pansy grabbed Draco’s hand and smiled. “You worry too much, Draco… it helps to draw a line in the sand. Friends are friends. I’m just making sure she understands, that’s all,” she said with a sickly sweet smile.

Draco fought to hold off anxiety about how Hermione was taking what had happened. He kept quiet as they all walked back to the Slytherin common room, hoping he’d get an opportunity to slip away soon.

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At dinner, Hermione focused intensely on her meal, while Ron and Harry discussed the last match and what they could do to improve.

Their conversation was drowned out by her own thoughts, however, as she realised with increasing frustration that while the boys seemed to be growing closer and progressing well in their separate pairings, they seemed to be again focusing on themselves and not asking her about her day.

Since the last conversation by the Lake, Ron had taken to giving Hermione considerable distance. She had guessed that he was probably weary of how she may react to anything he said, which she thought was ridiculous. Harry wavered between giving her outright orders and pretending they were just friends again. They both seemed quite confused about what she wanted and more comfortable with avoiding the much-needed discussion about the way the relationship was developing or not developing at the moment. She didn’t understand why they couldn’t see that they were treating her like she didn’t have any feelings, like she didn’t really matter. They were taking her for granted, and she was tired of it.

“What do you think, Hermione?” Harry asked.

“Huh?” she asked, snapping her attention back to them.

“About the last game, what do you think about our defence?” Harry asked in frustration that apparently she had not been listening.

“What do you think?” Hermione snapped.

Ron and Harry both looked at her in puzzled weariness that she was getting sick of seeing.

Ron sighed and shook his head, while Harry took a drink of his pumpkin juice. Hermione felt her blood boil as they began to resume their conversation about replacing one of their Chasers.

She could feel her anger and frustration rising as the seconds went by. They hadn’t even bothered to ask her why she had snapped. She was so irate that she couldn’t even look at them any longer. She turned her eyes to the Slytherin table to see what Draco was up to and froze immediately.

Pansy practically sat in Draco’s lap, her arm draped over his shoulder, while the other rested on his leg.

Not only did Draco appear comfortable, but he was laughing it up with his housemates.
She felt heat rise in his cheeks as Blaise turned his eyes on her, quirking one curious eyebrow before she rose.

“Where are you going, Hermione?” Ron asked.

“None of your business, Ron!”

“You can’t talk to me like that, sit down,” he ordered.

Hermione huffed and climbed out of her seat, beginning to leave.

“Hermione, get back here,” Harry ordered.

Hermione turned around slowly, a wicked scowl on her face as half of the table watched the Trio’s interaction curiously.

It didn’t go unnoticed that Draco, Pansy, Blaise, and half of Slytherin were watching as well.

She calmed herself, realising she was the centre of attention before she responded.

“What did you say, Harry?” she asked slowly, daring him to order her in front of everyone.

Harry looked around, swallowing as he and Ron exchanged glances.

“Nothing, Hermione. Nothing.”

Hermione smirked. “That’s what I thought you said,” she replied, turning on her heel and making her exit.

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Hermione was furious, but worse than that, she was taken aback and hurt. She felt betrayed.

Watching Pansy kiss Draco in front of her and his non-response had been bad enough, but to watch him just sit there while she draped herself all over him like a cheap rug had felt like a slap in the face.

She began to rethink everything, every word, every interaction they had had in the last two weeks for signs that he had been playing her like one of his slags.

Maybe this was just about the prophecy. If that was the case, then she didn’t want to continue the charade of trying to get to know him better; she needed to protect herself and her feelings. Why she had expected any better, she didn’t know, and she suddenly felt very foolish for thinking he would or could develop deep feelings for her. She was relieved she hadn’t told him that she was falling for him.

At least she still could count on Harry and Ron. Only their relationship had changed in recent weeks.

Being ordered around, and not being asked about what she wanted, what she needed, had gotten old, and she knew she was becoming resentful. It was affecting her ability to enjoy any time she spent around them.

Her hand wandered up to the necklace—her collar—as she began to contemplate the meaning of what she had agreed to and what she wanted. She went to find Harry so that he could call a meeting by the lake just shy of curfew that night.

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Peter watched in his Animagus form as the youngest Malfoy, Weasley, and Potter sat on the rocks, making anxious small talk. He hated transforming into his Animagus, but this was too good not to
get much closer to, and he had missed an opportunity to catch them all together. Finally, he would be able to confirm what he thought he already knew.

The boys seemed to be waiting for something. He found out what they were waiting for when their chatter ceased upon seeing the Mudblood approach. There was a thick anticipation as she walked down toward them; their eyes were fixed on her form, waiting for her to reach them. He noticed that Potter had a curious look on his face, while Weasley watched her with what appeared to be concern, and the youngest Malfoy wore an uncharacteristic apologetic look that he found intriguing.

“Hermione,” he started.

“Save it, Draco,” she snapped.

Potter and Weasley looked between the two of them curiously.

“What happened?” Weasley asked.

The Mudblood’s eyes rested on Malfoy accusingly.

Malfoy shook his head. “It’s … it’s complicated.”

“Is this about Pansy practically sitting in your lap?” Potter asked with a fair degree of bitterness.

Interesting, Potter sounded jealous of a witch over Malfoy. Very interesting, indeed.

Malfoy swallowed, looking between Potter and the Mudblood with a fair amount of guilt on his face. “Things in my house, they’re, they’re—”

“They’re what?” Potter demanded.

The Mudblood pursed her lips. “It doesn’t matter. This isn’t just about Draco; this is about me.”

The others looked at one another and then back at her in puzzlement. The Mudblood took a deep breath and pointed her wand to the necklace around her neck, Transfiguring it into soft pliable material that appeared to be much like soft plastic. She tore it off her neck.

Peter saw that Malfoy was staring fixedly at her while Potter and Weasley looked utterly confused.

“What are you doing?” Malfoy’s voice was laced with anger, his face flushed as he rose from his seat on the rock and walked closer to her.

She stood her ground. “I don’t think I should be wearing this.”

“And why not?” he asked, his brow furrowing.

“This signifies something that we don’t have… trust. I don’t trust you, Draco.”

“What did he do?” Weasley asked, giving Malfoy an angry look.

“It doesn’t matter, Ronald, I don’t trust you right now, either.”


“Or you, Harry,” she added.

Potter’s mouth dropped. “Hermione, what—”
“None of you seem to care about my feelings. This… relationship has been all fun and games for you since we got back. You get to order me about and have your way without any consideration for what I want… for what I need!”

“Hermione, calm down,” Malfoy said.

“You don’t get to tell me that!” she said pointing at him. “I don’t have to do anything you say! I don’t have to do anything any of you say. I hold the power here, not you!”

“Hermione—” Potter said softly.

“No, Harry, you’ll listen to me now. You don’t get access to my thoughts, my body, or any bloody thing of mine unless I say!”

“We know that,” Weasley said.

“No, you don’t. And I don’t think this is what I want anymore.”

The youngest Malfoy sighed. “We need to talk.”

“No, we don’t. I’m still committed to the prophecy, but that doesn’t mean we have to do this… we should still make plans to talk about how we’re going to get to Diagon during the Hogsmeade trip, but let’s just drop the rest. I’m sorry, that’s my decision,” she said firmly before turning away from them and walking away.

Diagon. What could they want there? Peter wondered as he watched her leave.

He scattered back into the woods before transforming into his human form. They had mentioned the prophecy. Surely, the Dark Lord did not intend for the youngest Malfoy to see his mission to this point. Peter was almost sure Lucius had been bluffing. And he had almost fallen for it. He could expose them all now and would be rewarded greatly for it.

But what was waiting for them in Diagon? He debated whether to double his reward and gather more information or head back to Malfoy Manor to report what he knew. Familiar daydreams of unseating the eldest Malfoy and being praised as the Dark Lord’s most valuable servant kept him in his position, contemplating if he should remain hidden in the Forest in hopes that they would reveal even more so that he could make that fantasy come true.
If you wanna be a man, you gotta work real hard;  
If you wanna make me feel I’m like your number one,  
Then nothin’ in the world should make us part.  
‘Cause we can make it work;  
If you take away the hurt from the heart.

I could be a trip but I choose not to,  
Deep inside of you, I think there’s still good in you boy.  
Don’t give me no reason not to trust you,  
Just take the benefit,  
Don’t give me no lip,  
And I’ll be sweet to you.

I’ll be givin’ you the benefit of the doubt  
And I’m givin’ you a minute to try to work it on out  
Baby, work it on out …

“Giving You the Benefit” by Pebbles

The following morning …

Remus was almost there, but something kept his legs from moving any further. He stood frozen in thought at the edge of the Forbidden Forest. His first plan had been to simply walk up to Hagrid’s hut and tell him that he had urgent business to discuss with Harry. But that approach no longer seemed to be such a good idea.

For a moment he wondered why the hell he had ventured out so late last night to come here. And then he remembered. Snape. Once the creepy git had returned, Remus had wanted to get as far away from him as possible, especially now. Taking Wolfsbane or not, he never was comfortable transforming with Snape around, and he could tell that broody Potions professor was even more uncomfortable around him when the full moon approached. He opted instead for making a trip to Hogsmeade to stay for the night so he could come and visit Harry the next day. Besides, Remus had always felt his most comfortable being close to the forest right before the rise of the full moon. That, and he also had some thinking to do about what he was going to say to Harry.

Of course, he could have easily owled Dumbledore to let him know he was coming by, but after Snape had reappeared at Grimmauld, that didn’t seem quite appropriate either. He really didn’t know what to think of Snape’s story. As a matter of fact, he didn’t know what to think of Snape, period. Their thorny past seemed to hover in the air whenever the git entered the room. To Remus, Snape remained a snarky, moody, secretive git.

But he had to admit that since Snape had confessed his culpability in the war crimes committed against Muggles, Muggle-borns, and those fighting on the side of the light, the man had become a little more patient and a little less mean-spirited.
While he and Remus were far from friends, there was a sort of mutual respect between the two of them, enough to keep Remus from approaching Dumbledore right now. Removing Snape from the school had been extreme, especially for Dumbledore, and Remus could tell from the look in Snape’s eyes that it had been humiliating.

Remus had begun to wonder about Dumbledore ever since learning of the prophecy. If it were true, then perhaps it was no accident that James and Sirius had discovered that Lily had been involved with Snape by way of the map. He had always wondered why no one had stepped forward to receive James’ gratitude for gifting such an incredible object. Once the map was in James’ hands, everything after had been much different. The affair between the four of them had started almost immediately, and the rivalry between them and Snape had escalated to a feverish pitch.

Remus shuddered as he thought of how close he had been to almost killing Snape. So close. Sirius and Peter had been complete bastards for planning that. Of course, Peter never took the blame—he hadn’t been suave enough to execute it, but Remus knew it had been the both of them. And what did Dumbledore do? Nothing.

“I almost ate Snape,” he whispered to himself, the surrealness of that awful fact setting in once more. He quickly tried to push it away, focusing on the real reason why he had come here. After Snape had informed him that Harry was aware of his relationship with Lily, Remus knew he had to talk to Harry. He just didn’t know how exactly. What would he say to him? *I’m sorry I shagged your mum, Harry, it was all your dad’s idea.*

No matter how many ways he turned over an explanation about it, it didn’t seem sound enough. Perhaps if it had been something more, something long term, he could find the courage to justify the relationship to Harry. But what they had had only been a moment in time. It had been an experimentation among the closest of friends, whom he loved dearly, but with whom he was never in love, not in that way.

And so, Remus remained staring up at the castle near the edge of the forest, wondering if he would actually be able to say anything to Harry at all.

He was about to turn back when he heard something crack. A branch, not far from the rocks but just inside the forest. It was small crack, one most people would have ignored or dismissed as a victim of the wind or perhaps some inconsequential creature, but Remus had spent enough time in those woods to know that small sounds were not to be ignored or underestimated.

It wasn’t hard for him to inch forward with stealth that only a skilled predator could use. Snape hadn’t been just mocking him when he told him to use his nose; it did come in handy sometimes. And right now, he smelled vermin.

There was a great rustling amongst the trees, and several fallen branches cracked as if suddenly broken by the pressure of heavy feet or something bigger, like a body. Remus moved quickly over to that area and crouched down, to peer in the dark. There on the ground was the mass of a man with a balding crown, bend over on his legs as if mimicking a gigantic bunny rabbit. The man’s clothing was worn and torn, and he looked filthy.

Peter.

What was he doing here?

*What do you think he’s doing here?* came the mental reply. *‘Follow the rat, Lupin’* Snape’s voice echoed in his head.
Peter began to rise, turning his head sharply, as if sensing Remus’ presence.

“Immobilius!” Remus shouted quickly. The stump of a man froze and fell over on his side like a lead weight, cracking more leaves and fallen branches as he hit the forest floor.

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The day after she had given back her collar, Hermione put as much space between her and Ron and Harry. She didn’t know how they would go back to what they used to be just yet, and she had doubts about whether they fully understood what exactly she had been calling off.

After classes were over, she made a conscious effort to reconnect with her other friends and sought out Ginny, who she found reading on her bed in the fifth year dormitory.

Hermione quickly discovered that Ginny was worried about their last conversation in the common room. The youngest Weasley wanted to be certain that Hermione would not disclose that she had performed oral sex on Draco outside of Classroom Eleven at the beginning of the school year.

“Ginny, I’m not going to tell Ron. You have my word.”

“Good, because, you know if he found out Hermione, it would be very bad for everyone. He wouldn’t understand.”

“I’m still not sure I do either,” Hermione said, surveying her friend, trying to force the thought of the redhead going down on her newest lover out of her head.

“Enough about that… What’s really going on between you three and the ferret?” Ginny pressed.

“Ginny…” Hermione huffed at the girl’s persistence on the topic.

“Hermione! Ginny!” Parvati exclaimed excitedly as she entered the dormitory and sat down between the girls on Hermione’s bed.

Ginny and Hermione both exchanged glances before sniggering at their friend’s enthusiasm.

“Oh, stop it! Can you blame me for getting a little excited at seeing you the two of you talking, without boys around? We never see you anymore, Hermione,” Parvati complained.

“I know, but I’m here now.” Hermione smiled.

“Good, so now that we have you to ourselves, let’s go have a chat, shall we?” she proposed.

Hermione stared back at her guardedly. “Chat about what?”

Parvati and Ginny exchanged glances. “Er, this and that,” Parvati said with sketchy eyes.

Hermione pursed her mouth, thinking. “What?”

“We have to ask, is there something going on between you four?” Parvati asked with in a hushed whisper, leaning over as if ready to gobble up anything Hermione said.

Hermione’s smile dropped. “Parvati…”

Ginny shrugged.

Hermione exhaled, contemplating. She really missed confiding in them, talking to them, and now
that she was in a relationship with her best mates, things were even more complex. Ginny and Parvati had always been there for her, especially when Ron and Harry wouldn’t or couldn’t understand what she was going through. She wanted to be open with them, but she knew she couldn’t reveal everything, they wouldn’t understand and it could jeopardise what they were trying to accomplish.

There was a long silence, and then Hermione sighed. “We’re trying to be friends with Draco. He’s changing.”

“You already gave us that story; there has to be more to it than that,” Ginny pressed.

“There isn’t. I’m sorry, but you should know that we’ve spent enough time with him to see it. He really isn’t the same person anymore, well, not entirely.”

Parvati and Ginny continued to stare at her.

“Do you know what the school thinks?” Parvati asked quietly.

“I’m pretty sure I can guess,” Hermione said with resignation.

“Hermione, you have to put some distance between him. The way you guys are always together and going off to be by yourselves… it looks…” Ginny shook her head.

“It looks bad,” Parvati finished.

“You know how I feel about gossips. No matter what you do, they’ll reach the worst conclusion,” Hermione insisted.

“Well they were right about you, Harry, and Ron,” Ginny muttered.

“Thanks, Ginny, that’s exactly what I need right now.” Hermione pursed her lips, her face flushed.

“Well, you can’t have three hot blokes to yourself… it’s just not fair!” Parvati protested half jokingly.

“And if other girls start really believing that you’re with Harry, Ron and the Slytherin Prat, you’re as good as toast,” Ginny warned.

“I’m not scared of the other bints.” Hermione waved her hand dismissively.

Parvati sat considering her before speaking again. “How do you know Malfoy doesn’t want in on your threesome? Maybe he’s doing it for a dare or he’s a kinky perv trying to get off.”

Hermione had to giggle. If Parvati only knew. “I don’t think that’s it, Parvati.”

“Perhaps he’s interested in you… or maybe even Ron or Harry,” she continued speculatively.

Hermione smiled in amusement at Parvati. “Does everything have to be sexual?”

Parvati giggled. “It’s certainly more interesting to discuss when it is.”

Hermione shook her head at the girl.

“So that’s it then?” Ginny appeared slightly disappointed.

Hermione shrugged. “That’s all I have to say about it really. Sorry.”
“Well, alright, if you say so. But Hermione, all joking aside, you have to be careful,” Ginny warned.

“Don’t I know it.” Hermione sighed. “McGonagall has already threatened to bar me from consideration from the Head Girl position because of my relationship with Harry and Ron… and Pansy has been a real nightmare lately.”

“She and Draco look awfully cozy these days,” Ginny added, with Parvati nodding in agreement.

Hermione grit her teeth.

“I’m surprised she isn’t giving him hell about hanging out with you three. In fact, I can’t imagine what the Slytherins must be thinking of him,” Parvati said in speculation.

“I’m sure Malfoy has thought up some great lie to keep them kissing his arse,” Ginny said with eye roll. “You know, I trust him as far as I can throw him.”

Hermione opened her mouth to defend Draco when Ginny put her hand up. “Forget it, you three obviously see something that the rest of us don’t… just, please, keep your wits about you. This is all a bit too sudden and…”


Ginny nodded. “Yes, bizarre.”

Hermione nodded curtly. “Fine. Let’s change the subject then, shall we? So what about you, Ginny? Is it my imagination or are Dean’s eyes permanently glued to your bum lately?”

“And not just his eyes…” Parvati added with an amused grin.

Hermione laughed while Ginny blushed and scowled at Parvati before bursting into a fit of giggles.

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In another part of the castle…

“Try again,” Harry said in a patient voice. “Clear your mind and try to focus on your happiest memory.”

“I know, Harry! You don’t have to repeat the same thing every time. I get it!” Draco snapped.

“Calm down, Draco. Getting yourself worked up isn’t helping. In order to produce a proper Patronus, you need to relax, as well,” Harry explained.

“I am relaxed!” Draco’s annoyance with Harry’s patronising tone was wearing thin; that, and after three sessions of tutoring, he still couldn’t produce a bloody Patronus.

Harry sighed, but remained silent as he waited.

Exhaling slowly, Draco closed his eyes to gather his thoughts. “*Expecto Patronum!*” he yelled out, daring to peek at last. But again, there was nothing.

“Damn it!”

Harry gave Draco a pitying smile. “Look, you’ve been working hard. Maybe we should give it a rest for tonight.”
“No! Last session I managed to produce a little sliver of one. I won’t leave today until I have at least that,” Draco insisted.

Harry nodded reluctantly. “Alright, but if you don’t mind me asking, when you say the spell, what exactly are you thinking of?”

Suddenly Draco felt very guarded, and Harry’s face, his eyes, they were too close, as if trying to peer into thoughts. He shook his head. “That’s… none of your business.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Right. Well, then I’ve done about all I can do to help you. I guess you’ll have to figure the rest out on your own.”

Draco surveyed Harry with intense calculation. He had come this far, and Harry had seen him at his most vulnerable before, so he decided to take a leap of faith. “My family, before… everything, when I was younger, before Hogwarts.”

Harry shook his head disapprovingly. “Well, that’s the problem. That’s too general. You need a specific—”

“I know that! You didn’t let me finish!”

“Sorry…”

Draco sighed. “So, there was one day in particular. My father…” Draco’s voice trailed off, and he couldn’t help the smile tugging on his lips.


“My father taught me how to fly,” Draco finished stiffly.

Harry stared back at Draco with a shocked expression.

“Close your mouth, Potter, or something might fly in it.”

Harry gave Draco a small, bemused smile. “Sorry. I just never pictured Lucius Malfoy flying.”

“Well, he did… does…. He taught me. I was showing off in the garden for my mum.” Draco cracked a smile then. “I almost broke my arse doing it, too… but then he picked me up and we both got on. He let me steer. Then suddenly I felt like I could do anything. It was the best feeling ever. I’ve never seen my father that carefree before. He looked so… relaxed.”

There was a small appreciative silence between Harry and Draco, and then Harry forced a small smile. “Better times, I suppose,” he said.

Draco gave the statement a stiff nod. He was right, those were better times, but he hated acknowledging it.

“Is it hard?” Harry asked. “To think of that time and not think of what’s going on now… with your family?”

Draco nodded, his eyes cast to the floor. “I can’t think of that time, and my family, without thinking about what’s happening now. I just can’t.”

Harry reached out to place a hand on Draco’s shoulder and squeezed encouragingly. “Then you’ll have to choose another memory,” he said cautiously.
Draco shook his head. “I have no other memory that could compare to that,” he almost whispered, suddenly feeling quite inadequate and poor.

Harry hand travelled from Draco’s shoulder up to his hair, stroking it. “None?” he asked softly.

Draco pulled away from Harry, his resentment at the Boy Wonder rising. “No! I don’t have bloody fan club like you do, or friends, or a famous name!”

“You’re wrong. You have friends… and lovers…” Harry’s stare was fixed and meaningful.

Draco stared back at Harry, feeling the tension between them growing thick. Harry seemed to be stiff, as if waiting for rejection, while Draco felt uncertain and apprehensive.

But Harry’s face showed none of that, and it emboldened Draco to begin to close the gap between them. He drew closer until he was standing nose to nose with Harry. When Harry opened his mouth to speak, Draco took his mouth without a second thought, pulling the dark-haired boy into him. Harry seemed caught off guard, moaning in surprise and approval until Draco pulled back, closed his eyes, and pointed his wand out.

“Expecto Patronum!” Draco’s wand vibrated, and he willed himself to slowly open his eyes, half-expecting to be disappointed once more. But there was a sliver of silver light flooding from the tip, growing larger by the minute, until the shape of a full grown wolf stood in front of him and Harry. It turned and ran a full circle around them both before disappearing into thin air.

“It’s a wolf!” he laughed, looking back at Harry in surprise. “It’s a bloody wolf!”

Harry laughed with him before embracing him in a tight hug. “That was brilliant, Draco!”

Someone from a darkened corner began clapping. They both paused, staring at each other with wide eyes, before quickly pointing their wands in the direction of the sound.

“Show yourself!” Harry demanded. Draco’s hand shook, and he was scrambling to think of hexes to use just in case. He probably would have used one without bothering to see who was there, but having Harry at his side was reassuring. A curse sat on his tongue as Ron slowly stepped from the darkened corner.

“Weasley!”

“Oh, it’s Weasley now?” Ron teased with a playful smile.

Draco scowled. Ron’s smile was damned near infectious. And truthfully, Draco was half relieved. But he was also annoyed that Ron had given them a scare and that he been spying on them for who knows how long.

“Ron, how long have you been standing there?” Harry asked sternly.

“Long enough,” Ron said. “Congratulations, Malfoy; nice Patronus you have there.”

Draco smirked. “It’s nothing, really…”

Harry gave Draco an eye roll and smiled.

“What are you doing here?” Draco asked.

Ron shrugged. “Well, I thought we should talk about Hermione… I’m sort of worried.”
Harry and Draco exchanged a glance and then nodded in agreement.

“She totally overreacted,” Harry started. “But I do think she has a point about one thing…”

“What?” Ron asked doubtfully.

Harry turned to Draco. “Tell us, what exactly is going on between you and Pansy… it’s pretty disrespectful… to all of us.”

Draco groaned. “You think I like that slag hanging all over me?” he asked in exasperation.

“Well, it sure looks like you’re enjoying it,” Harry said accusingly.

“Yeah, I thought you said your housemates don’t mind you hanging with us,” Ron added. “So why would you need to play charades with Pansy?”

Draco shook his head. “Look, guys, I told you before, it’s complicated.”

“Well, I don’t like it,” Harry said, irritation in his voice. “It’s foul, leading Pansy on like that. If you do care about her, then you need to be honest with us… with Hermione especially.” He said the last averting his eyes as if embarrassed about something.

Draco was touched, an oddly warm feeling rising within him. It was obvious this was much more about him than Hermione. “Just Hermione, Harry?”

Harry blushed. “Just answer the damn question!”

Draco sighed. “Don’t worry; I’ll take care of it.”

Harry sighed a little. “Good.”

Ron nodded. “And do it quick. I’d hate the thought of having sex with Pansy.”

“What are you on about?” Draco asked. “You don’t have to have sex with Pansy.” It never ceased to amaze him some of the things that came out of Ron’s mouth.

“Listen, every time you touch Pansy, I’m reminded that you two could potentially be having sex. Every time we snog you, we could be indirectly snogging her, too,” Ron explained, making a disgusted face.

Draco scoffed. “Right, Ron. You don’t mind spanking Pansy, just snogging her.”

“Just get rid of her, alright?” Ron mumbled, his ears turning pink.

Harry sniggered, while Draco huffed. “And what about you two?”

“What about us?” Ron asked.

“Well, at least I have an excuse. You two must have done something really bad for Hermione to say she doesn’t trust you anymore,” Draco pointed out.

Harry sighed, throwing up his hands. “She’s just being a spoiled stubborn… submissive. She really can’t handle taking orders, at least not all the time. I think this is all a game to her.”

Ron nodded in agreement, but Draco narrowed his eyes, considering Harry’s statement.
“But there’s more to it than that…” he countered. “I mean, it’s more than just giving orders.”

“What do you mean? How’s it supposed to work, then?” Ron sounded frustrated. “She wants to give up control, but in her way. That doesn’t make any sense to me.”

“Do you remember what Snape told us?” Draco reminded. “He said that—”

“It’s a gift,” Harry and Ron chimed in together.

“Right, and that if we abuse it, she can take it back,” Draco finished.

“So that means she really has the power then… she’s in control,” Ron said slowly, appearing to be thinking out loud. “But doesn’t that defeat the whole purpose of asking us to take control? The more I think about it, the less sense this whole thing makes.”

Harry tapped his forehead. “And if she had ultimate control, and she can just give back her collar anytime she’s not happy, then she’s the one calling the shots. That’s makes us the real submissives.”

Draco nodded. “Yeah, I suppose you could spin yourself in circles all day thinking about it. But I really do think she wants to submit; she enjoys it, we’ve seen that. I think she just doesn’t want to be mistreated.”

“We weren’t mistreating her,” Ron insisted.

Harry bit his lip. “Well, maybe a bit, but it’s hard to tell when she likes being pushed,” he said in confusion.

“Yeah, but she has to get off on it, too,” Draco offered. “Maybe there’s a difference between pushing a submissive and abusing them…”

Harry stood contemplating Draco’s words. “I suppose. I guess it’s about everyone getting what they need out of it.”

“And what would that be, exactly?” Ron asked in frustration. “Hermione hasn’t really told us any of her needs. How are we supposed to know what she wants, if she doesn’t tell us?”

“Hmm, well, actually she has,” Draco said.

“When?” Ron pressed.

Draco sighed. “When we were discussing the terms of her submission. Remember? Like she was clear that she wanted to be respected in public. It seems really important for her, and we have been sort of ignoring that a bit,” he said staring at Ron, who blushed.

“Well, how am I supposed to know what’s public and what’s public public?” he asked.

Draco and Harry both gave him a sceptical look.

“Oh alright, what else, then?” Ron asked, admitting his culpability.

“Well, she does have fantasies…” Harry admitted.

“Fantasies?” Draco and Ron stared at him in surprise.

“Yeah, she has about sixteen fantasies,” Harry explained.
“Sixteen!” Draco and Ron said together.

Harry nodded.

“Harry, it’d probably be a good idea if we were all aware of those,” Draco said with irritation.

“Right,” Ron said in evident annoyance that Harry had been holding out on him.

Harry appeared ashamed. “I know. I just got caught up in her pleasing me… it felt really good. I guess I didn’t really think about what she wanted.”

“Well that’s easy enough to do. I thought that just doing what we said would be enough,” Ron added.

“Obviously not,” Draco said. “I mean, think about it. Hermione is the brightest witch of her age, she’s confident, she runs circles around everyone at this school. And she chose us to give up control to. That’s—”

“Special,” Harry finished.

Draco nodded. “Very.”

“So,” Harry said, thinking out loud. “She wants to give up control, she wants to be pushed, but she doesn’t want to feel abused or taken for granted. We have to show her that we appreciate her gift… her submission, but that she can’t just take it back every time she’s dissatisfied.”

“And how do we do that?” Ron asked.

Draco smirked as his thoughts began to fall into a cohesive plan. “Well, each of us has a lot of work to do, and we all have different ways we can go about it, but I think I have an idea.”

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Later that night…

It was an half an hour before curfew. People were on their way back to their common rooms, a few lingering in the halls. Hermione had failed to show up at her usual spot for studying in the library, so Draco had been discreetly roaming the halls, searching for her, under the guise of just having a casual walk about the castle.

He had to admit, he was frustrated beyond belief. What an impossible situation. Hermione hadn’t even given him a moment to explain. Surely she understood the circumstances he was dealing with! Still, another part of him understood also that he was straddling a line that could not be straddled for very long. Sooner or later, something would have to give, and he’d have to make a choice. But first, he’d try to get through to her in private. That would be much easier.

His paced slowed when his eyes caught the sight of a long, bushy mane bouncing in the far distance. She was walking alone at a steady pace toward the hallway that would eventually lead to the Gryffindor common room. And she was walking fast. Draco’s eyes scanned the hallway. There were too many people lined up here and there. If he ran after her, it would create a scene. But he would have to catch up to get her to go with him somewhere more private.

It was now or never. He had never chased a girl before; he had never had to. But this was different. She was the key to everything right now. The four of them didn’t really work without her. They needed her… he needed her. And right now, he really didn’t care how it would look for him to be...
calling her name in front of several onlookers.

“Hermione!” he called, as several girls turned around to watch the interaction, whispering and staring.

Hermione continued to walk, picking up her pace.

“Hermione, hold on!” he called. When Hermione didn’t slow down, Draco felt compelled to do something that felt completely foreign to him - he began to run.

When he finally caught up to her, Hermione turned around in a huff. “What do you want?”

Draco let out an exasperated sigh. “I just want… look, we need to talk, but not here, let’s take a walk,” he said softly, glancing behind him.

“What’s the matter; scared your girlfriend might come along?” Hermione asked bitterly. “Oh, look at this. Trelawney was wrong; I do have the gift of foresight!”

“What?” Draco asked, when a familiar and unwelcome voice called from behind him.

“Draco!”

Draco closed his eyes, cursing Pansy’s poor timing. When he opened them, Hermione had hers narrowed to the thinnest, most hateful slits he’d ever seen on her face.

“Darling, what are you doing here?” Pansy cooed once she caught up to them. She gave Hermione a brief amused glance and then turned to smile warmly at Draco. “A few of us from the House are gearing up to play wizarding poker…”

Draco sighed. “Bugger off, Pans.”

“What?” Pansy asked in incredulity.

There was a small crowd gathering, staring with rapt attention at the scene unfolding.

Draco watched as Hermione shook her head, and glanced to the side as if she were about turn and walk away. Draco knew that Hermione was not the kind of girl who would subject herself to repeated humiliation in front of others. He finally had her attention now, after days of being ignored; if he was going to start proving he was worthy of her trust, it had to start now.

“You heard me. I said I’m not interested, Pansy.” His voice was firm and clear with layered meaning.

“Draco, you’re embarrassing me;” Pansy said in a fierce whisper, glancing to her side at the whispering onlookers.

“No, you’re embarrassing yourself, and you have been for quite some time,” he sneered.

A smug look of someone who had a winning hand grew on Pansy’s face. “Fine, I guess you won’t mind me talking to Nott, then.”

Draco gave a short, biting laugh that sounded more like his father’s than his own. “I don’t give a shit what you talk about with Nott! You can talk to whoever you like, you can fuck whoever you like, you can jump off of the bloody Astronomy Tower if you like, just leave me the hell alone!”

The smugness left Pansy’s face and was replaced by a pitiful look of regret. “You just wrote your
death sentence, Draco,” she whispered, before turning and walking away.

Draco sighed, trying not to think of where she was going, who she was going to talk to, and what it may mean for him. Whatever lay ahead for him was probably going to happen anyway. He could only keep up this charade so long. It was wearing on him. He had a back-up plan, one he loathed to think of. Despite Pansy’s threat, he was not without options. But he didn’t want to think of it right now; he needed to mend things with Hermione.

He turned around and his heart dropped to see that she was not there. Instead, there was a small crowd of students, staring at him with fascination. He didn’t waste time and ran in the direction she had previously been heading.

It took a few minutes to find her, but when he did, she was walking down an empty corridor very slowly, as if in thought.

“Hermione…” he called down to her.

Hermione’s steps began to take on an uneven beat as she quickened her pace.

Draco could feel his heart pounding as he walked briskly to catch up to her. When he finally reached her, he was at his wit’s end, determined to get her to face him. “Hermione, I need to talk to you!”

Hermione groaned, finally stopping to turn to face him. “Why? So I can watch you snog Pansy in the middle of the hallway?”

Draco ran his hands over his hair, pulling it in frustration. “If you had stuck around, you would have seen me telling her to go shove it up her arse.”

She looked back at him dubiously.

He gave her a small smirk, holding out his hand to her. “Come here,” he said softly.

“No,” she said firmly, crossing her arms over her chest. “You can’t tell me what to do anymore!”

She was right. He couldn’t. But there were other things he could do.

Draco moved in quickly to kiss her hard and fierce, devouring her mouth, trying to savour every bit of taste from her; he’d missed kissing her.

When he pulled back, they were both breathing hard, staring at each other.

“You think you can just do what you want, don’t you?” she spat bitterly. “You think you can just snuggle up and snog her and then move on to me?”

“I’m not snogging her! I can’t, not after being with you,” he whispered.

Hermione shook her head. “You’re just saying that; you’ll say whatever it takes to get what you want.”

“Will I?” he said, wrapping an arm around her waist pulling her closer.

“Draco…” she protested, trying to pull away.

“Do you want me?” He had to know, he had to hear her say it.

She pushed against him harder. “It doesn’t ma—”
“Do you want me?” He repeated insistently.

She stared at him for a moment, fixing her mouth.

He smirked, recognising her stubbornness and obvious signs of desire by the flush of her cheeks and the ever so slight squirming against his body.

“Follow me,” he said as he let her go, turning his back to her.

He hoped, wished, that Hermione was at least curious enough to do what he requested. Still, he was determined not to look behind him. He couldn’t show her how anxious he was to prove himself to her, how much he wanted her to want him just as much as he wanted her. He was the dominant here, and however this went down, he was determined to remain in control.

Even though Draco didn’t dare look back, he listened closely for the steady sound of her footsteps behind him as he led her down a winding staircase under the Slytherin dungeons.

He heard her pause a few times, and he slowed his footsteps discreetly so that she could keep up.

When he reached his destination, he whispered what he believed to be the password, waiting for the worn, blackened wooden door to open. He had never tried it before, only heard about it, so he was only half expecting it to work. But to his surprise the door began to creak open.

Relief and anxiousness that he was determined not to show set in, but he continued to walk through the door as if he had done so a million times before. The room really was lavish, even in its neglected state. The ceiling, though slightly dirty and covered in dust, was clearly once silver-plated, moulded into intricate serpentine designs wrapping themselves around each other forming wave-like patterns. The wall was a deep emerald green with just the slightest specks of silver, which matched the painted silver cracks along the grey stone floor, cracks that all lead to master bed, which was situated on a plush exotic green rug. The bed itself was huge, with a plush green duvet, the canopy over it was velvet with silver roped ties dangling from each corner.

“What is this room?” Hermione asked. “And why did you bring me down here?”

Draco could detect the nervousness in her voice, but it was mostly covered by the rational no-nonsense tone she often used when scolding others.

He turned around slowly. “We need to talk, and set some things straight.”

“There’s nothing to talk about!” Her voice was almost shrill, as if she had reached her limit in repeating herself.

Draco stared at her. She huffed and looked around the room and then back at him. He continued to stare, even when she began to fidget and avert her eyes once again.

“Stop staring at me like that,” she demanded.

He closed his eyes. It was important that she knew how he felt about her, but he never was good at talking, not about things like this, especially with girls. He had never felt this way about a girl, so he had never had to do this. But it would be a beginning, a new beginning for them.

Draco opened his eyes to Hermione’s suspicious expression. “You’re just mad I made you lose that stupid bet you made with Ron.”

Draco stared back at her in confusion. “Bet? You think I really care about some bet? You think Ron
cares about it? We don’t. I do care about you, though… a lot.”

“What?” she asked.

“You heard me.” He wasn’t going to repeat himself, he hated doing that.

Hermione eyes narrowed, and Draco felt resignation that perhaps she was already convinced he was a liar.

“You’re lying,” she said stubbornly.

“I’d never lie about that,” he said truthfully.

“Then how do you explain Pans—”

“I made a mistake; I gave her too much power. I thought she’d make trouble for me.” Draco had to stop for a moment, forcing himself to keep eye contact with her as he spoke the next. “I was being a coward… but I’m not afraid anymore,” he said simply. It was a half-truth; he was scared of what choices lay ahead for him, but not scared enough to lose her.

“And why not?” He could see that she was still watching him for signs of untruthfulness.

“Because some things are worth the risk,” he whispered, grabbing her around the waist once again, drawing her close to him. “You don’t trust me anymore.”

She nodded, confirming what he said.

“Tell me, Hermione. What do I have to do to earn your trust?”

“I’m not sure,” she said, thinking. “But it’ll take time…”

Draco nodded. “I see, and there’s nothing I can do to speed it up a bit?”

Hermione shook her head. “No… you can’t. Unless…”

“Anything,” he said quickly, and he meant it.

Hermione stared back at him cautiously, narrowing her eyes. “Anything?”

Draco nodded slowly, suddenly a bit apprehensive about what was going through that brilliant mind of hers.

To his horror, a slow devilish smirk grew on her face. “What if I said you had to do everything I said?”

Inwardly, Draco chuckled. He could handle that. He quirked one eyebrow. “It depends, will you respect my limits?”

Hermione huffed. “Yes, of course.”

“Alright, I’ll do it,” he quickly agreed.

Hermione narrowed her eyes. “Not so fast, what’s the catch?”

“No catch, Hermione… anything you want. I’m your servant,” he bowed his head a little.

A determined, stern expression was set on her face as she backed away and waved her hand airily.
“Strip, right here and now.”

Draco pulled his robe over his head and then slowly began unbuttoning his shirt, keeping his eyes on her.

He tried not to smirk as he observed that Hermione appeared to be over-thinking what her next order would be.

~~~*~~~

Hermione wondered what game Draco was playing. He’d agreed to do whatever she asked a little too easily, too quickly, with no protest.

Well, if he thinks this is going to make up for being a prat, then he’s quite mistaken.

Still, she found herself enjoying the idea of having the great Slytherin bint magnet under her thumb. Total control sounded very nice. Oh, the things she could do…

Hermione let her eyes slowly run down his now naked form, taking him in from head to toe. He was semi-hard, so apparently this wasn’t completely unarousing to him, but to her satisfaction, he obviously wasn’t doing it because it was a turn on, either. Giving himself to her in this way meant something more to him.

“On your knees,” she ordered.

Draco kept his eyes on her as he lowered himself to the cold stone floor.

She smirked, lifting up her robe, revealing her regular school uniform, instead of the corset and garters they had ordered her to wear.

Draco’s eyes were appraising, calculated and intense, even in his new submissive position on the floor. Since Draco was obviously experienced in dominating his partner, she felt some pressure to impress him with her own skill at retaining control and showing mastery. Hermione found herself swallowing, as she tried to look nonchalant.

Hermione thought of the first time he had dominated her to use as an example for how she should do it, but with that thought came the memory of the freedom she felt while submitting. She felt her mouth pinch as it often did when she was deep in thought. This wasn’t exactly what she would call fun, but she had no doubt that it would be very satisfying.

But what to do next? Perhaps something to humiliate him, he seemed to love humiliating her. Or maybe she should make him serve her, or perhaps something that accomplished both.

She stared down at him. “Kiss my toes.”

The shadow of a smirk that had been on Draco’s face since he stripped disappeared, and with what Hermione surmised took great effort, Draco slowly leaned over, bringing his lips to her feet.

It was an interesting sight, and she couldn’t deny there was a degree of satisfaction in it, but it didn’t turn her on at all.

Hermione watched as Draco remained bent, his lips planting kisses around her feet. She had to stifle a giggle at how much the brush of his lips tickled her; she wanted to just snatch her feet away.

“That’s enough!”
Slowly, he lifted his head, keeping his eyes on her. “Yes, Mistress.”

Hermione frowned. Surely there had to be something more satisfying to being the dominant than this.

“Crawl over to the bed,” she forced out sternly.

Draco narrowed his eyes but didn’t reply, only nodded his head.

“What’s that?” she asked.

“Yes, Mistress,” he replied in a steely voice. Just enough steel to make her mind wander, thinking of how far she could take this. What would be his breaking point? She grinned to herself. The consequences of pushing Draco too far didn’t frighten her; on the contrary, she found the prospect very arousing. Perhaps he would rise up and punish her for exploiting the situation. Perhaps he would give her a good hard spanking, or tie her up and…

“Yes, Mistress,” he replied in a steely voice. Just enough steel to make her mind wander, thinking of how far she could take this. What would be his breaking point? She grinned to herself. The consequences of pushing Draco too far didn’t frighten her; on the contrary, she found the prospect very arousing. Perhaps he would rise up and punish her for exploiting the situation. Perhaps he would give her a good hard spanking, or tie her up and…

“Is this an acceptable pose, Mistress?” Draco asked, breaking Hermione’s thoughts.

Her eyes sharpened, staring at Draco’s smooth, pale backside perched up invitingly as he leaned over the bed as if waiting for her to strike him. His head was buried in the mattress. She had to see his face, see if he was smiling, having a laugh at her expense.

“Turn your head to the side so I can see your eyes,” she ordered.

Draco immediately did as he was told. Draco’s face was sombre, and there was a hint of trepidation in his eyes as he followed her movement to his side so she could study his expression.

“Anything I want, Malfoy?” She ran her hands down his back and over one smooth, alabaster arse cheek before bringing back her hand and slapping it hard enough to make the blond gasp.

“Yes… anything you want,” he gritted.

Hermione began to think about what would have the most impact on him, what would make her feel what she felt when she was in this position. She felt a flash of aggravation. She was always thinking. It was what she did best. She was full of ideas, plans, and facts. The feeling of letting go of all of that and allowing someone else to do all of the work involved in decision-making and tending to what happened next had been blissful. This wasn’t really that much fun at all, but she would be damned if she gave up so he could mock her.

She brought her hand back once more, slapping his arse in the same place, the heat from her hand making her think of how her own bum had felt the first time Draco had spanked her. She closed her eyes briefly, reminiscing. If their positions were reversed, he wouldn’t show any mercy, he would spank her until she cried out, so that was what she intended to do as well.

Smack.

The sound recalled the memory of the way the sting of pain from his hand always left her wet and wanting more.

Smack. Smack.

Hermione stifled a moan, thinking on the last time she had been spanked, how good it had felt to have her skin on fire from his punishment.

No mercy.
Smack. Smack. Smack.

She heard Draco’s muffled grunt against the mattress and couldn’t help but smile in satisfaction.

Well, not entirely. It was nice watching him take it for her. But now she was really aroused, not from the sight of his red bum, but from the memory of him doing this to her. Right now she wanted to be the one taking it, squirming against the bed, as he punished her for whatever reason he thought was appropriate at the moment. She wanted to feel his control, listen to him whisper dirty things in her ear, and possess her, taking her hard. She could, of course, order him to do those things to her right now, but it wouldn’t feel the same if she ordered it.

Hermione hadn’t realised she had stopped spanking until she felt her hand being pushed back as Draco rose from his position. He straightened to his full height and then turned around, setting his grey stare on her. His eyes seemed to see right through her as he began to step toward her.

She stepped back. When she did, the corner of his mouth slowly turned into a slow smirk. Her stomach was doing funny things, she felt pinned by his stare, her anxiousness and arousal mixing, making her heart beat wildly. Unconsciously, she took two more steps back. He was still walking toward her, more like stalking, in all his nude glory. And now, his cock was hard. Quite.

“Draco….”

He reached her, grabbing her wrist to pull her body flush against him. Hermione tried not to rub herself against the steel of his cock pressing into her centre. Her damp centre. Her knickers were very wet.

“Draco….”

“Did you get it all out of your system? Hmm?” he whispered.

The sultry tone of his soft voice made her heart race and she stopped backing away.

“Do you need for me to do anything else for you?” he asked darkly.

Hermione’s mouth went dry as Draco’s mouth hovered over hers, both of his hands moved quickly, bringing her arms behind her back as his mouth descended on hers, taking her lips, her tongue, everything.

She moaned as his tongue slid in, exploring, demanding, claiming hers. When he pulled back, his grip on her arms behind her back tightened, and he pressed her harder into his body.

“Answer me. Did you get it all out?” he demanded.

“Y-Yes,” she stammered.

“Yes, what?” his voice rose.

“Yes, Draco,” she quickly replied.

“No,” he said, with a dangerous gleam in his eyes that shot a jolt straight to her pussy. “Yes, Master.”

Hermione opened her mouth, but no sound came out.

Draco reached out, grabbing her hands, pulling her close to him.
Hermione tried to push him away, shaking her head. “Draco, no. I need—”

“You need to be respected,” Draco finished.

“Yes, and I need to be heard. I don’t want to feel…” she shook her head.

“Taken advantage of?” he offered.

Hermione nodded slowly. “Yes.”

“But you do. You want to feel used,” he stated.

“But not really… it’s… it’s hard to explain.”

“You don’t have to. I know what you want. You want to feel safe. You want to know that your heart won’t be broken, that I’ll make you a priority and not fool around with anyone else, no other girl. You want to be my girl… yes?”

Tears brimmed in Hermione’s eyes as she stared back at him, but her face was still guarded.

“I want to be that for you, I want to guard your heart, and I trust you to guard mine. I get it, Hermione. I need your trust. Nothing works without that. I’ll do whatever I can to earn it, but you have to trust me as well. I’ll respect you, and your limits. I’ll handle your gift with care. But you have to give it to me first.”

She nodded slightly, still appearing apprehensive.

“Will you? Will you trust me?” he asked.

Hermione pursed her lips. “You don’t make it easy. How do I know what you’re up to when you’re away from us? Every time I look over at your table, she’s always draped all over you!”

“Not anymore,” Draco said with finality.

“And how do we know what you say about us when we’re not around? How do we know you’re not making fun of us or spilling our secrets? It’d be suspicious if you didn’t, since you’re supposed to be spying on us!”

Draco bit his lips, struggling with his next words. “Do you believe that I care about you?”

Hermione folded her arms. “It doesn’t matter what I believe.”

“Yes, it does… it means everything,” he said, his eyes wide with conviction.

Hermione considered him for a moment. “Yes, Draco, I believe you care about me, and I care about you,” she finally admitted.

Draco breathed a small sigh of relief. “Then that’s all that matters. I have to get through this, but it would be much easier if you were on my side.”

“I am on your side!”

“Good, that means a lot to me,” he said softly, pulling her closer again.

Hermione drew back within his embrace. “Don’t think that changes anything as far as our… arrangement.”
“Your submission, you mean,” he corrected.

Hermione sighed. “Yes, I won’t do it. Not if I’m going to be taken for granted.”

“You won’t be, Hermione,” he said earnestly.

“Hermione…” she repeated.

“Would you prefer to be called something else?”

“No,” she said with a small smile before it disappeared once more. “Did you ever… did you ever collar Pansy?”

“Yes,” he said simply.

Hermione’s face fell.

“And no…”

“Remember what I told you before? She used her body and her submission as a way of trying to manipulate me. It wasn’t real; we were playing around. We didn’t have a connection, there was no trust, no… love,” he said softly.

Hermione stared back at him in shock.

Draco ignored it. “I was playing with her to get off… to satisfy my needs, but only my needs. If you choose to give this to me, your needs will become just as important.”

Hermione nodded slowly.

“And I know exactly what you need,” he said with confidence.

She smirked. “Do you, now?”

“Hmm hmm,” he said with a smirk. “You need to feel like the most prized possession, something not even a prince could go without, even if he tried.”

Draco turned around, staring at the room, and then turned back around with a sly smile on his face. “On your knees, pet.”

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Hermione didn’t want to think about how quickly things had changed within a span of minutes since ordering Draco about. The way he stared at her, commanded her attention when he was standing before her, it was intoxicating. And he seemed to know what she wanted, what she needed. She couldn’t even hang on to her scepticism and cynical doubt about his relationship with Pansy. She saw the sincerity in his eyes when he had told her what he had with her was special, that he trusted her, that he…

She tried to block out the L-word. Draco had said love, but he hadn’t told her that he loved her directly. She didn’t want to read too much into it. But it had to mean something. There was more than just sex here, that much was clear to her.

She suddenly felt fearful, excited, and relieved all at once when he ordered her to fall to her knees before him.
She lowered herself slowly until she felt the cold stone of the floor beneath her. Staring up at him, she waited to see what he would do.

Draco was smirking down at her and then he turned and picked up his robe, drawing something medium, leathery and black from the pocket. It was the whip he had taken from Snape’s home.

“Do you know where you are?” he asked softly, circling around her. When he stopped directly behind her, she squirmed under the tingling sensation of the leather tips of the whip sliding along her upper back.

She shook her head in response to his question, which prompted Draco to grab a fistful of her hair, pulling her head back so that she stared up at him.

“That’s not an acceptable answer, pet.”

She could hear the hint of a threat in his voice, enough to make her spine tingle.

“No, Master.”

Draco smirked. “This is Salazar Slytherin’s old bedroom.”

Hermione gasped, staring up at the ceiling and around her as much as she could with Draco holding her head.

“Nice, isn’t it?” Draco commented.

“Yes, yes, Master.”

“You know, as much as Salazar hated Muggles, Grandfather always said that he did admire their royalty. In fact, I think he was once quoted as saying that the Muggle tradition of having a royal hierarchy was the only good thing about Muggle culture.”

Hermione felt herself tense, not knowing where Draco was going with this, and feeling unease at the obvious prejudice in Salazar’s statement.

Draco let go of her hair and came around to crouch down in front of her.

“Of course, he was a bigot. But despite that, Salazar fancied himself to be much like a Muggle king, or prince…” he said with a smirk, raising his hand to stroke her cheek before grabbing her chin firmly in his hand. “Tell me, pet… what do you know about Muggle princes?”

Hermione stared back at him, her mind racing. What was playing at?

He squeezed her face harder. “Well?”

“Ah, well,” Hermione stammered. “Muggle princes… they were next in line to inherent their father’s wealth and assets.”

Draco squeezed harder. “And?”

“And… they are very powerful, they are trained to be strategic thinkers, swordsmen, and future rulers… and of course, they are very wealthy…” she continued.

“And?” Draco’s voice was impatient.

“Um, well, they have a royal court,” Hermione added, hoping she was coming close the answer he
Draco nodded. “Good. And this royal court… how would they entertain their prince?”

“Well, in the past, the court consisted of jokers, and courtesans… and… and concubines,” she said with a fair degree of embarrassment as a particularly dirty thought crossed her mind.

Draco smiled, letting go of her face and standing up to stare down at her once more.

“Tonight, pet, this room is mine. I’m a Muggle ruler, and this…” he said, waving a hand around the room. “This is my castle, and you’ll address me as your prince.”

“Yes, my Prince,” Hermione said. Her head was swimming from hearing Draco describe himself as a Muggle and the possibility that he would be playing out one of her fantasies, a fantasy she didn’t think she’d feel safe playing out with anyone any time soon.

“And that would make you what, my pet?”

“I’m—I’m a courtesan,” she said hesitantly, afraid to utter the role she was most drawn to.

Draco clicked his teeth. “I thought you said you trusted me, Hermione.”

Hermione took a breath, her heartbeat rapid. “Yes, I do, my Prince.”

“Then be honest with me. I know you have a fantasy… I know you want to be bought and paid for. You want to be truly owned… a real slave, a personal whore… or did I misunderstand Harry?”

Her mouth dropped opened from the surprise that Harry had shared her secret, and that Draco was indulging the fantasy. She was anxious with both anticipation and fear.

Draco’s expression became serious. “What we do stays in this room. I will never treat you like a whore in public… you know that, don’t you?

“I promise you, Hermione,” he said. His eyes were unguarded and sincere, and it touched her heart to see such genuine emotion in them, so much so that she found herself nodding without a second thought.

“Now tell me, what are you?” Draco asked again.

“I’m your concubine… Prince Draco.”

Draco put a hand on her head, stroking her hair. “Good girl. Now, my little concubine, kiss my feet.”

Hermione fell over much the same way Draco had done earlier, pressing her mouth to his feet reverently. She felt herself growing wet, and her head was becoming light. Her lips moved over Draco’s feet to his ankle and then back down again as she covered each one with little small kisses, the feeling that she was falling into something she could not name but longed for growing by the minute.

She heard him breathing heavily above her as he shifted his feet. “Do you love your Prince?” he asked in a tentative whisper.

Hermione felt the tendons of Draco’s legs stiffen as he waited for her response, and in that moment she knew that he needed for her to, and she wanted to reassure him that he had nothing to worry about, because she did.
“Yes, I do,” she said.

A look of relief and contentment grew on Draco’s face as he smiled down at her.

“And your Prince loves you as well. Now, show me how much,” he said, pulling her up to her feet to guide her to the bed.

Hermione found herself gripping Draco’s hand tightly to keep from falling, her knees felt like jelly, and her heart and mind were racing with joy and new excitement about what was to come.

“Strip and put your hands up, against the bedpost,” he ordered.

Hermione began undressing, quickly discarding her clothes. She took a deep breath once she was done, slowly lifting her hands to grip the bedpost tightly with both hands.

“Now, you’re not wearing what I commanded you to wear. There’s punishment for that. Don’t you agree?”

Hermione stiffened, but forced herself to bravely say, “Yes, my Prince.”

Draco withdrew the whip, running it over her backside with slow, measured strokes, teasing at what he was about to do.

Hermione found herself sticking her arse out, waiting for it, signalling she was prepared for it.

“Perhaps you don’t want to be here,” he said striking her on the thighs, which pulled a yelp from Hermione.

“Perhaps I should throw you out of the castle… return you to your little village.”

“No… please, don’t… I want to stay.”

Draco seemed to be struggling not to smile at her response. He took a step back, and she braced herself just in time. No sooner had the whip cracked in the air did it land sharply against her flesh. She hissed, forgetting the pain of it, and then warmth spread over her cheek, and she could feel herself becoming wetter.

“Thank you, my Prince,” she whispered as she spread her legs a bit further before holding herself still for the next lash. Draco’s hand traced the line where the whip had landed. He began caressing her flesh soothingly before drawing back the whip again.

One.

Two.

Three.

She had gotten used to the sting of the stripes when Draco suddenly stopped. Hermione looked back over her shoulder.

“Is there something wrong, my Prince?”

Draco was staring at her with focused intensity that both unnerved and excited her.

“Yes. I don’t think this is real punishment for you… I think it’s too easy.”
Hermione swallowed.

“What will you endure for me?”

“Prince?” she asked, not quite able to hide the tremble in her voice.

“You heard me, pet… how far would you let me push you?” Draco asked, watching her closely.

Hermione’s heart was beating faster than ever, and she found herself gripping the bed poster until her knuckles were stark white as she turned to ask, “What would you want me to endure for you, my Prince?”

Draco dropped the whip, walking back over to retrieve his wand from his robe. Hermione inhaled sharply when he Conjured a long black cane with a silver-plated serpent head.

She stared at it in curious anxiety. She really didn’t like pain… that much.

“Will you indulge me and take a caning tonight?” he asked, drawing closer.

“Yes, my Prince,” she whispered. They stared at each other in silent understanding that she was placing trust in him despite her fear, and then Draco gave her a small peck on the cheek.

“Bend over for me.”

Hermione nodded, bending over the bed.

She waited in tense silence as Draco moved closer to her until she could feel his body heat against hers, almost touching, almost. She slid back a little to make contact, only to have him move back a step.

“Stay still. If you move again, you’ll regret it,” he warned.

That scared and excited her all at once. “Yes, my Prince.”

Hermione tried to calm her nerves as the smooth long length of his cane lightly glided over up her thighs, over her arse, and then across her back. She tensed.

“I’m not going to hit you here,” he said softly, resting the cane on her back.

She tried to exhale and relax, but found herself still gripping the duvet tightly in anticipation.

Draco drew the cane off of her back and tapped her arse cheek lightly.

She smirked and exhaled. It wasn’t so bad. Another tap, light, playful, on her other check put her at even more ease. She sighed as he began to start a series of light taps across her backside, stopping every so often to stroke her gently with his hand where he had tapped.

After several moments of him doing this, Hermione stuck her arse out even more to signal that he could stop ‘playing’ and really hit her.

Draco chuckled at her eagerness, increasing the pace and impact ever so slightly so that there was a slight sting after each tap now, but not too much. In fact, it wasn’t enough; she wanted much more.

She wanted him to stop playing with her; the light stings seemed to taunt a slow waking craving she hadn’t realised was there.
“Harder,” she whispered.

“What’s that, pet?” Draco asked, continuing to tap her arse lightly at the same steady pace.

Hermione wiggled her arse, “Harder,” she urged louder.

“Hmmm?” Draco replied, keeping to his rhythm.

“Harder, Milord, please,” she begged.

“You deserve it, don’t you?” Draco asked, striking her hard once before resuming his former pace.

Hermione gasped at the pain and then felt something deep within her ache when it dissipated.

“Yes, I’ve been bad,” she replied quickly.

“Yes, you have. You want me to punish you, don’t you?” Draco asked in a gruff low voice laced with lust and stern command.

“Yes, my Prince….”

Draco continued to strike her, his taps becoming harder, the sting of each strike biting her skin a little more than the last. Hermione could hear herself moaning at each one as she squirmed under it, wanting even more. She wanted to feel his full strength, his frustration, all of his power channelling through the instrument he was using. Right now, the cane was an extension of him, her Master, and she wanted nothing more than for Draco to pour all of his focus, frustration, and attention into what he was doing to her. She wanted to take it all and completely free fall into submission without a care or worry.

Hermione moaned loudly and then stomped her feet, bucking back against Draco’s cane before burying her face into the duvet, whimpering. “‘More… please, harder… please… please.”

Draco obliged, slowing down his pace but hitting her much harder than before, until she could feel the bite of the sting sinking deep into her flesh. She never thought that such a sensation would turn her on… until now. He delivered four more hard strokes, the last making her cry out, and then he stopped.

She hadn’t realised she was quivering until his warm smooth palm pressed against her sore backside, tracing the marks the cane must have left down to her thighs.

“You’re crying,” she heard him say in concern.

She hadn’t even realised she was until she blinked. Her head had wandered somewhere else again, and she felt lightheaded and dizzy.

“I’m-I’m fine, my Prince.”

When she felt Draco’s cool lips pressing against her inflamed flesh, she couldn’t stop fresh tears from falling as she opened herself up wider for him. His tongue traced up each line embedded in her skin by the cane until he reached her arse.

“You’re a good girl, you know that?” he whispered.

“Thank you, my Prince.”

When Draco’s tongue continued to the cleft of her arse, Hermione didn’t even bother to try to clench
herself close. She never felt so open before, so exposed, and she wanted to be for him. Reaching up behind her, she spread her arse for him.

“Hmm, yes,” Draco murmured approvingly. “That’s my girl, spread yourself for me.”

Hermione did as she was told, spreading herself wider, until she had her arse hiked high and her face pushed into the mattress. Draco wasted no time plunging his tongue deep inside her cunt, fucking her with it while she writhed against it. She whimpered when he removed it, and then gasped in shock when something else pressed against her, only this time sliding his cock along her arsehole, licking around it. He spat on the narrow passage before rising.

When she felt his cock at her narrow entrance, she only tensed for a moment before letting herself go, ready to accept him, wherever he wanted to put himself.

“I love you, you know that?”

“Yes, my Prince,” she whispered.

“No… not Prince, say I love you, Draco.”

She nodded quickly against the mattress, anxious and happy to do just that. “I do… I love you, Draco.”

“You’re mine… my girl, my whore, my friend. Mine,” he groaned as he pushed himself slowly into her.

“Yes, Draco… yes…”

Draco’s hands were pulling at her hips as he pulled her back onto his cock. It burned to have his thick, hard cock intruding into her arse so insistently, but the burn felt good, and she wanted to feel him fill her up.

His fingers dug into her side, and then she felt his body lean over hers, his lips touching her back, covering them with small kisses as he continued to work himself in and out of her.

Hermione could feel the pressure within her pussy building and reached down to play with her clit to quicken the approaching explosion.

“Yeah, that’s it, play with yourself, come for me, Hermione… come for me,” Draco urged, his own rhythm becoming more spastic and wild.

It only took a few swipes of her hand and Draco’s last deep strokes to send Hermione over the edge, calling out his name as she came.

Draco followed, groaning against her back before stilling and falling against her, his face sticking against her skin.

They lay there for a few moments, breathing together when Draco began to rise, but not before pressing one last kiss against her back.

“I’m glad we had this talk,” he murmured against her skin.

“So am I, Master,” Hermione said with a smile of contentment.

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Around the same time, in the forest …

“What are you doing here?” he asked, knowing the man lying frozen on the ground at his feet could not respond.

“Why do you even bother to transform back into your human form? The other suits you much better,” he sneered, bending down to study the chubby man staring wide-eyed up at him.

“Oh, I’ll just take this,” Remus said, sliding Peter’s wand from a well-worn pocket. He could see Peter’s eyes straining despite their frozen state.

“Now… what to do with you?” he mused. At that moment, Remus tried to physically shake off a horribly insane image creeping into his head, but as hard he tried, it remained, perhaps because at the moment it seemed the most obvious.

Remus didn’t even realise that he was unconsciously baring his teeth as he stared at his former comrade. Glancing up to the sky, he noticed that dusk was almost upon them, and Wolf Moon, what many called the Full Moon for February, was only a few days away. He had taken his Wolfsbane, but it never quite quelled the beast within. It only tamed it enough for him to retain his sanity… most of it, at least.

It would be only two days until he transformed into his full werewolf form. God help Peter if he was still lying on the floor of the Forbidden Forest at the mercy of a werewolf, even one under the tenuous control of Wolfsbane.

His primal urge raged within, and in that moment, the answer to how to deal with Peter seemed almost logical. But the other half of Remus knew that the most obvious answer about how to handle the traitor also was the least rational, the most savage, and the most morally detestable.

Remus groaned. Wolfsbane never really fully did the trick. It only made him less insane, less liable to kill those closest to him. The beast never could be completely tamed, he thought once again. He closed his eyes, forcing his slow waking nature down once more. He would have to do that more often now that the full moon was approaching. The savage, primal voice began to fade, and he could feel his human nature coming back to his senses. When he opened his eyes, he smiled a wry smile.

“You’re a lucky bastard, you know that?” he said to Peter.

The best thing for everyone would be if Peter was turned over to the Order. Moody, Arthur, he, and Snape would get the truth out of him. Find out what he was up to, what Voldemort was planning.

He bent over, holding onto Peter’s stiff arm firmly in an effort to do a Side-Along Apparition, but after several times, he found that he could not.

“Damn it,” he cursed under his breath. Of course, there were obviously anti-Apparition wards on the forest. He would have to think about that later, right now he had to figure out a way to bring Peter back by taking him out of the forest himself and then Apparating. But how to end the spell and bring him back without a struggle was going to be a challenge.

Remus really didn’t feel like scuffling with Peter, especially in his current state. Even now, he could feel the wolf within struggling against the Wolfsbane. The sooner he got Peter back to Headquarters, the better.

He sat thinking, staring down at the man. Plan One, bind Peter’s arms, end the spell, and walk him out of the forest. Only he couldn’t bloody well move the man’s arms back enough to do a suitable binding spell because he was immobilised.
Alright, Plan Two, since immobilisation rendered the victim completely heavy like dead weight, he’d levitate him out of the forest and then try to do a half-way Side-Along Apparition with him.

But there were two problems with that, first, levitating someone in front of oneself required a lot of focus, and his magic was always wild and sporadic right before the full moon. Second, Remus wasn’t sure if he could do a Side-Along with a levitated body. He could wind end up splinching them both.

Remus sighed, feeling himself growing more frustrated by the minute. He sat down, thinking for several minutes. Alright, Plan Three. Do a binding spell on Peter’s arms, and then end the immobilisation spell. He could always tighten the binds after the spell ended.

Yes, that was the best one yet.

He flipped the tubby man over and did a basic binding spell on his arms and then flipped him back over, standing in a fight stance over Peter as he ended the immobilising spell.

“Remus! My old friend… you don’t want to do this,” Peter begged as he began to writhe within his binds.

“You’re right. I’d rather be at home, having a nice toddy, but instead, I have to deal with you, a murdering traitor.”

Suddenly Peter let out a blood-curdling scream, which alarmed Remus. He stared down at the man, in shock. Peter appeared absolutely terrified as he glanced nervously about as his right hand, strange and silver, began clutching his left arm. Remus watched as Peter pushed the sleeve of his shirt up to his bicep revealing the Dark Mark. It was raised like a fresh brand, and it was moving, shifting like a living organism. Remus squinted his eyes, studying it. The motion of the Mark seemed to be scalding the pale skin around it with each passing moment, causing Peter obvious pain. His eyes began to tear as he looked up at Remus.

“Remus, please… he’s calling me… if you don’t let me go, he’ll come to me…. He’ll come to me!”

Remus ignored Peter’s pleas, feeling his anger rise the longer he stared at the hideous mark burning against the man’s skin.

Peter’s eyes hardened then, and his mouth twisted into a sickly snarl. “Let me go, or you’ll regret it!”

Remus chuckled coldly, staring down at the pathetic excuse he used to call a friend. “You never did do menacing well, Peter. You poor, pitiful fool. Come on, up you go,” he said, bending down to grab Peter by the shirt.

As he pulled, Peter struggled against him. Remus fought to keep the man under control but fell back hard on his arse when Peter kicked out at his knees. Remus tried to quickly scramble to his feet, frantically pointing his wand, but another kick hit him square in the nose, and then he felt the agonising pain of a pair of teeth sinking into his wand wrist.

“Arggh!” Remus yelled out, trying to elbow Peter as the man continued to gnaw at his wrist. Determined not to drop his wand, Remus braced himself for pain as he jerked his arm within Peter’s jaws so that his elbow jabbed into the shorter man’s chest. Peter bowled over in pain, and Remus used the opportunity to kick him, hard in his side, causing the shorter man to fall on his back with a loud thump.

Remus felt a brief moment of victory until he saw that Peter’s head was shrinking, so were his hands, and then whiskers began to grow.
“Oh, no, you don’t!” Remus screamed.

“Stupefy!” he yelled at Peter, but the partially Transfigured man rolled to his side quickly, and just like that, Peter was a rat again, and a very fast rat at that.

Remus didn’t have time to think or plot or plan, he had to make sure Peter didn’t escape the forest. He would use his increasingly acute senses to track him, sniff him out, and catch him. Hopefully it would be over quick, so he could be done with him and put him in the hands of those who could be trusted not to harm him.

Because right now, with the wolf within him warring with his human nature, Remus could not say for certain that he would not… in fact, he knew, if he didn’t find Peter within a day and a half’s time, he would not be able to hold himself accountable for what happened to the man.

Chapter End Notes

The location of Draco and Hermione's reconciliation was totally taken from one of my first and still favorite, Dramione stories; HappilyJaded’s "The Price of Knowledge". If you haven’t read it, do check it out here at this link:

http://hp.adultfanfiction.net/story.php?no=600000211
Free Falling Part II

Open up the book you beat me with again.
Read it off one sentence at a time.
I'm tired of all the lines,
Convictions and your lies.
What right do you have to point at me?
And still crowdin' my space are the things you still hold against me.
You cannot save me…

Well, it's not the time to breakdown.
It's not the time to break up this love,
Keep it together now.
It's not the time to break…

-"Breakdown” by Daughtry

Don’t go around tonight,
Well, it’s bound to take your life,
There’s a bad moon on the rise….
Hope you got your things together.
Hope you are quite prepared to die.
Looks like we’re in for nasty weather.
One eye is taken for an eye.

“Bad Moon Rising” by Creedence Clearwater Revival

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It had been almost twelve hours since Remus had begun sniffing out Peter. The rat was still in the forest, he knew that much. Not only was Remus’ nose becoming more acute, picking up even the slightest change of scent, but his eyesight had improved drastically, and crouching low to the bed of the forest felt more natural as the hours went by.

Peter had almost escaped the forest three times; each time though, Remus had forced him to detour. Remus had just barely missed pouncing on the chubby little rat, succeeding in only sending him scattering in the other direction. It all felt like some sort of twisted sport now, and Remus couldn’t deny a growing part of him was beginning to enjoy the hunt. The cat and mouse game kept the darker thoughts from gnawing at his conscience, fighting to emerge with each passing hour closer to the dawning of the full moon.

Playing with your food, Remus? Snape’s voice echoed tauntingly somewhere in his head.

Remus shook his head; the thought was sickening, but yet there still remained a small voice in the back of his head, telling him that the Rat deserved it— he had caused so much pain, so much tragedy, what a fitting end.

“No!” Remus barked out, sending birds flying upward into the sky.

“No,” he whispered, glancing up at the almost translucent full moon hanging against the darkening sky like a sign post for a not-so-distant future. One that he hoped would not come to fruition and
tried not to think about at the moment.

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Hermione left Salazar’s chambers dazed. Draco walked her back partially before kissing her hand and turning to go back to his own House.

As she continued up the corridor towards the Gryffindor common room, she felt as if she were floating. She was so dizzy that she had to look down at her feet for a moment to make sure they were firmly planted on solid ground. She said the password and entered, greeted by deathly silence. To her relief, the common room was completely empty. She felt worn, and her head was still buzzing from the deep euphoria she had felt after reaching that special place she’d only experienced twice before. Whatever it was, she wanted more of it… but for now, what she needed was sleep.

When she awoke the following morning, her room was already emptied, and she suspected that for the first time ever at Hogwarts, she had overslept. Her arse and thighs were sorer than they had ever been, and she looked down to see red and light purple marks from Draco’s cane criss-crossing her flesh. She smiled as she brushed her hand over them, remembering with fondness how she had begged him for them and how with each strike he had pushed her into a new level of submission.

When she finally came down to head off to breakfast, Harry and Ron were both standing in wait for her.

“Where’s everyone?” she asked, looking around at the empty common room.

“Scrimmage…” Ron and Harry said in unison.

“You guys aren’t going?” she asked suspiciously.

Ron and Harry shrugged. “We have better things to do,” Harry said ominously, glancing at Ron.

Hermione looked at them suspiciously, feeling very sure they wanted to sweet talk her into sex. “And what if I’m not in the mood?”

“Not in the mood to talk? That’s a new one,” Ron said snidely.

Hermione narrowed her eyes. “I know exactly what you mean by talk… you mean you want to shag.”

Ron rolled his eyes.

“No, Hermione, we really need to talk,” Harry insisted.

Hermione looked between them guardedly. “Alright…”

Ron mouthed something, but she couldn’t quite make it out.

“What?” she asked

Ron huffed. “Room of Requirement,” he mouthed more deliberately.

Harry pulled out his cloak, and lead the way.

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They walked in silence until they came upon the halfway point, passing behind a tall statue in the
centre When they were completely behind it, Harry draped the invisibility cloak over them, and they made a turn for the opposite direction, crouched together uncomfortably until they reached their destination.

Ron felt stupid being under the cloak. He was too big now to be fully covered, and besides, he doubted that Dumbledore was fooled by it; he was certain that the old man had seen through the cloak before.

Once they were finally inside, he quickly snatched the cloak off of them, noticing to his chagrin that Hermione wore a familiar scowl on her face.

“What makes you think Dumbledore can’t see in here?” Hermione asked.

“Because it’s not on the map,” Ron replied smartly.

“So?” Hermione said.

“So, Snape said that Hogwarts has its own secrets,” Harry said. “And he told me that there were rooms that guarded themselves from magic used against it.”

“And this is one of them,” Ron finished.

“Oh, what’s the point, anyway?” Hermione said in exasperation. “He’s been watching us sneak around all year! He even saw us shag, more than once I’d wager. Why do we even bother?”

Harry and Ron exchanged a glance and then shrugged.

Hermione moved between the two of them, crossing her arms over her chest. “Alright, you wanted to talk,” she said stiffly.

Already her attitude was annoying Ron, but he knew that pointing that out would only make things worse, so he tried his best to hold his tongue.

“Let’s sit down,” Harry said, and just as he spoke, three cushioned chairs appeared at each of their sides.

They all sat down slowly, eyeing one another. Hermione sat with closed body language, obviously ready for a row. Ron shifted in his seat uncomfortably, not enjoying the tense silence, while Harry stared between them and then finally off to the side at the fire.

Finally, Hermione huffed. “Well, this was a great idea,” she murmured sarcastically.

Ron found himself glaring at her; her attitude definitely wasn’t helping matters.

“Well, it’s better than ignoring each other like nothing happened,” he snapped.

“I’m not ignoring anyone!” she replied. “It’s not my fault you’re avoiding me because you feel guilty about how you’ve been treating me,” she said accusingly.

“I treated you exactly the way you asked to be treated,” Ron shot back.

“You know that’s not true, Ronald,” Hermione insisted.

Gods, he hated when she used Ronald in that motherly tone; it made his blood boil.

“I don’t know what to think!” Ron said in exasperation. “First you tell us you want to give up
control, and then when we don’t do it your way, you throw a fit!”

Hermione pursed her lips and tightened her fists within the folded position over her chest. “Just forget it, Ron; this type of relationship is obviously over your head,” she said condescendingly.

Ron could feel his face burning as he leaned into her. “You think it’s over my head because you can’t bloody well decide what you want? You’re just mad because I see through your bullshite!”

Hermione began to rise, while Harry stared back at Ron with wide panicked eyes.

‘Fine, let her leave,’ Ron thought.

“Hold on, Hermione!” Harry called almost pleadingly.

Hermione paused to look back. “No, Harry, it’s obvious that this discussion isn’t going to go anywhere. I’m very tired and hungry, and I’m not in the mood for a row.”

“Yeah, and your mood is what counts the most, right?” Ron remarked, pleased that she had given him an opportunity to point that out.

Hermione put her nose up and began to walk away. As she did, Ron’s hopes of a satisfactory resolution begin to sink until finally she disappeared through the wall, leaving him with a terrible empty feeling.

Why did it always have to be like this between them?

“Brilliant, mate,” Harry said, glaring at Ron.

Oh, so this was his fault now? What about Hermione?

Ron closed his eyes and cursed under his breath, fighting with himself only for a moment before rushing out to run after her.

Hermione had made good distance; she was almost at the other end of the hallway. It annoyed Ron even more that it appeared that he would have to run after her. But he did, nonetheless.

“Hermione!” he called.

“Leave me alone, Ronald,” she called back, continuing her brisk determined walk down the hall.

That only made him more determined to catch up to her. He sprinted until he did, and then reached out and yanked her arm back. She literally growled at him, rendering him momentarily stunned. But when she pulled her arm back, trying to break free, he instinctively tightened his grip. His persistence only seemed to enrage Hermione more, and she began to dig into her robe pocket with her free hand for what Ron assumed to be her wand.

Before she could withdraw it, Ron grabbed her free arm and pushed her back, up against the darkened wall, cloaked under the shadow of a tall armoured knight stationed only inches away.

“You’ll listen to me, for once! Even if it’s the last time we ever discuss anything!” he ground out, pressing her harder into the wall. He didn’t know how else to make her listen.

Hermione glowered at him and her arms were tense like she was only appeasing him momentarily but was ready to fight back at any moment.

“Now tell me, what exactly is your problem?” he demanded.
“You are!” she spat.

“So this is all my fault now?” Ron asked incredulously.

“Are you saying you did nothing wrong, Ronald?”

“Stop calling me Ronald! And no, I’m not saying that I didn’t do anything wrong…. Maybe Harry and I screwed up a bit, but you have to admit your part in all of this as well,” he pointed out. She wasn’t going to get off that easy.

“Me?” Hermione asked in shock.

“Yes, you! You’re not satisfied unless everything is done your way!”

“I’ve seen what control under you would be like--slavery is more like it!” she retorted. “If I hadn’t spoken up, you two would have run me into the ground!”

Ron gritted his teeth, trying to fix his mouth; he had so much he wanted to say to her, but he knew it would only lead to a nasty argument. One thing had been well established in their relationship; he and Hermione had wicked rows, and already it felt as if they were close to having their worst one yet.

“Damn it, Hermione,” Ron cursed, his grip on her arms loosening.

“What is it? What do you have to say for yourself?” she demanded.

Ron shook his head, backing away from her. He couldn’t get it out.

Hermione threw up her hands as if taunting him. “You’re the one who wanted to talk, Ron, so go ahead and talk! If you have something besides your usual insults to say to me, get it out now!”

“Fine!” Ron stepped even further away from her, bracing himself.

He took a deep breath, trying to steady his nerves and voice. “I’m sick of the way you always try to control things and how you always talk down to me while doing it.”

Hermione scoffed. “I see. You can dish it out but you can’t take it, is that it? We’ve had this conversation, Ron. Remember? You’re too damned sensitive.”

“Yeah, we talked about it, and nothing’s changed since! If I’m so fucked up, Hermione, then why do you even want me? Why would you ever trust me enough to give up control in the first place?”

“Well, you don’t have to worry about that anymore,” she said, tightening her jaw. “Right, what was I thinking? It was foolish of me to put so much trust in your clumsy hands.”

Ron gave a humourless laugh at that, clenching his fists. “First I’m sensitive, now I’m clumsy! Next you’re going to tell me I stuff my face too much or don’t do my Transfiguration homework well enough to be your boyfriend.”

“Well, if the trainer fits,” Hermione sneered.

Ron shook his head. “It’s so easy for you to point out my faults, isn’t it? Because I let you do it… but you’re not perfect, Hermione.”

“I never said I was!”
Ron scoffed. “Wouldn’t know it, the way you busy yourself picking me apart.”

“Picking you apart? And what about you, Ron? You’re always taking advantage of me and belittling me!” she countered.

Ron wrinkled his brow. “Taking advantage?”

Hermione’s face was turning red as she continued. “Yes, taking advantage! You and Harry have been taking advantage of me long before we even started this relationship. You more than him.”

“What?” Ron asked in astonishment. What was she on about?

“You heard me. I’ve always helped you out when you needed it… with your assignments, when you get into trouble, when there’s a problem between you and Harry, you come running to me. You hardly ever thank me, much less acknowledge me for all the things I do!”

“That’s not true, Hermione!” he protested.

Was it? He remembered thanking her, once or twice, definitely.

“Oh, really? Then tell me the last time you thanked me for something! Go on!”

Ron was speechless, he couldn’t actually remember. Shite, maybe she had a point; he hated it when she was right.

“You see… I’m tired of it. You both act as if anything I do for you two is something I’m supposed to be doing… but what do you have done for me, Ron?”

Ron felt his anger rise at the question. She was being unfair and unreasonable… and fucking self-centred!

“What do you mean, what do I do for you, Hermione? I’ve done plenty!”

Hermione scoffed. “Such as? Oh, before you answer, sharing your treacle tart doesn’t count!”

“No, Hermione… I’m talking about listening to you when you fret over an exam we both know you already got an O on,” he pointed out.

Hermione opened her mouth to protest but he continued before she could.

“I’m talking about listening to you plan out your SPEW campaign and even attending a meeting when you know I don’t even believe in the cause. When will you get it through your stubborn skull that house-elves love being owned?

“That’s not the point! They’ve been socially conditioned to believe that!” Hermione started.

Ron was determined not to let her deter him from making his point. “I’m talking about when Harry and I came looking for you when the troll was loose in the school….”

“Oh, that’s a low blow; it was over five years ago!” she snarled.

“I’m talking about when I stood up for you when Snape was unfairly taking points from you in class, earning a detention for myself.”

Hermione closed her mouth.
Ron drew closer to her, his voice softening. “And defending you when Draco called you a Mudblood in front of everyone…. I haven’t told you, but I’ve defended you many times since, and I’ll keep doing it.”

He watched as she slowly lifted her eyes to him, standing very still.

He stepped closer still, his words barely a whisper. “I’m talking about when I tell everyone how bloody brilliant you are, when they’re griping about you showing off because they’re jealous.”

Hermione appeared to be holding her breath.

“And staying up with you all night to calm your nerves after Harry scares us both with one of his wild mood swings or scar spells.”

She glanced away from his stare, biting her lip.

“I’m talking about hating Crookshanks… but still buying him a whole bloody bag of fishy treats at Hogsmeade,” he finished with a small smile on his face, trying to lighten the mood to show her that he didn’t really mind doing things like that for her.

But Hermione didn’t return his smile; instead, when she finally spoke, he saw with great trepidation that she held even more defiance and stubbornness on her face.


Ron could feel himself beginning to shake, he was so mad at her. He wanted to shake her, too, but knew it would only make things worse. Why did she always get to him like this? She was infuriating!

“I want the same thing you want, Hermione; some fucking recognition that I’m not worthless! That I’m not a fucking leech… A little gratitude would be nice, for once,” he said.

“Fine! You want gratitude? Thank you, Ron… thank you, thank you, thank you!” she practically screamed in his face.

Ron grabbed her head with both hands and pulled her mouth to his, kissing her hard. Hermione’s arms shot out and pushed him back but not before she slapped him hard across the face. It stung like hell. Hermione appeared just as shocked by her actions as he did.

Relief swept over Ron when she began to moan into his mouth.

This time when Hermione brought her hands up to his chest and pushed, it was only half-hearted.

When the kiss finally broke, he found himself staring into her limpid eyes. He had missed her, and it had only been a few days. He was tired of fighting; he just wanted to kiss her all night.

“Hermione, I know I took advantage of you, I know I did. But I honestly thought you were enjoying what we were doing. I should have stopped and asked. I’m sorry.”

He meant every word of it and could only hope that she believed him. He realized he was running on empty as far as air was concerned, his breath heavy and his heart racing. Time seemed to have frozen
as he waited for her reply.

His heart fluttered when she gave him the slightest of nods and a small smile.

“What do we do now?” she asked.

“I don’t know, Hermione. This isn’t the easiest thing to figure out, is it? What do you want from me… from us?”

Hermione remained silent for a moment, playing with a button midway on his shirt before making eye contact. “I want you to appreciate me,” she said softly.

“I do, Hermione,” he tried to reassure without sounding dismissive. “I appreciate you… and everything you’ve done for me… Thank you.”

“Those are just words, Ron. I need you to show it…” she insisted.

“And how do you reckon I do that while making you do what I want?” he questioned. He had to admit, he still couldn’t quite wrap his head about that one.

A smile broke out on Hermione’s face. “You’re supposed to be in charge... Figure it out.”

“Funny…” Ron said with an amused smirk.

They stood staring at each other, smiling in the strange new understanding that carried the secure calmness Ron had always cherished. It didn’t happen too often, but perhaps now, it would last.

“Well, I guess we should go back inside unless you have more stuff to tell me that I should be doing,” he said with one eyebrow quirked.

“Well—” she started, but Ron cut her off, pulling her hair back just the way she liked before kissing her again.

He felt his cock twitch when she smiled against his lips and squirmed against him.

"Ron, not here…” she said, glancing at the ceiling to signal surveillance.

Ron glanced up at the ceiling and then winked, moving in to press his mouth to her ear so that he could whisper, "Let the old goat watch."

She giggled, which made him smile. He let her push him back as she moved forward and grabbed his hand.

Ron felt like a ton of bricks had just been lifted from his shoulders when she did, and he couldn’t stop smiling as Hermione pulled him along, back toward the Room of Requirement.

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When she and Ron arrived back in the Room of Requirement, Harry appeared absolutely miserable and bored and seemed surprised to see them walking through the door hand in hand.

She noticed Harry watching her as she took her seat beside him. She patted his thigh encouragingly with a bright smile. “All right, continue…”

Harry glanced at Ron with a question on his face and then back at Hermione. “You’re ready to talk now?”
“Yes,” she said simply.

“Well, uh… Ron and I think we need to have a firm idea about what you really want.”

“Harry, you know what I want,” Hermione said pointedly, staring at him.

“No, Hermione, I don’t. You say you want to be controlled, and you have fantasies about being pushed, but then when we push you, you push back. It gets old.”

Hermione took a breath. “All right, let’s see if I can explain this. I do like it when you push me. I think I’ll always like having my limits tested, but certain things are off-limits, and if you would just put yourself in my place for one minute, you’d see when you’re crossing the line.”

“Can you give us an example?” Ron asked.

Hermione smiled. She liked Ron like this; perhaps fighting with him was actually a good thing, once in a while.

“All right, like the whole humiliation thing… I can’t tolerate you doing that to me in front of others, and I’ve told you that. I need to be able to trust that you won’t make me feel like a fool in front of everyone.”

“We wouldn’t embarrass you like that, Hermione,” Harry reassured.

“Harry, you’ve already come dangerously close with that lifting of the skirt business… I’ve worked very hard to do well here, and something like that could completely destroy my reputation. It’s already hard enough now that everyone knows about our relationship. All I ask is that you not make it any harder for me.”

Harry stared at her keenly for a few moments. “You didn’t enjoy it at all?” he asked sceptically.

“It doesn’t matter. Some things are more important, Harry. What if someone had seen me?” she countered. “If you can’t respect my limits, I can’t really put trust in you.”

“It’s just… confusing,” Harry tried to explain. “If Ron and I really thought others could have seen that, we wouldn’t have done it. But sometimes it seems like you’re fighting yourself more than anything; like you feel guilty for giving in.”

Hermione bit the inside of her lip, debating on whether she wanted to argue with him. Had she been fighting herself by resisting them and their orders? Where was the line between reasonable discernment for one’s well-being and trust? She wasn’t sure anymore.

They stared at each other, frozen in their impasse, when Ron interrupted. “All right, no more public stuff, not unless we can be sure no one will see. Anything else?”

She gave him a small smile and glanced at Harry. “And I don’t want to feel like a fucktoy all the time.”

“Hermione, you asked for this, remember?” Harry reminded.

How could she ever forget? “Yes, I remember.”

“Well are you really sure you still want it?” he asked.

She stared at both Harry and Ron, who seemed to both be bracing themselves for her answer.
“Yes, I do.”

Harry face remained sombre, which made Hermione frown. She thought he would be pleased with her answer.

“We’ve heard that before, but it has to feel real to be worth anything,” he said. “We can always talk about what you don’t like. But you can’t just keep changing your mind every time you don’t get your way.”

“All right, agreed,” Hermione said. “And you can’t exploit me without regard to my feelings.”

“Fine. Can we exploit you with regard to your feelings, then?” Harry said with a sly smile.

“Harry, I’m serious!” she admonished.

“Hermione, it’s not like we’ve never thought about your feelings; we just misunderstood them,” Harry explained. “But we understand now,” he said, reaching out to take her hand in his.

Hermione smiled and gave Harry’s hand a reassuring squeeze.

“I’ll never violate your trust again,” he promised.

Hermione raised an eyebrow. “Except when it comes to telling my secrets…”

“What?” Harry asked in confusion.

“Harry, I know you told Draco about my fantasies, and I assume you told Ron as well.”

“I didn’t think you’d mind,” he said quickly.

Hermione gave him a small amused smile. “I suppose I don’t.”

A weird smile grew on Harry’s face as he leaned back in his chair. “Good.”

Hermione narrowed her eyes, watching him closely. What was going through that brain of his now?

His eyes were canvassing her body slowly, and there was a definite change in the atmosphere. She looked over at Ron, who was watching Harry in quiet contemplation as well.

“Do you remember when Draco was feeding you from the table and Snape interrupted?” Harry asked finally.

“Yes…” Hermione said slowly, trying to control her nerves from the image that his words conjured.

“Were you disappointed when he interrupted?”

Hermione’s brow wrinkled. “Well…”

“Yes or no, Hermione.”

“It’s complicated,” she said, feeling her cheeks flushed. How do you admit you like being fed by hand like a dog?

“I think that’s a yes,” Ron snickered.

Hermione snapped her head to give him a warning glare. Ron wore a dare on his face.
“Hungry, Ron?” Harry asked.

“Huh?” Ron appeared confused. Harry gave Ron a meaningful stare

“Oh, oh yeah… famished,” Ron said with slow understanding showing on his face.

Harry stared back at the far wall near the hearth, and Hermione followed his gaze. She gasped when she saw a long dining table, stacked with food of all sorts. Ron seemed pleased as he went to inspect it.

Harry arose to walk over as well, but when Hermione stood up to follow him, he turned with a stern look on his face.

“No, you’ll stay right here. In fact,” he smirked as he pointed down toward the floor in front of her. “Get down on your hands and knees… right there,” he ordered.

Hermione felt her breath catch. Harry was almost staring through her.

So this was it; they were starting over, and he was demanding her obedience testing her to trust in him, by not revealing what would come next. She glanced past him at the long table of food, which gave rise to strong feelings associated with the memory of being fed by Draco. She remembered being at Draco’s feet, feeling humiliated, degraded by that one simple non-sexual act, yet there was something else there, too; feelings she’d wrestled with many times since.

Harry had apparently gotten tired of waiting for her to comply and began to turn when she fell on her knees quickly. He paused and then continued to walk to the table, where he took a seat at the head. Ron had already made himself comfortable at the other end and had wasted no time stuffing his mouth with a muffin.

Hermione could feel her mouth salivating at the sight of food. She was hungry, and the full table reminded her that breakfast had long been over.

She watched on as Harry and Ron began to eat, starting conversation about their upcoming Quidditch game, seemingly oblivious to her presence. She mentally considered whether to rise and go over to join them. This was just plain cruel. But then Harry paused and smiled.

“Hungry, Hermione?”

She quickly nodded.

“I’m sorry, what was that?” he asked with a serious expression.

“Yes, Master.”

“Come here, then, and get some food,” he invited with an unreadable smile.

Hermione began to rise to her feet when Harry shook his head. “No, I want you to crawl over here. Slowly.”

Hermione stared back at Harry in shock for only a moment before glancing at Ron who had paused in mid-bite to watch her obey Harry’s command.

And so she did. She fell forward on her hands and began a slow, deliberate crawl toward the table, keeping her eyes on Harry.

He watched her without blinking until she arrived at his feet. She looked up as he picked up
something and brought down a piece of toast, holding it out before her.

“Go on,” he encouraged, and with her eyes still on him, she took a bite.

“Good girl,” he said, smiling down at her.
She took another bite, and then another.

“Does this excite you, Hermione? Tell me the truth,” he asked.

“Yes,” she mumbled as she continued to chew her food.

“Close your eyes,” he ordered.

She stared up at him one last time, measuring his face to see if she could guess what possibly lay in store. But he only stared down at her, waiting.

And so she closed her eyes, and soon after, felt the smooth, silky material wrapping itself over her eyes.

She heard Harry’s chair grate against the floor as he shifted it back, out of her reach, causing her to fall forward once again onto her hands.

“You want something, Hermione?”

Hermione paused, straining her ear to hear anything: a shift, his feet moving, Ron shifting from the opposite end, anything. But there was silence except for the quietest impressions of their breathing.

“Harry….”

“You know better than to address me like that, don’t you?”

“Yes, Master….”

“I want to make sure something is clear before we continue… because I’m not sure you understand.”

“Yes, Master?” Hermione asked hesitantly.

“Do you know what it feels like when you put up a fuss about something I want?”

Hermione blinked from behind her blindfold; was Harry harping on their previous disagreement about public humiliation? He really was a stubborn prat sometimes.

She held her tongue to keep from sighing out loud as she mentally searched for the right answer. It wasn’t very hard to imagine; she hated it when either he or Ron blatantly ignored her advice, so she imagined it must be quite frustrating.

“Do you?” Harry asked once again with more of an edge to his voice.

“I think so, Master,” she replied softly.

“Then tell me…. Describe to me what you think it feels like when you argue with me about something I would like you to do.”

Hermione pulled back, perching herself once more on her arse to speak to him. “I imagine that it feels like I don’t value your opinion, or perhaps you think that I don’t care about what you think…” or
about what you want…. Perhaps you even think I don’t trust you.”

She waited for Harry to agree to any or all of these possibilities, to answer her, but instead, he said nothing. She turned her head to the side, in the direction she knew Ron sat, though she could not see, but there was no reply there, either.

The silence was maddening.

Hearing Harry give her a smug lecture or a few choice words expressing his disdain for her disobedience would be better than complete silence.

“I do care… Master,” she said finally, anxious to break the tension she felt. “I trust you.”

She heard the unmistakable sound of Harry’s chair sliding forward then, and she waited until she could smell him to fall forward to get closer to him. His legs were in front of her, and when she leaned in, her head was in his lap. She rubbed her head over his thighs and breathed a sigh of relief when she felt Harry’s hand fall onto her hair, caressing her.

“I trust you, Master,” she repeated.

“Even when you don’t get what you want?” Harry asked softly.

“Yes, Master, even then.”

“I’m glad to hear you say that, Hermione,” he replied, continuing to stroke her as if she was an overgrown cat.

Harry hummed and shifted. Hermione lifted her head and could detect that he was moving, perhaps picking something else up off of the table. She heard the distinct sound of him taking a big bite out of something and felt the juice spray her in tiny droplets.

“Clean it off for me,” he ordered as she felt the back of his wet hand against her mouth.

Hermione didn’t hesitate to lap at the skin against her lips and she felt and tasted the juice sliding down the back of Harry’s hand and between his fingers. It was plum juice, and she sucked each plum-drenched digit on his hand until there was none left. When she was done, she lifted her chin expectantly to show her eagerness to obey.

She felt him wipe her drool-drenched chin with his thumb, trailing it down her neck and then pulling his hand away.

“Open your shirt for me, Hermione,” he instructed.

Hermione sat up straighter and unbuttoned her shirt. She felt a tinge of embarrassment as she remembered she was wearing a white cotton bra instead of the outfit they had demanded of her previously. What a way to begin their new declarations of trust and obedience.

“That’s not what you’re supposed to be wearing,” Harry remarked. She was relieved to hear a smile in his voice.

Hermione sighed. “I know,” she said, unclasping it from behind to free her pert breasts.

She waited in anticipation for several moments before shrieking in shock as ice cold wetness slid over her nipples. Ice cubes.

Harry was tracing ice over her nipples; it was in sharp contrast to his hot mouth, which had found its
way onto her own. His tongue snaked its way into her mouth, exploring, all while teasing her breasts with the frozen cube in his hand. When he pulled away, to her relief, the ice was withdrawn as well. She gasped when she felt the hot air from his mouth blowing down on her skin, creating the oddest sensation that made her shift with unexpected pleasure.

“Open your mouth, Hermione” came a soft voice.

She took one last big gulp and then opened her mouth slowly, wider and wider.

“Hold it open,” he said.

She could feel her mouth getting wetter from not being able to swallow and then something bumpy and familiar was being placed on her tongue. She closed her mouth around it and took a bite. A strawberry.

She heard him chuckle after she made an approving sound. He fed her one after another, and she ate each one with relish. She loved them so much.

When the last strawberry was gone, he ordered her mouth back open, and she waited eagerly for the next treat. She had hopes for grapes next but instead something warm and gooey hit her tongue in a steady stream. When she closed her mouth to swallow, some of it landed against her closed lips. Chocolate.

She heard Harry groan above her and then felt the hard shaft of his cock smearing over her lips as she let the chocolate down her throat. Once she was finished with her chocolate, she opened her mouth once more to taste Harry, only his cock was pulled away immediately.

She whimpered, leaning forward to find it, but there was nothing there but air.

“Can’t always get what you want, Mione…” he said breathlessly. She could tell from his voice that he was just barely restraining himself and wanted her just as badly as she wanted him.

She was about to open her mouth to ask him nicely to do what he wanted when she felt herself being pulled back and then hoisted up into the air and flung over a well-muscled shoulder!

“Ron!” she protested.

“Yeah?” Ron asked, stopping.

“What… what are you doing?” she asked.

Ron set her down on her feet and pulled her blindfold off. “Do you really need to know?” he asked with a challenge in his voice.

Hermione sighed, trying to relax. “No… I suppose not,” she said warily.

Ron delivered a swift blow to her arse. “No what, Hermione?”

“No, sir,” she said quickly. She squeaked when his hand came down again in the same place. That hurt.

“You’ll call us all Master, now,” Ron instructed. “Got it?” he asked as he picked her back up and walked her over to a bed that hadn’t been there just moments before.

He laid her down softly, and she glanced at the bed, trying to gather her composure despite feeling rattled from the suddenness of everything that was occurring. “Yes, Master.”
There was a mixture of satisfaction and pride on Ron’s face.

“All right now, sit up for me…. I want you to completely strip for me,” he said.

Hermione found herself struggling from smirking up at him outright and tried to hold her piece.

Ron chuckled, staring down at her.

“And what’s so funny?” she asked with some irritation.

“I know you like I know the back of my hand, Hermione. You’re trying to be on your best behaviour because of our conversation, but there’s also a part of you that wants to pull me into a wicked row.”

“And why would I want to do that?”

Ron shrugged. “Oh, I don’t know, maybe to push me into pinning you down like I did the last time we were in here.”

Hermione scoffed. “You think I’d pick a fight with you just so you can overpower me?”

Ron perked an eyebrow, smiling.

“I don’t need to resort to such antics to get you to overpower me. I can just ask you, and you’d jump at the chance.” She smirked in satisfaction.

“But that’s no fun…. The fun is in me doing it on my own, yeah?”

Hermione smirked up at him.

“Strip,” he repeated.

She lay on her back and pulled off her skirt, socks, and shoes, until she was completely naked before him.

Ron’s eyes were intensely trained on her thighs as his hands reached out tentatively, gently tracing the red and purple bruises Draco had left there.

He swallowed. “Hermione, please tell me you enjoyed this… I’d hate to have to kill Malfoy now-- I was actually starting to like him.”

Hermione smiled, putting her hand over Ron’s reassuringly. “Don’t worry, Ron, I asked him for it and I enjoyed it… a lot.”

Ron exhaled, still staring at the bruises. “Definitely not my thing,” he murmured, still sliding his fingers over the marks.

Hermione shifted as his fingers began to trail up over her hip to her belly and then her breasts.

Ron licked his lips, his eyes focused on her chest. Reaching into his pocket, he withdrew his wand and stood back, studying her completely.

“What are you doing?” she asked with slight concern.

“Just be quiet for one minute,” he said as he began to make intricate movements in the air above her.
Hermione followed his wand movements, and her brow furrowed.

When he began to whisper something she couldn’t understand, her heart began to race, and she became fearful.

“Ron! What are you doing?”

“Just hold on a second,” he said with annoyance, resuming the strange and unfamiliar movements.

He paused, frowning. “Sit up for me and put your arms behind your back, ’kay?” he asked. Hermione felt strangely entranced by his evident concentration. Ron usually only concentrated on chess and Quidditch, so anything that sparked this much focus ensnared her curiosity. She slowly pulled her arms behind her, eager to see where he was taking this.

As soon as she did, Hermione felt a tightening in her arms, and then her hands and wrists. She gasped when she saw red ropes coming from seemingly thin air to encircle her torso, wrapping around her waist, encircling her breasts, and then felt the soft rope making elaborate designs crisscross over her arms, pulling them tighter together by the biceps, elbows, and then her wrists, leaving only her hands free behind her.

“Ron, what the hell?” she gasped.

Ron’s smile was sly and smug. “Oh, this? Well, uh, I’ve been practicing a few spells… just in case.”

“Just in case?” Hermione queried. “I thought you weren’t into this ‘slave stuff’?”

Ron shrugged. “Well, maybe I changed my mind. I’ve always wanted to see you tied up nice and pretty,” he said in a throaty lust-laced whisper.

“You’re so beautiful,” he said absently while running his hands over her exposed skin through the bindings and then pulling on the ropes, testing their strength before pulling away, but not before giving her thigh a sharp slap.

Hermione gasped, causing Ron to groan as he closed his eyes. “I love you, Hermione.”

Hermione watched Ron’s strange excited state with awe. She felt empowered that she was the cause of this expression on his face.

“I love you, too, Ron.”

Harry watched avidly as Ron licked his lips once more as if savouring her words.

“Can I gag you?” Ron whispered, as if he had uttered something dirty.

Hermione stared up at him for only a moment before slowly opening her mouth. When Ron dug into his pocket, withdrawing the familiar red ball, Hermione pulled back.

“Hold on, what about my safe word? You can’t hear it through a gag,” she said.

Ron sighed. “All right, then just grunt like three times into the gag or something.” He stood, waiting for her agreement. She nodded, signalling her consent. Ron squeezed her mouth to push the ball in between her lips. Hermione’s eyes went wide as he did. She began to mumble nonsensically around the plastic. She enjoyed the feeling and sound of her own words being blocked by it. She found herself utterly aroused when he finally tied it around her head, securing it in place.

“There we go,” he said, staring at her in wonderment.
She watched him, continuing to moan as he stroked her breasts, his fingertips brushing her nipples, watching with fascination as her they hardened even more under his touch. He played with them, pulling, squeezing, letting them go, and then leaning in to take one into his mouth.

“Mmm,” he murmured before pulling away once more to watch her as she squirmed within her binds. “You look so good, struggling like that for me. I want to make love to you like this.”

Ron licked his lips once more and then stood up straight, glancing back at Harry, who was still sitting at his place at the table, rubbing his hand over the obvious tent in his trousers.

“What do you think of that, mate?” Ron asked boastfully.

Hermione watched as Harry stood up then, walking over toward her and Ron slowly, his eyes fixed on her as she lay bound on the bed.

She tried not to wiggle about as both boys stared down at her, and then Harry came closer, kneeling down on the bed, glancing behind her, inspecting.

“Nice work,” he finally said. “Where did you learn that trick?”

Ron smiled proudly. “Fred and George sent me a nice book on bondage spells.”

Hermione’s eyes went wide as Harry snickered.


Hermione tried to wiggle once more but almost toppled over onto her side doing so, which made Ron smile wider. She scowled as much as she could with the gag in her mouth.

“Are you upset with me?” he asked.

She gave two short moans through her gag to indicate that she was not. Still, this didn’t feel particularly sexy at all. Not until Harry reached behind her, pulling on the rope encircling her arms so that her body sat upright and balanced.

Harry’s pull tightened the ropes against her skin and they sank into her flesh, reminding her just how confined she was right now. She felt her hips grind at the tightening and caught a glimpse of Ron’s growing bulge right before her. Perhaps being bound wasn’t so bad, after all.

When Harry began to trail kisses along her neck and grope her rope-squeezed breasts, she couldn’t help but squirm and moan.

“Is this bothering you, Hermione?” Harry asked tauntingly against her skin.

“Mmm” she moaned, trying to convey the word ‘no.’

“Yeah? You sure?” he continued, running his hands down her torso along the rope bindings over her skin and back along the bindings leading down to her lower waist, just above her cunt.

She tried to convey, ‘Yesss, Master,’ through her gag, but it only came out as a muffled whimper as she tried to push herself against his hand, her body insisting that he go even lower.

Harry smiled against her skin. “Hmm, sure you don’t want to argue with me about your rights, or about how I’m abusing you?” he whispered.

She shook her head emphatically.
“Huh?” Harry asked, feigning ignorance.

“Mmmmmnnmm,” she whined through her gag, staring at Ron, who had already pulled down his trousers and was stroking his big cock in front of her.

“Anyway I want?” he continued.

She nodded enthusiastically.

“You know that we’ll always give you what you need... don’t you, Hermione?” he asked seductively in her ear.

“Mmhmm.”

“But you also want to know that I won't give it to you right away, hmm?”

Hermione could only mumble around the gag in her mouth, her head was spinning once more, as Harry’s fingers lightly touched her clit, making her even wetter.

She moaned louder.

“Damn, I wish I could hear you beg,” Harry whispered.

“Nah, mate, I like her like this,” Ron panted, his hand working over his shaft faster.

She was bucking up against Harry’s hand when he snatched it away. She couldn’t help but whimper when he did, and then, to her disappointment, she saw him rising from the bed.

“Lay back,” Ron said as he knelt down in front of her onto the bed. Hermione didn’t want to throw herself onto her back, so she allowed him to guide her onto her back slowly. Once she had settled, he pulled her legs out, spreading them wide and lifting them onto his shoulders so that he could position his cock at her sopping wet entrance.

She groaned as he began to push his fat cock inside, pulling her legs against him as he did.

Harry pointed his wand at her mouth, and she froze, staring at him and then up at Ron, who had his eyes shut and was enraptured in the act of fucking her, oblivious to what Harry was doing.

She protested, but it only came out as more muffled whining. She thought of grunting her safe sound, but then Harry’s hand was in her hair, caressing her as his wand touched the centre of the ball gag in her mouth. It inflated immediately, and her mouth closed around it.

“Keep your mouth open,” Harry ordered, and she immediately did out of anticipation of he had in mind.

She heard a pop and then felt air push through the centre of what was formerly the ball gag. The plastic material began to tighten in her mouth, hardening, and then slowly growing in circumference, causing her mouth to stretch wider. She tried to adjust her lips as it hardened and spun clockwise just inside her lips, forming a perfect ‘o’. When her mouth was stretched satisfactorily, the ring stopped spinning and stood in place, the straps holding it and tightening a bit more to keep it fixed.

Harry smiled, sticking his finger in and sliding it along her tongue. Hermione couldn’t help the way her mouth was watering, which seemed to excite Harry more. He quickly unzipped his trousers and disrobed.

“Is this was you want?” he asked as he moved to straddle her face, his cock jutting out prominently
towards her mouth as he faced Ron.

“Yes,” she moaned as Ron pushed back into her, pausing only to allow Harry to move into position.

Hermione tried to breathe through her nose as Harry’s cock slid through the gag. She tried to use her tongue to lap at the head pushing its way through, longing to close her lips around his shaft, but could only move her head to try to give him pleasure. It didn’t seem to matter to Harry, though, as he sank deeper into her mouth and began to move up and down, fucking her mouth while he held onto the mattress at her sides.

She could barely see, just concentrate on the cock in her mouth and the one pounding into her pussy, but she could hear muffled moans above her and imagined that Harry and Ron were kissing and moaning into each other’s mouths. The mental image of them doing that while they took their pleasure with her was intoxicating, and she could feel her climax building until she was moaning wildly around Harry’s cock to signal her orgasm.

She heard their kiss break, and Harry’s strokes inside her mouth slowed. She coughed a little, trying to adjust to the change as Ron began to shake the bed with his relentless pace.

She shook her head and twisted her hips as her orgasm hit, squeezing herself as much as possible around Ron’s large shaft.

“Fuck, Hermione, oh… fuck,” he groaned just before falling onto her, his head buried in the mattress just next to Harry’s thigh.

Above her, Harry was moving methodically in and out of her mouth, and she could feel his body tensing and his bollocks swelling against her face. He was about to come. She tried to ready herself for it but could barely swallow, so when his hot, sticky release splattered inside her mouth, coating her tongue, she gulped several times to keep from choking on it.

He slowly rose up, withdrawing himself from her. He lay down beside her, reaching under her head to undo the straps of the gag. When he did, she coughed, rolling onto her side to swallow.

“You all right?” Harry asked.

She smiled, her head swimming.

Harry smiled back at her, kissing her square on her mouth. She heard Ron groan groggily behind her and scoot up to spoon her from behind. It felt good to be between them once more. She had missed them so much.

“Love you,” Ron whispered giving her a tight squeeze. She hummed and closed her hand around his arms, reaching out to Harry with her foot to draw him in closer so they could cuddle before they had to rise and join the real world again.

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Much later that night…

The moon was high, its effervescent glow illuminating Hermione’s skin, making her appear unworldly as its reflection danced in her eyes.

Everyone was in bed, and the galleon had signalled that Harry was calling another meeting. She felt anxious, wondering if something was wrong.
Harry and Ron had arrived before her and were waiting when she came to meet them in the deepest
clearing of the Forbidden Forest. They didn’t greet her or say a word, but as soon as she arrived, Ron
moved around her slowly until he was behind her, out of her vision. She swallowed, not sure what
his intentions were. Watching Harry’s face revealed nothing.

She could feel Ron behind her; he was so close but not touching her and still not speaking. But his
breath reached her ears, and she could smell him. It was strange to not hear his voice. He was always
so talkative, but not tonight. She didn’t dare turn around. She felt frozen by Harry’s stare.

He stood before her, his glasses reflecting the moonlight, almost obliterating his eyes, but not
completely. Their brilliant green glow held her in a trance she couldn’t break free of. She wanted to
speak, to ask them why they had called her out here, but something in the way they held their silence
forced her to keep her own.

There was a rustling nearby, and her wand hand twitched close to her pocket, expecting some
unwelcome visitor. But Harry didn’t even look in the direction of the noise, his stare steady on her
still, and Ron didn’t move behind her, not one bit. He didn’t even call out or curse in his usual
overdone attempt to hide his fear.

Footsteps drew closer, and she gripped her wand, turning to stare in the direction of the one that
approached.
The moon cast light on his platinum blond hair first, and then his eyes, which glowed like two bright
diamonds set in the statue of the Greek gods she had seen in her favourite history books. Draco
spoke no words when he entered the small clearing where they were standing.

He and Harry exchanged a long, meaningful stare and then Draco’s gaze moved past her, toward
Ron, she presumed. She heard Ron stepping closer to her and fought from whirling around to see
what he meant to do.

Ron’s hand was snaking its way into her bushy mane, pulling her head back, his soft lips brushing
against her ear lobe. “Do you know why we brought you out here tonight, Hermione?”

It was hard to catch her breath. Hermione swayed, feeling unsteady in her balance as her anxiety and
excitement about their intentions mounted. “No, Master,” she tried to say in a steady voice.

Ron’s grip tightened. “You’re so smart--guess,” he said, pulling her hair so that her face stared
almost straight up at the full moon.

“Full moon…” she gasped.

“Right,” he confirmed. “And what does Trelawney say about the full moon?”

Gods, she hated Divination! Why was he asking her questions about…. Oh!

“Oh, the full moon signifies rebirth… creation,” she answered confidently.

“Good girl,” Draco drawled from her side, stepping closer, running his hand over her cheek and
down towards her neck where he traced an outline from ear to ear. “Rebirth is within your grasp.
You’re missing something… aren’t you?”

Hermione tried to swallow, but Harry stepped in closer, and it was then that she lost her ability to
breathe. He reached into his Muggle denim pocket and pulled out something leather with a metal
hook in the front; it was the collar she had worn at Snape’s. “Are you missing this, Hermione?”

Hermione stared at the collar dangling before her face, its meaning taking on much more gravity than
it had before. There were no misunderstandings about what it would mean now to wear it. Trust had been re-established, she had gone deeper with each of them than she had ever been before, and she no longer felt the pull of guilt or struggle with what she wanted.

To be here, surrounded by all of them, her boys… her men. Protected, cherished, and on the edge of a heavy promise that could not be broken once she accepted it. She didn’t need a tattoo or a leash to know that she had already given her heart and would freely give her body and life for each of them. She knew that they would do the same, in their own ways.

And so it didn’t take any thought for her to answer, “Yes, Master,” with barely contained excitement and longing that only a week ago she would have felt shame for possessing.

“Show us how much,” Harry said.

Hermione instinctively fell to her knees before him, but was pulled back by two very large, strong hands. Ron began to claw at her robes, trying to find the clasps.

Finally, he just gave up. “Take it off,” he ordered gruffly.

Hermione didn’t waste a second complying, lifting her robes above her head to expose her half-naked form.

Ron groaned behind her, and she could almost feel his eyes fixed on her arse. Harry rose to his feet, turning around immediately to walk to the nearest tree. Draco came around in front of her, his grey stare was fixed on her as he blocked her view of Harry. He reached down and pulled on her nipple, causing her to hiss.

Hermione stared up at Draco and began to turn to regard Ron, when Ron’s hand sunk back into her hair, pushing her forward onto her hands. She faltered and gripped the dirt of the forest floor, her fingers sinking into the rich earth.

Draco’s feet moved to the side and Harry’s came into view. He stood before her for several moments, and she didn’t dare look up, feeling tension coming from him, from all of them. The air crackled, and she was beholden by the power from being at all of their feet, bent over on all fours on the ground.

She heard something swish in the air above her, and then again. She couldn’t help but lift her head to look. When she did, Draco’s hand was heavy on her head, forcing her eyes down.

Harry’s feet moved to her right, and then he was walking around her, and she tensed. Suspecting, but not quite sure. The harsh bite of the switch in his hand confirmed her estimation that he intended to whip her with a branch he had chosen.

She gasped and then quickly thanked him for it.

“Good girl,” Harry said as another strip of the switch hit her in a different place. Her skin burned there, but not in the most unpleasant way.

“Oh!” she cried out, clutching the ground harder. “Thank you… thank you, Master.”

Harry delivered five more strikes before moving back around to stand before her. Her eyes were fixed on them when she felt the sharp sting of the switch on her thighs. There was another flash of sharp pain as it cut higher.

She had barely thanked the one delivering it when there was another, and she was crying out once
more, holding back a sob.

“No ‘thank you’?” Draco asked behind her.

“I’m sorry, thank you, Master,” she said quickly to answer him.

He delivered five more stripes, leaving Hermione clawing the ground and weeping, pain and ecstasy were inseparable. She couldn’t even lift her head, it was swimming so badly her vision cloudy from her tears.

“Have you had enough yet?” Harry asked in an eerily cold voice.

She was temporarily stunned. Her flesh was on fire, but she knew his question wasn’t just about the whipping; it was about her placing her needs above theirs. He was asking her if she would quit again when she didn’t get what she wanted.

“No,” she choked out.

“No?”

“No, Master,” she repeated.

“Shall I continue, then?” Harry asked with a challenge in his voice.

Hermione’s hands were shaking, and she inhaled, trying to brace herself for more. “Yes.”

“Oh, you can do better than that,” Harry said, tracing her skin with the branch.

“Yes, Master, please… until you’re satisfied,” she conceded, finally looking up at him.

There was stillness, and she felt weighed down by the anticipation of taking more from him. She waited for what seemed like several minutes before glancing around.

Harry no longer held the switch in his hand. Instead, he held the collar, his eyes fixed on her in an intense gaze.

“Are you really ready this time, Hermione?” he asked.

“Yes, Master, I am.”

“If you accept this collar now, Hermione, you can’t just give it back again when you’re unhappy,” Draco warned.

“I know, Master,” she said, her throat dry.

“And you can’t make up the rules as we go along, either,” Ron added.

“Yes, Master.”

“No contracts or verbal agreements; complete trust,” Harry emphasized.

“Yes, Master,” she said quickly.

“Sit up,” Harry ordered.

Hermione had to bite her lip to keep from hissing in pain as she sat up, the sore flesh of her arse resting on the soles of her feet.
Harry drew closer to her, bending down. She looked up at him expectantly when his hand reached down to ghost over her neck once more. To her disappointment, he took a step back, staring at her. He held the collar back, like an underserved reward that he wasn’t sure that he should grant. Hermione’s eyes grew wide, and her mind raced anxiously, thinking she had done something to make him reconsider.

“Harry… Master, this is what I want…. I want to be owned…. I want to wear it. Please.”

“And if I wanted to have you marked?” Harry posed. “Have you pierced, tattooed, or colour your bloody hair blue to show my ownership, would you object?”

Hermione felt her heart racing at the prospect of Harry doing any of those things. Would he? Her former vehement opposition to the suggestion was just a memory now. Her trust was complete, and more than anything, she wanted to please him, to please all of them. She knew with confidence they would never put her in harm’s way.

“No, Master.”

Draco cupped her chin, lifting her face to look up at the three of them standing over her, staring down and keenly focused on her.

“Do you feel special right now?” Draco asked.

“Yes, I do,” she gushed.

“Do you feel safe?” Ron asked.

“Yes Master, I do.”

“And do you trust us?” Harry asked.

“Yes, Master, with all my heart,” she said earnestly.

They all exchanged glances, signalling some silent understanding. Ron lifted her hair, pulling it up as Harry knelt down before her, holding the collar up to her throat. She was taking short breaths, waiting for him to close it around her neck. He paused, pressing it against her skin as he gazed into her eyes, and then he was kissing her, slow and tender and she felt Draco move beside her and fall to his knees. And then there was another set of hands pulling the collar tighter.

Harry’s lips were still tasting her when she felt the leather band around her neck fasten. She heard and felt Ron kneel down behind her. His mouth was on her shoulder, right beneath her collar, and then he was whispering sweet words of adoration and affection.

When he pulled away, she reached up and felt the leather band, from the large silver hoop in the front, to the back of her neck.

“Thank you,” she said.

Ron’s hands moved over her back, and he covered her with his body, sucking at her neck. “Are you wet, Hermione?”

She was. Having them all so close was intoxicating.

“Yes, Master.”

“I know you are, slut,” he rasped. “This is one of your fantasies isn’t it?” he asked as he latched onto
her nipple from behind.

“Yes, Master,” she moaned.

“You want us to fuck you, right here… all three of us, don’t you?” Draco questioned.

“Mmm, yes, Master,” she whispered.

“Not yet, pet; you have something else coming,” he said ominously.

She heard movement then and opened her eyes.

Draco and Harry were backing away from her, and her heart raced with apprehension. Had she done something to please them?

But then Ron’s hands were reaching into her thick hair, grabbing it by the root and pulling her head back so that he could lean into her and whisper in her ear.

“You want to make me happy, Hermione?”

“Yes, Master,” she gasped, pushing herself against his hard body.

He let her head go, and she stared ahead, watching as Harry and Draco continued to back away from her and Ron as if an energy force was propelling them away.

Their eyes were still fixed on her, and she wondered what Ron was doing. She heard whispering and then the rustle of the dead branches and grass moving, and she looked around with wild, frantic eyes, expecting a large creature to emerge. But Harry and Draco did not move, and behind her, Ron had his wand pointed toward the trees. He was doing those weird movements with his wand again, and that was when she saw it. The branches on the tree to her right had moved! It was growing, it’s long, skinny, mangled form was sliding toward her in the grass like a snake.

She stared at it, stunned, and then looked to her left. The other tree’s branches was also moving toward her, extending out much like the extendable ears she had seen in the Weasleys’ shop so many times. She moved back when they came close to her, but not fast enough as they began to slide up her body, making her squeak and thrash as if they were, indeed, poisonous snakes.

“Don’t do that, Hermione. Just stay still,” Ron warned from behind her.

“Ron…” she started.

“Do as he says,” Draco warned with a sternness in his voice that made her still abruptly.

She tried not to jump up and utter a sound as the branches encircled her wrists, pulling her arms out and up until her knees were barely touching the forest floor, practically suspending her between both trees. She tried to look to each wrist to survey her binds when she felt a tingle and then a scratch of bark sliding alongside her thighs.

There was a branch at each side, and they were both encircling her, tightening around each thigh, spreading her apart just an inch wider than her shoulders. She heard Ron fall behind her, and then his large hand slid up her back into her hair, pulling her back against her confines. His long, thick cock was out, and he positioned himself behind her. He slapped her hard on her very sore and tender arse, producing a whimper.

She let her head fall once more as his hands began to palm her enflamed flesh. She could feel him
inspecting her with fascination and lust. It made her squirm. His hands were steadily becoming more possessive as he explored, pulling her back against his hard length.

“Do you feel owned, now? Really owned?” he asked.

“Yes, Master,” she replied.

“Say my name, Hermione,” he snarled, digging into her skin as he pushed himself against her.

“Ah! Yes, Ron!”

“You already are, you know… owned…. You always have been,” he whispered.

Hermione gasped as Ron entered her, pushing his huge length inside of her steadily as he pulled her back. Her gaze moved between Draco and Harry. They watched the tableau with intensity, and the sight clearly aroused them, judging from the bulges in their trousers “Isn’t that right?”

“Yes, Ron… yes… always,” she breathed.

“Louder, Mione…. Tell me who you belong to,” he grunted.

“I… belong to you… Ron… All of you… Oh, god,” she cried out.

When she looked up, panting, Draco was obviously aroused by the scene before him. His chest rose and fell rapidly, and he shifted, his erection fighting against his clothing.

He muttered something and then reached into his trousers to withdraw his cock.

He leaned back against the tree, watching as Ron continued to drive himself into Hermione, gripping her arse as she clutched the branches encircling her wrists.

She watched as Draco began to wank. They were watching each other until Ron shifted, grabbing Hermione by the hair and riding her hard until he growled out her name to signal his climax.

He fell back, and she heard him breathing hard behind her. When she looked up, Draco was no longer resting against the tree; he was standing right before her, his cock in her face. It was only a second later that he was pulling her head toward it, pushing the long, pink rod against her lips. When she glanced up, he was staring down at her, transfixed. And then she was opening her mouth wide, accepting every inch of him, trying to accommodate his full length in her mouth.

Draco groaned, throwing his head back. She looked up, pleased that she had the power to make him groan like that. She continued to work her mouth over him, when she felt her body being adored with kisses from behind. Ron was planting kisses along her arse, and then up her back as he caressed her. She moaned around Draco’s length, which elicited another groan, and then Draco’s hands flew to her face, fixing it in place while he drove himself in and out of her mouth.

She heard the crunch of grass, but couldn’t look, practically impaled on Draco’s cock, has he held her head in an iron grip.

Harry dropped down by her side, and she cracked her eyes open and tried to turn her head to peer at him. It made her pussy ache and dampen to know he was watching her suck cock. She recalled immediately the first time she had ever done so, with his hand pushing her head down onto Ron’s length on the rocks, not too far from where they were now.

Harry whispered, something, and she keened her ear to listen to what he was saying. Filthy things,
words that made her wetter and more enthusiastic at her task. Draco was pulling and pushing her head as his hips jerked with increasing fervour, and then she felt Harry moving behind her. It was only a second later that he was using the wetness from her cunt to coat his cock while murmuring a familiar spell that dampened her backside before slowly pushing himself into her arse. She cried out as he began to push into her insistently, gripping her shoulders to steady himself as he did.

She cried out around Draco’s cock as Harry sheathed himself inside of her arse fully, making her feel stretched and fragile around his length. When she opened her eyes, Ron was right there, a foot away, his eyes holding a deep, entranced glaze as he watched on.

Draco’s fist clenched within her hair, and she knew he was close and grew more excited to taste him as she continued to suck. Before he came, though, Harry’s fingers gripped her shoulders hard as he thrusted twice more before she felt his warm release inside of her. She continued to suck Draco as Harry rested on her back, feeling her own climax approaching as the cock in her mouth drove in and out of the wet cavern of her with blind need. When Hermione came, she pulled her wrists against the bark constraints surrounding her arms and tried to press her legs together, causing the branches to dig into her thighs.

Draco gripped her head tight, holding it still as he came, filling her mouth with his spunk. She drank him down greedily, allowing only a little to spill over her lips and drip down her chin. Draco slowly withdrew then, stumbling back and falling to his arse in front of her with a dazed look in his eyes.

She felt Harry stumble behind her, and he swayed, pulling her against her constraints. Both Ron and Draco asked him if he was all right, and she heard him mumble something barely audible. She felt the binds of the tree branches loosening and then falling away from her wrists and ankles and stumbled with Harry catching her around the waist and easing her down onto her knees slowly. Harry was breathing in short gasps, and collapsed fully against her back, resting. If they hadn’t just finished having sex, Hermione may have been concerned but she was sure that the reason he was breathing so heavy and felt weakened was the result of their coupling. Still, she leaned over more so that he could rest.

Both Draco and Ron rose to surround her on her front and side, forming a circle and enveloping her with the warmth of their bodies. They all leaned in, showering her with kisses, hugging her tightly as they murmured words of praise and adoration.

Hermione smiled, feeling satiated and renewed in their embrace as she looked up at the full moon. She was theirs, completely, and finally, she felt no guilt or shame about her position or theirs. It felt good to be owned, and a quiet peace filled her as she basked in the warmth of the tight-knit circle they had created.

Somewhere in the distance a wolf howled, but Hermione barely heard it as the sound of their collective heartbeats and breathing drowned out the world around her.

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The moon was high tonight, too high. It was bearing down on Remus, making his skin crawl as thoughts of peeling it off nagged at him. His human shell felt too fragile to hold what lay just below the surface; he wanted to tear his flesh away so that he could roam free, the way he was meant to…

This is when he hated himself the most, just before the change. He was lucid enough to know that he was losing himself, yet the desire to completely succumb to the wolf was too strong to resist.

He was already changing, he could feel it. His hair had grown considerably longer, his nails more prominent, and his teeth sharper. He kept his eyes to ground. If he even looked at the moon now, it
would be his undoing.

Remus tried his best to remain in the shadows, hiding away from it all—the moon, the urge to change, the call of the hunt... himself. It wouldn’t be long before he would be forced to emerge from his hiding place so that he could give into himself once again. He cursed the Wolfsbane as he always did right before the fall. The cruel potion running through his veins taunted his rationality, mocking his ever-fleeting desire to remain sane and fully conscious of his human nature. The previous day’s plan to complete his task without coming to any bloodshed seemed almost comical now.

He could smell Peter more than anything else in the forest, even more than the fresh pine, soil, or flesh of more likely prey. His nose was focused on one thing only. He had been hunting him for almost a day and a half. Though broken, at every turn the rat had managed to scuttle along the forest floor just out of Remus’ reach.

A branch cracked, and his head snapped in the direction from which the sound came. He smelled dirty fur, the pheromones of a filthy, panicked rodent, covered in the stench of dirt, sweat, shit, and all of the larger plant life of the forest. And then he heard the distinct patter of little feet trying to run faster as if being chased by a predator.

Remus couldn’t help but bare his teeth as he began to crawl and then break out into a run toward that sound. His thoughts, which were just moments ago clear and focused, once again became cloudy. His run became a tenacious chase, and then he felt his feet pounding the earth, whipping with little feeling through the brush as terrified animals scattered from his path. He would undoubtedly hunt them later, but right now, there was only one thing he wanted.

It felt as though he was flying when he leaped in mid-air over and between trees several feet away. When he landed with a dull thud, his legs felt stronger, and his feet twitched from the exertion. Something tickled on his soles. It felt like a worm... or a tail wriggling beneath his feet. He stopped himself from drooling as he gazed down at his prize, which was struggling in vain to break free.

The rat caught under his feet squeaked and sniffed. Its front paws clawed along the ground in a hopeless stationary run. Remus could hear himself laughing, and the last shroud of self-loathing and guilt dissipated as his eyes were pulled upward over the trees toward the moonlit sky.

He couldn’t hide from it forever. The light of the moon shone on him like a spotlight, and for a moment, he felt frozen in its glare. He closed his eyes and felt his body tremble with a familiar ache. It always started up his toes, stretching along his calves, travelling fast through his blood. In those moments, it felt as if he was burning alive. He fought from scratching himself as his feet dug deeper into the earth. Something squished, and the little human voice in his head told him he had just squashed Peter, but Remus knew that wasn’t true, for he could hear the rat whine behind his clawed foot.

His teeth broke through the gum—he hated that most, it hurt like hell—and then all form of coherent consciousness faded as he felt his head expand and his nails transform into claws, sliding out from under the cuticles like razors, cutting his fingertips.

He howled in pain and relief. It was always that way at this hour. He was free, but breaking from his human form was always excruciating and never over soon enough.

When it was complete, he could barely recognize the whining man under him. Half rat and half man lay sprawled out like some mutant thing gone awry in Transfiguration, the leg of ‘it’ trapped beneath his paw.

Peter stared up at him with wide, frantic eyes. “Remus, you wouldn’t... would you?” he pleaded.
When Remus blinked at him in recognition, a low, hysterical giggle broke from the other man.

“Of course not. You’re taking the Wolfsbane, aren’t you?” Peter sighed in relief.

Something inside of Remus broke to hear the traitor laugh, and he snarled in spite of himself. Peter froze, trembling as he watched his captor with trepidation. “You will let me go, won’t you, dear friend? I’m harmless, really. It’s all out of my hands now…. I’m at his mercy; we all are!”

Remus cocked his head to one side. His vision was exceedingly acute, and he could make out the beads of sweat and nervous trembling of the other man’s hands, which were clutched close to his chest in his typical rat imitation. He was waiting for Peter to move, to fight; he was hoping for it, in fact. But instead, Peter lay still, his eyes fixed upward in fright.

"I’m so sorry for all that I’ve done…. You don’t think I regret what happened to them? I do…. Every day! Believe me, I do!” Peter continued frantically.

Remus leaned in closer to peer down at Peter, unable to control his growl. He wanted to say so much to him, but rarely could he talk when he was like this, and his bloodlust was strong, despite the Wolfsbane.

“The Dark Lord is powerful, I was no match for him, you see…. You all had each other, but I had no one! I was caught out there, alone!” he cried. Copious tears were running down his face, and he was sniffing in the most unattractive way imaginable. Something like pity grew in Remus, and he hated himself for feeling it.

Peter had always been the weakest of them. Looking down at him now, trapped under his foot and begging for pardon, only underscored his pitiful existence even more. But he was wrong about one thing: he hadn’t been alone. He had been a part of the Order, he had been a Secret Keeper, and he had betrayed them.

Remus tried summon the last remaining bit of will and strength it would take to drag the man away as he considered removing his foot.

Suddenly, Peter grabbed his leg.

Remus swiped at Peter’s hands without even thinking, tearing away a good portion of Peter’s right arm, exposing bone and tendons.

Peter screamed and howled in pain, crying even harder before squinting up at Remus.

“Ah, Remus, please, dear friend…. I won’t try to escape! I just want to live! I just want to live!”

The smell of Peter’s blood stirred something within Remus. His last remaining bit of pity and mercy was battling with a hunger he could barely keep down.

“Y-You remember I was a good friend, don’t you? I was the best of them all! I treated you better than James and Sirius ever did! I brought you your homework when you couldn’t make classes because of your condition…. Remember that? I always looked out for you…. I was loyal… to all of you…. I never would have betrayed them unless I was forced to do it! How could I fight the Dark Lord? I was no match…. What was I supposed to do? What would you have done?”

Familiar rage began to bury his former pity, and Remus spread his claws, growling over Peter. Incoherent thoughts mingled with his mounting desire to tear apart the poor excuse for a human being beneath him. He would have never betrayed his friends, not for anything; the thought repulsed him. The faces of James and Lily flashed across his scattered mind like lightening warnings of a
torrential storm. The only people who had ever really kept him true to himself were gone… dead.

And then there was Harry. Harry, who had almost been killed because of Peter’s betrayal. Harry, who was still in danger. That was why Peter was in the forest in the first place, wasn’t it? Harry would never be safe with Peter alive. And the Ministry was corrupt now….

“You all abandoned me!” Peter snarled, the blood draining from his face. He glanced at the remains of his arms and grimaced. “You think I didn’t know? I knew! I was a good friend, but none of you were to me! You had abandoned me long before the Dark Lord came along… for a Mudblood whore!” Peter cried.

As soon as Peter said it, something snapped through the binds of the Wolfsbane restraining the wolf within Remus. The man underneath him was no longer a former friend or an unfortunate tortured soul to be pitied. He was kill. One last horrified scream ripped from Peter’s mouth as Remus leaned in closer. At that moment, Peter’s wail was like a melodious prelude, a mere appetizer before the main course. Remus paused for only one moment to enjoy the sound before sinking his jaws into Peter’s head, crushing the man’s skull between his teeth. There was no tug of guilt or remorse as he did it, those feelings would come later.

The only thing Remus could feel right now coursing through his veins right was pure satisfaction and the bliss that always accompanied claiming his prey.
Disappearing Acts

It's the great disappearing act
Done once again for tomorrow
As we're chasing our tails
Biting our nails
So strong and frail

And we build and tear down
Build and tear down
Build and tear down
We've run out of time to say
How did it get so late?

“Disappearing Acts” by Chris Cornell

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When Remus awoke, his head was groggy and a familiar dull pain ached in the back of his cranium. There was dried blood caking in his nails and on his thighs. He wiped his mouth to find it crusty with the same. The usual.

But no matter how many times he awoke to find himself in such a state, it never seemed to diminish the self-loathing and disgust he felt for what he was, and worse, for what he had done.

While the Wolfsbane helped contain his sanity, usually keeping others safe from him at his worst, it also had awful side effects. With the potion, he had more clarity and rationality when he transformed, so his memories were clearer and more coherent.

He blinked. At first, he only could only remember running. He had been chasing something of great importance to him. He could still recall the urgency; it had felt more important than anything he had ever pursued. Triumph and the thrill of the hunt still coursed through him like days-old liquor in a drunk. He remembered it, the feeling of satisfaction as he had…

Remus’ eyes widened, and his mouth dropped open as he began to shake. He looked down at his hands again. There was caked blood there, yes, but something else. Hair, lots of dirty brown hair. Dirty brown human hair. No.

“You all abandoned me!” Remus could hear Peter’s voice yelling in his head. He gripped the soil, digging his hands into the dirt, clutching onto the earth as if he might fall off of it if he didn’t hold on.

As he closed his eyes, the frightened contorted face of his former friend, the traitor that he despised and pitied stared back at him, pleading for his life.

What had he done?

What had he done?

Remus froze, just barely aware that his hands were now trembling. He had never killed a person, even before Wolfsbane… by the grace of the gods he had avoided such misfortune. Even worse, he had been on Wolfsbane when he had killed Peter, which meant some large part of him had wilfully done it.
He fell back against the trunk of the tree he found himself laying under. He was a murderer, no better than Peter, really. Well, perhaps a little.

“Shall we kill him together?” he heard Sirius’ voice ask, recalling that one moment that seemed like ages ago when he had been willing to kill Peter wilfully with Sirius.

He struggled to rise to his feet, feeling unstable in his footsteps. He looked up in the distance, through the trees, to see the pointed rooftops of the castle he used to call home, wishing he could simply take the underground to his old dorms and curl into bed and rest like he used to after such a night. But there was no one here for him now. James was gone, Sirius was gone, and he had killed Peter.

The only person he had now was Tonks. He thought that perhaps he should go to her, but then quickly reconsidered as he recalled their last fight. She wanted so much more than he could give her right now. He feared where their relationship was going and what it would mean for her and their future child, considering his curse. It was too much to deal with right now.

Right now, Grimmauld seemed much more fitting a retreat than anything resembling a real home. He didn’t deserve to be around normal people. Snape would make suitable company; perhaps he could even get into a row with the slimy git to relieve some frustration. Anything would be better than being near Tonks right now, he felt so dirty.

Remus took a sharp breath as he thought of Snape. He had told Remus to follow Peter, and he had prevented Peter from divulging news about the four to the Dark Lord. Despite feeling like the lowest scum to walk the earth—a murderer—Remus felt some sense of purpose and satisfaction that Snape, at least, would not judge him. Perhaps it served some greater good he couldn’t yet feel good about.

Tears burned beneath his eyelids, and he couldn’t stop them from slipping and sliding down his face as he tried to keep his eyes focused ahead of him.

“Damn you, Peter,” he whispered. “And damn me.”

He didn’t even need to say it, for Remus already felt damned.

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When she came back that night, Hermione felt like she had eaten one of the twins’ trademark candies designed to make her feel euphoric and high. Her collar was tight and prominent against her neck, and the silver buckle glimmered in the moonlight. She didn’t bother to hide it or remove it, instead her hands constantly wandered up to her neck as she reflected on the night and past couple of days just before falling fast to sleep.

She awoke to Parvati and Ginny shaking her.

“What is it?” she asked in annoyance.

“Hermione! Wake up!” Parvati practically yelled.

“What?” she repeated, sitting up fully.

“There’s been another attack!” Ginny said anxiously.

“What do you mean? Where?” Hermione asked.

Ginny and Parvati exchanged nervous glances. “Near Oxford…” Parvati said apprehensively, her
“My parents!” Hermione exclaimed. Fear sprung up fiercely in the pit of her belly as she jumped out of bed and began to get dressed. She had to go home and see if they were all right, and if they were, she had to get them out of Britain. It was no longer safe for them to be here.

“I know. Hermione, listen—” Parvati began.

Hermione sat up and got out of bed quickly. “Where did you hear this?”

“The Prophet, look,” Ginny said, pushing the paper into Hermione’s face.

Hermione ignored the strange fixated stare both girls were giving to her collar and concentrated on the article. They had been hearing about escalating attacks on Muggle London for months, but Oxford was her hometown, and she was very concerned for her parents.

“I have to get them out of there!”

“You can’t; no one can leave the school. They’re even thinking of cancelling the Hogsmeade visit,” Parvati informed.

Panic struck Hermione—everything was riding on the Hogsmeade visit. “Oh no, they can’t cancel that visit!”

Ginny and Parvati both looked at Hermione in puzzlement. “Hermione, Hogsmeade is the least of our worries right now. People are dying!”

“Right,” Hermione said, pausing and then turning to retrieve clothing from her dresser.

“Are you going to owl your parents and warn them?” Ginny asked.

Hermione nodded. “I suppose that’s all I can do, right?” She suddenly felt very helpless; she didn’t want to frighten her parents, but they had to know they were at risk.

Parvati and Ginny looked at her sympathetically.

Uncomfortable with their pitying looks, she quickly moved past them and shut the door so that she could shower. When she came out, both Ginny and Parvati were sitting on their beds, watching her closely.

“What is that thing around your neck?” Ginny asked.

“Oh, ah, this… it’s a rare heirloom, a gift,” Hermione explained.

Ginny scoffed. “It’s definitely not from Ron.”

Once again, Hermione raised her hand to feel her collar, feeling it.

“Did Harry give you that?” Ginny pressed.

“Does it matter? I like it; I think it’s rather unique.”

“It looks like a dog collar,” Ginny said, grimacing.

Parvati nodded in agreement.
Hermione rolled her eyes, adjusting the collar to put on her white button-down oxford. She tied her necktie tightly to see how it would look over the collar.

Only it didn’t cover it at all, and only made the collar stick out more. She looked back at the girls to see what they would say but they were staring at her strangely. She huffed and went into the bathroom closing the door behind her.

Did she want to wear her collar out like this? It was so prominent.

“Oh, bloody hell!” she huffed, attempting to transform it into a silver locket similar to the one Draco had designed months before. After the fifth attempt, she got it; in fact, in her opinion, it looked even better.

When she came out, neither Ginny nor Parvati said anything as she announced that she would meet them in the Great Hall after going to the Owlery to send a note to her parents.

When she came downstairs with her note in hand, Harry and Ron were in the common room waiting for her.

Harry looked sick. His skin was pale, and his eyes looked haunted as if he hadn’t slept at all.

Hermione frowned. “Harry, you look… unwell.”

Harry grimaced. “I’m just feeling a bit queasy, that’s all. Probably need to eat,” he muttered.

Ron and Hermione stared at him worriedly.

“Well, let’s get a move on then,” Ron said, keeping his eyes on Harry.

“I’ll meet you two in a few minutes, if that’s alright. I have to send a letter to my parents.”

Ron’s brow wrinkled. “About what?”

Hermione took a deep breath. “I’m worried. I think they should know that things aren’t safe. Perhaps they should consider getting out of Britain until things… get better,” she said with hesitation. Would things ever get better? They seemed to be only getting worse each year.

Ron and Harry nodded solemnly before turning to exit with Hermione following them out.

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Lucius was present when the Dark Lord suddenly Apparated into his drawing room. Although there were wards set up to prevent such a thing, they seemed meaningless to the Dark Lord. Lucius couldn’t help but admire such power, even if he had grown to hate the monster occupying his home. The Dark Lord was immediately surrounded by most of his followers. They bowed low, each anxious to report their progress in creating chaos in Muggle and Wizarding London.

Lucius and Narcissa exchanged a brief knowing glance. For Lucius it was like holding his wife’s hand, which was all the affection the Dark Lord would tolerate in his presence. He hated to see the couple even touch.

Lucius felt nervous tension course through him as he waited his turn to report his activities since the Dark Lord’s absence. Truthfully, he had been busy making sure that Peter did not seek out his master to inform him of what he thought he knew about Severus, Draco and the others. But Peter had disappeared days ago, and the Dark Lord’s sudden and unexpected appearance vexed Lucius.
Had Peter summoned him? Did the Dark Lord know that Draco was not following his assignment to the letter? He worried for his son, terribly.

Guilt rose within him again as he thought about what he had done to Draco by swearing allegiance to this… man before him. He tried to push down his hate, his loathing for his Master before approaching, knowing that it could be easily detected.

“Where is Severus?” the Dark Lord asked. “I was informed that he had been dismissed.”

Lucius opened his mouth to speak, but the Dark Lord continued before he could.

“Where is he now?” The Dark Lord asked, staring plainly at Lucius.

Lucius raised his eyebrows. “My Lord, I assume he’s at his home…”

The Dark Lord drew closer to Lucius, his red eyes unblinking as they burned into his own.

“Rabastan… Rodolphus,” he said without turning to look at the men, his eyes still fixed on Lucius.

“Yes, my Lord.” Both brothers stepped forward.

“Bring Severus here… I’d like to know how Draco’s assignment is going, especially in light of the fact that Severus can’t be there to watch over him,” he said, his eyes still glinting a dare. Lucius held his breath.

“Yes, My Lord,” the men said, turning to leave immediately.

Lucius tried not to turn his lip in hatred as a cruel threatening smile grew on the Dark Lord’s face.

“Something on your mind, Lucius?” the fiend asked with a ghost of a smile on his snake-like mouth.

“No, My Lord…”

“Oh, Lucius. You should try your best to be honest with me. I don’t have to read your mind to know that you’re concerned about your son… although, I can’t imagine why?”

Lucius willed himself to breathe once more, his face completely impassive as he tried his best to block all though of his son’s fate from his mind. “My Lord, I am not, I’m merely concerned about Severus and how our sons will fare when it’s clear Dumbledore has become an absolute dictator. Perhaps it is time for me to speak to the school’s board.”

“Yes, perhaps, you should… let’s wait first. Perhaps Rabastan and Rodolphus will be able to produce him, and we can inquire more about it then, hmm? In the meantime, I want to hear about the strikes against Muggle London… And… where is Peter?” he asked.

Lucius looked around; Bellatrix, the Carrows, Macnair, Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott all exchanged curious glances. Peter was always the first to come running when the Dark Lord called.

Their Master narrowed his eyes. “When was he seen last?”

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That weekend…
“Everyone must have a partner,” McGonagall called out, surveying the crowd of students gathered around in excitement. This was their first and last Hogsmeade visit this year and they all had some degree of restlessness from being confined to castle grounds.

“I shouldn’t have remind you that these are dark times, and the only reason we are allowing this visit is because we know you are all getting antsy and need some recreation, but if you do not follow the rules, I have no problem with ending this excursion early and cancelling any future Hogsmeade visits,” she threatened.

There were several mutters and grumbles.

Hermione, Harry, and Ron exchanged a worried glanced when McGonagall’s voice called their attention to her. “Mr. Potter, Mr. Weasley, and Ms. Granger, may I have a word?” she asked.

Draco watched as the three approached the elder professor, and then he was forced to turn away from them and began to walk with his House as they started the long walk towards Hogsmeade.

Anyone from the outside looking in could see that things in Slytherin had changed dramatically. Whereas before, the sixth years were tight knit and protective of one of another, now they were fragmented into tiny, fragile cliques. Pansy and Nott had all but separated from everyone and walked and talked in guarded murmurs ahead of the others, while Crabbe and Goyle were uncharacteristically quiet, with occasional whispers and suspicious looks around them, even cast towards Draco, who walked alongside Blaise in tense silence.

He glanced up at the darker wizard, who kept his eyes straight ahead.

“You don’t have to walk with me, you know,” Draco said offhandedly, feeling apprehensive about how exactly he was going to get away from his House to join Harry, Ron, and Hermione.

Blaise snorted. “Yeah, I know that. Like there’s any better company.”

Blaise remained quiet for several moments, which only increased Draco’s anxiousness. He didn’t understand why Blaise was walking next to him, and Draco really didn’t have time for this right now. He didn’t want Blaise interfering with his plans to slip off with the Trio later.

“Doesn’t make sense, does it?” Blaise said finally.

“What?” Draco asked in irritation.

“All of that rubbish about killing Muggleborns and Muggles,” Blaise said quietly as they continued to walk.

Draco looked up at him sharply, trying to gauge if he was being tested or not. “Since when do you give a shite about Muggleborns or Muggles, Zabini?”

Blaise scoffed. “I don’t. But if I were a dictator or let’s say… a Dark Lord, I wouldn’t want them killed off. Why would you exterminate an entire population if you want to remain in power? Why destroy what you can conquer?”

Draco didn’t respond. Was Blaise having some sort epiphany? Draco really didn’t care; he had things to do.

“If you ask me,” Blaise continued, “this whole Dark Lord business is load of crap. He’s just a power hungry maniac who talks a good game. My mum thinks so as well,” he admitted.
Draco raised an eyebrow at that. “Yeah? And why are you telling me this, Zabini?”

Blaise kept quiet for a moment before speaking “My mum… she’s been getting threats from Death Eaters,” he said in a hushed voice. “They’re trying to force her to join. She has lots of contacts… valuable friends. She’s been forced into hiding.”

Draco didn’t know what to say. He didn’t particularly care about Blaise or his mum, but he knew what it was like to worry about one’s parents, especially in wake of the kind of evil that had forced Blaise’s mother into hiding.

“That’s unfortunate,” he managed to offer.

Blaise nodded. “Yeah. I want to make sure she’s safe… I don’t even know where to owl her now… If there’s a way she can get to safety…” he said, his voice trailing off.

Draco felt his defences go up. So that was what Blaise wanted. Information. Why the bloke thought Draco knew anything that could help was beyond Draco. “Look, I’m real sorry about your mum, Zabini, but I don’t know anything… What do you think I am, a double agent or something?”

“I just thought—”

“Sorry,” Draco snapped. “But you thought wrong. I really don’t know anything that can help your mum. I’m not sure there’s anyone that can help her… she’s just as screwed as the rest of our parents.”

Blaise narrowed his eyes at Draco. “Every man for himself then, I suppose?”

“I didn’t say that,” Draco replied.

Blaise studied him for a moment before giving a curt nod “Fine… I suppose I’ll see you later,” he said, walking faster to separate from Draco and catch up to Pansy and Nott.

Draco watched as Blaise continued to walk on, and the fifth, fourth, and third years began to make their way past him, glancing back curiously as he stood still on the pathway.

The Gryffindors were next. As the first seventh years began to make their way past him, Draco eyes scanned all of the faces of the sixth years and then the fifth years approaching. Hermione, Harry, and Ron were nowhere to be seen.

Someone bumped into him hard, and he turned to see Seamus laughing it up with his friends as they sniggered.

“Waiting for someone, Malfoy?” Seamus asked. “Or maybe they’ve finally wised up and realised that making friends out of Ferrets is a bad idea.”

Draco gritted his teeth, trying to bite his tongue. He really couldn’t afford to get into a row or fight with anyone, especially today. He was relieved to see that Seamus and his friends didn’t care enough to stick around to see his reaction and instead continued on their way.

He decided that he was done with playing covert operations and decided to walk back against the steady line of approaching students. Many gave him curious and strange glances, whispering as he continued to walk back, searching for three familiar faces.

He held his breath as the line began to thin out and he saw the tall pointy hat of McGonagall rearing up at the end. She was walking alongside Professor Flitwick
Draco felt his nerves on end. Where were they?

His stomach did a flip as McGonagall approached, giving him her usual stern gaze. To his relief and puzzlement, Harry, Hermione, and Ron were following right behind her.

“Mr. Malfoy, what are you doing back here? Shouldn’t you be with your House; Slytherin was first in line,” she pointed out, her icy stared fixed on his face.

Draco swallowed and nodded. “Yes, Professor. I was waiting for Harry, Hermione, and Ron,” he said casually, giving the three of them a familiar smirk.

McGonagall drew back, appraising Draco closely. “I see,” she said, turning to regard the Trio who stood behind her.

Hermione did not seem the least bit perturbed by McGonagall’s reproachful stare and held her chin up proudly.

When McGonagall turned her attention back to Draco, he straightened his posture and made sure to keep eye contact with her to show he had nothing to hide.

“It has not gone unnoticed by me or the other teaching staff that you four have overcome years of bickering and rivalry in a short span of a few months to form a most unusual friendship,” she said with suspicion.

“You say that as if it’s a bad thing, Professor,” Draco posed inquisitively, trying to sound as non-smug as possible. It was hard for him.

McGonagall narrowed her eyes, and Draco felt the vein in his head throb as he tried to remain his neutral expression. Really, the woman had always given him the creeps.

“You say that as if it’s a bad thing, Professor,” Draco posed inquisitively, trying to sound as non-smug as possible. It was hard for him.

McGonagall’s narrowed her eyes, and Draco felt the vein in his head throb as he tried to remain his neutral expression. Really, the woman had always given him the creeps.

“I don’t know what you four are up to, but I have my eye on you. All of you,” she said, looking back to stare pointedly at Hermione once more.

Ron wrinkled his brow, glancing at Harry who gave McGonagall a feeble smile. Hermione looked weary of McGonagall’s threats altogether and wasn’t even bothering to hide it.

Draco wondered what had happened between those two. He knew that Hermione had always been one of McGonagall’s favourites. He’d have to ask her about that later.

“Right, we’ll keep that in mind, Professor,” Hermione said with a tight fake smile.

McGonagall pursed her lips. Draco didn’t like how this was developing; whatever animosity now existed between Hermione and McGonagall could threaten the entire point of their plan for today. He decided it would be best to deflate it and turn McGonagall’s attention back on him.

“Yes, ma’am. I consider them to be close friends. Closer than many, even in my own House,” he said genuinely.

Harry gave him an affectionate smile, and Draco found it hard not to smile back. He suddenly wanted to snog the boy senseless.

Professor McGonagall gave Draco a distrusting look, her eyes slowly moving from his face to his left arm, staring at it pointedly. Draco knew instantly what she was trying to imply and pushed down his urge to say something cutting about the old cow. It would only land him in detention or worse back at Hogwarts while everyone else was at Hogsmeade. So instead, he forced himself to look away.
from her and turned his gaze to the Trio. The four exchanged quick glances before joining together
to walk ahead of Professor Flitwick and McGonagall in silence.

As they walked, McGonagall and Flitwick began to talk in low tones about things that none of them
had any interest in, such as repair to one of the classrooms and grading first year papers. Despite his
anxiety, he also felt strangely comfortable, watching the long stretch of students before them. Even
though none of them was saying anything, he didn’t feel any awkwardness or wonder what they
were thinking. He was among friends. Friends, that less than a year ago, he would have pranked to
humiliate or demean. He glanced up, eyeing Hermione, Harry, and Ron. They seemed to all be in
their own thoughts as they continued to walk, and so Draco kept his eyes focused ahead too, walking
with them quietly.

When they reached Hogsmeade, McGonagall gave them all one last look before walking ahead of
them all to take care of a few third year Ravenclaw boys who had gotten into a heated argument.

Draco, Hermione, Ron, and Harry stuck together, heading towards the Three Broomsticks. The
Slytherins in particular seemed to be eyeing him curiously. Apparently it was all right for him to be
hanging out with the Trio on school grounds but not at Hogsmeade. He wondered briefly if anyone
would challenge him in front of them, testing his loyalty. Thankfully, most of the gawkers seemed to
bore quickly and moved on to their interests in Honeydukes Sweetshop or Madam Puddifoot’s.

When they sat down, they all requested Butterbeers, as planned. They drank their drinks slowly,
making meaningless filler conversation, until people had grown weary of staring at them.

Just as planned, Harry rose and went to the loo, leaving Ron, Hermione, and Draco alone. After ten
minutes, Draco rose and went to the bar, speaking to Madam Rosmerta. He asked her stupid
questions about how they were able to make such a delectable Butterbeer. The woman seemed to be
easily flattered and engaged him in conversation for the next ten minutes.

When Draco glanced back at the table, Ron and Hermione were kissing, just as planned. He waited
before glancing back again, and when he did, they were rising to leave, hand in hand.

He allowed Madam Rosmerta to finish her explanation about the sweetening process, giving Ron
and Hermione a good five-minute lead before making up an excuse about leaving something at
Zonko’s Joke Shop. She wished him luck, and then he exited the front door, glancing about to make
sure no one was looking before heading to the back of the Broomsticks as they had planned.

Ron, Hermione, and Harry all stood shoulder to shoulder as Draco ducked behind them and took
Harry’s invisibility cloak. He slipped it on and waited for the three to begin walking, following close
behind as they continued on the pathway to the Hog’s Head Tavern, where they went to the back.
Harry knocked on the door five times in a weird cadence that sounded like code. Sure enough, two
minutes later, an older gentleman opened the door, peering around cautiously. “Well, come on in,”
he urged.

“Thank you…” Harry said as the three others followed closely behind them up a narrow staircase.

Draco tried as best he could to follow Ron and Hermione’s footsteps so as not to add to give away
that he was there, not that he thought that the older man noticed anyway.

When they got to the top of the stairs, the man unlocked a room, and all of them followed him inside.

“I shouldn’t be doing this, you know,” the man grumbled.

“We promise, we’ll be right back. We have to do this, it’s very important,” Hermione pleaded.
The older man eyed her warily before grunting and pointing to the corner.

“If you’re not back by sunset, I can’t help you. I’m not going to have them closing down my pub because of this,” he said.

“Thank you… Abe,” Harry said, placing a few Galleons in the man’s hand. He looked down at the money and then pocketed it, walking away. He took one final glance at the three and then closed the door behind him.

Ron let out a relieved sigh and then looked around. “We better make this count. Let’s go.”

Harry and Hermione nodded.

“Draco?” Hermione asked.

“I’m right here,” Draco said, pulling the Invisibility cloak off. “Are you sure you can trust him? He seems sort of barmy to me.”

“What other option do we have?” Harry asked. “Even if we have access to Snape’s Floo, it’s too risky. I’m sure it’s being monitored.”

They all exchanged looks, their faces becoming more determined.

“Alright, then, on with the plan,” Ron said, turning towards the seemingly empty corner. There was a window there, and a chair, a small clay figurine of a little girl sitting on it.

The four gathered around it.

“Here goes nothing,” Harry said, reaching out to touch it. Draco instinctively reached out as well, as did Ron and Hermione.

In the next instant he felt himself being pulled and then he was falling, the dizzying sensation of being swung about almost making him vomit until the worse sensation of falling onto hard cobblestone clobbered him on the bum.

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When they all landed on the cobblestone street of Diagon Alley on their bums, it hurt like hell. Hermione quickly scrambled to her feet, conscious that they were in public and looked conspicuous. But as her eyes scanned the alley, she noted that there was hardly anyone there. Waiting for the boys to collect themselves, she searched for other people, but found no one. She almost wished there was someone there to gawk at them or cast a disapproving look. It was eerie.

As they began to walk down the alley, they were all struck into silence by the appearance. It was no longer bright with lots of hustle and bustle, but nearly abandoned, with stragglers, shifty looking characters. Some shops that were normally overrun with business were closed, and a few looked like they had been abandoned for some time.

“What happened?” Ron asked anxiously.

Draco glanced sideways, keeping his face straight. “What do you think, Ron? The Dark Lord happened.”

They all glanced at Draco and then around the alley they were in as they continued to walk in silence, the gravity of what was going on outside of Hogwarts, and why what they were doing was
so important, weighing heavier than it had in weeks.

They kept walking until they reached the blackened cobblestone entrance leading to Knockturn. Exchanging quick anxious glances, they began to move together towards it.

“I hate this place,” Ron muttered.

No one uttered a reply as they continued to walk, the pathway growing darker and narrower as they went. They heard crying and shouting not too far in the distance and paused immediately.

“What’s that?” Hermione asked anxiously. Those were not good sounds; her nerves were getting the best of her. She grasped her wand in her pocket for comfort.

Draco shrugged. “Probably some nutter. There’re all sorts of degenerates in Knockturn.”

“Wands at the ready,” Harry instructed.

Draco shook his head, scowling. “If you flash your wand here, you’re just asking for an attack. Everyone just keep walking and keep your eyes forward. Try to look like you belong.”

The Trio glanced at Draco and then each other before doing as he had instructed. They moved elbow to elbow, with Harry, Ron and Hermione occasionally glancing behind them to see if anyone was following. Draco’s walk became more confident, and he broke away from them, walking slightly ahead. He appeared to be familiar with the shops they were passing.

“Are you sure we’re going the right way?” Harry whispered.

“Yeah, pretty sure,” Draco replied. “Snape said it was next to The Ghoul’s Tavern, which is over there…” He paused, stopping in front of a shop with no apparent name and turned to face them with a small smile. “And here we are.”

Hermione frowned. “But there’s no sign,” she pointed out.

Draco smirked. “Sure there is,” he said, pointing to the window. The Trio leaned in, looking. The windows were blackened but there were faint sparkles of light, each window featured a letter that glimmered and then faded against the darkened window, spelling out the word Medius.

“Freaky,” Ron said.

Hermione took a deep breath and stepped forward, putting her hand on the door handle.

Draco stopped her, placing his hand firmly over hers. “Perhaps I should enter first. You don’t know who owns this shop or how they feel about Muggle-borns, or blood traitors and half-bloods… just let me do the talking,” he explained.

They all nodded silently. Hermione was grateful he was there.

As they entered, a black hawk flew out, startling them. Inside, it was deadly silent and very dark. There were stacks and stacks of books lined against the walls, some of them had binders that moved in weird patterns, others had mouths that hissed as the four walked on, deeper, searching for a clerk or perhaps the owner.

After several minutes, they became more comfortable, each becoming entranced with objects of interest. Hermione was drawn to the books against the wall, while Harry stared at the various artefacts displayed in the glass cases strategically placed throughout the shop. They were macabre,
skulls, daggers, shrunken heads, symbolic pendants along with seemingly average items such as cups and antique looking music boxes.

“May I help you?” an ancient voice croaked somewhere no one could really see. It almost sounded as if it had come from the walls.

They all jumped, staring about wildly searching for the owner of the voice.

“Who said that?” Ron demanded, anxiety evident in his voice.

“I did,” said an elderly gentleman who suddenly appeared out of thin air from behind the counter.

“How did you do that?” Hermione asked, eyeing the man incredulously. What kind of magic allowed someone to be invisible without a cloak?

The old man smiled. “Magic, my dear.” His smile waned as he continued to stare at Hermione. “Who are you? Shouldn’t you be in school?”

Hermione glanced nervously to Draco, who stepped up to the counter. “That’s not important. What is important is that we’re here to inquire about a book. You’re going to help us find it, because if you do, you’ll be well compensated. If you don’t, we’ll have to ask someone else to help us find it, someone who can appreciate our money,” he said, pulling a bag of Galleons from his pocket. He jingled it, swinging it playfully before the owner.

The owner stared at the bag and then at the four before narrowing his eyes. “What kind of book?”

“A spell book called *Harnessing Power: The Wizard’s Almanac of Ancient Ceremonies and Rituals.*”

The shop owner chuckled, looking amused. “Are you sure you want to purchase that one?”

“Yes, why?” Draco asked suspiciously.

The shop owner shrugged. “No reason. It’s over there, but you have to pay for it first.”

Draco narrowed his eyes. “Not so fast. We’d like to inspect it first.”

The shop owner crossed his arms over his chest. “If you want to even try to pick it up, you’ll have to pay me first.”

Draco looked around at the others, a question on his face. They all exchanged glances and then nodded.

“How much?” Draco asked.

“How much you got?” the shop owner asked with a sneaky grin that gave Hermione the creeps.

“Listen, you—” Draco started.

Hermione stepped up. “We’ll give you twenty Galleons.”

“Hermione!” Draco scolded.

The shop owner gave Hermione a wide tooth grin. “Very well. Pay up,” he said, holding his hand out. Hermione tugged the bag of Galleons from Draco and counted out twenty.
She knew Draco was not happy with her taking over, but she had a hunch, and she was pretty sure she was right. The shop owner put away the money she gave him and jerked his head to the direction of the book. “It’s all yours, sweetheart.”

Hermione gave him a small tight smile and then turned to walk over to the book. “Draco, Harry, Ron, come over here,” she beckoned.

The boys all looked at each other and then slowly walked over to stand beside her.

“Try to pick it up,” she said, staring at Draco.

Draco gave her a sceptical glance before leaning over and touching the book. When he did, his hand went right through it just as the book vanished.

He gasped, “It’s gone! We just been had!”

Scowling, he pulled his hand back to run through his hair, and when he did, the book reappeared.

They all gawked at it in fascination.

“What the bloody hell?” Ron murmured.

“Remember, Snape said he tried several times to retrieve only it vanished every time he went to touch it,” Harry reminded them.

“Oh, sorry ‘bout that,” the shop owner called out with a snide tone. “You probably should have done your research before purchasing. I’m not responsible for books that don’t want to leave, and that one’s really attached to the shop.”

Hermione smirked. “Is that so?” she said, reaching down to pick the book up. When her hand touched it, it remained solid, and she lifted it up, holding it firmly in her hand. The boys all gaped at her in surprise.

“Hermione… how did you do that?” Ron asked.

Hermione smiled and then glanced over at the shop owner. He was frowning. “Now wait one minute…” he started.

“It’s mine, isn’t it?” she asked defiantly.

The shop owner grunted, scowling at all of them. “You better get going before I report you. I mean it… get out!”

Hermione held her head up high as she passed him with Draco, Ron, and Harry following close behind her.

Once outside, she breathed a sigh of relief. She’d been hoping she was correct, but until she had touched the book, she hadn’t been completely sure.

“How’d you do that?” Draco asked.

Hermione stared at the book in wonderment and satisfaction that her hunch had been correct. “I think this book was written specifically for Muggleborns.”

“A magic book written just for Muggleborns?” Draco questioned, looking perplexed.
Hermione nodded.

“That’s bizarre,” Ron commented.

“It makes sense really. I’m sure there are special spell books for pure-bloods,” she said, staring back at Draco.

He nodded his head slowly, thinking. “Yes, there are. My family has several books written specifically for pure-bloods.”

Harry wrinkled his face at that. “Magic is magic. Are you saying there’s special magic just for pure-bloods or half-bloods or Muggleborns? That doesn’t even make sense.”

“Sure it does, Harry… you encountered such a spell second year. Only the Heir of Slytherin could call the Basilisk… it only recognised the Heir by blood. Blood is everything,” she said, more to herself than them. The irony of Hermione pointing out the importance of blood purity in certain forms of magic was not lost on any of them.

“How did you figure that out, though?” Draco asked finally.

“It was just a hunch. I remember McGonagall telling some of the seventh years that there were books in the Restricted Section that only responded to the touch of those who were deemed appropriate to read them. It got me thinking, perhaps Snape wasn’t the appropriate buyer for the book, and then I started a mental list of all of the possibilities of why that could be.”

“You’re bloody brilliant,” Ron marvelled.

“I do alright.” Hermione smiled. “Now, I think we need to find a room, somewhere private where we can read this properly.”

“I know just the place,” Draco said, his face growing sober as he turned left, deeper into the darker part of the alley. Hermione took a deep breath, following behind him, with Ron and Harry on her heel.

Hermione’s stomach tightened and she began chewing the inside of her bottom lip as Draco led them down a winding, narrow alley. There weren’t many people there, but the ones they passed were quite frightening, some rather ghoulish. The sunlight was all but gone here, and she found herself practically on Draco’s back to stay close, grateful that she was between him and the other boys.

At last, he stopped in front of a tall black brick building with gray shutters. The windows were all shaded, and there were cracks in the door.

“What is this place?” Ron asked, staring at Draco doubtfully.

“You’ll see,” Draco answered, climbing the short stack of steps to the doorway.

He knocked twice and then a woman’s voice asked, “Who’s there?”

“Dragonflies,” Draco answered.

Hermione watched as the door opened and a beautiful woman, wearing the thinnest silk robe, emerged. Her nipples were quite visible through the fabric, and the opening in the front revealed a toned and sexy thigh. Hermione glanced back at Ron and Harry, who were both gawking. Draco did not appear affected, only familiar.
He smiled. “Hello, Emily…”

The woman smiled. “My little Dragon, what brings you to my home? Shouldn’t you be at school?”

“Today is a free day, and I’m with friends.”

“Oh?” the woman said, staring past Draco to appraise Hermione, Ron, and Harry. She gave them a small friendly smile and then looked at Draco. “You know, Death Eaters are ruining business. Random raids… you never know when they’ll be by… are you sure you should be here?” she asked, glancing up at the Trio once more.

Draco looked back at them. Hermione gave him an encouraging smile, and then he nodded.

“Yes. We just need use of a room, for a few hours. I’ll pay you for your trouble,” he explained.

The woman chuckled, reaching out to squeeze Draco’s cheek. Hermione found herself glaring at the gesture. She didn’t like the way the woman touched him. It was almost intimate.

“Save your money, my little Dragon, the room is yours. Upstairs to the right,” she said, opening the door wider to allow them entry.

Draco went in first, and Hermione scowled to see Ron and Harry staring at the women. She pulled on Ron’s arm and nodded her head up the stairs to follow Draco.

She caught up quickly and entered behind him as he opened the door to the room that the woman had given them. It was plain, with a small window, a thin plain carpet, plain white walls, and a huge bed.

“Tell me this isn’t a brothel, Draco,” Hermione said as Harry shut the door.

Draco turned to her, his face apologetic. “You said we needed a private room. Well, we have one.”

“Those women, they’re… ladies of the night?” Ron asked.

“Prostitutes, you mean,” Hermione said.

“They’re nice people. Some of them weren’t as fortunate as the rest of us. This is the only living they can make, especially now… Besides, men don’t just pay them for sexual favours. They make for good listeners as well.”

Hermione stared back at him in disbelief. “How do you know about this place? Draco, did your father bring you here?”

“He did. And there’s nothing wrong with it. Lots of pure-bloods do it. Don’t look at me like that!” he said, apparently affronted by Hermione’s stare.

Hermione looked away, feeling guilty about judging him, but disgusted that Lucius had brought him here.

“I’m sorry…” she muttered.
“Well, we better have a look at that book,” Harry said.

Hermione looked at the bed, trying not to grimace as she sat. There was no telling what sort of sordid things went on here. She opened the book, quickly combing through it and searching for anything that sounded remotely like the prophecy. Finally, she paused on one page.

“This is it! This is... it,” she murmured, her brow furrowing.

“What is it?” Draco asked.

“Hermione?” Harry said, coming closer with concern on his face. She glanced up at him, Ron, and Draco, swallowing.

“It’s in Latin,” she started.

Ron shrugged. “So?”

“It says... well, it appears this is a ritual,” she explained.

“Great! That’s what we wanted,” Harry said with excitement.

“It requires sex,” she continued.

“Perfect,” Draco said with an amused grin on his face.

“...And blood,” Hermione finished apprehensively, staring at all of them.

The boys gaped back at Hermione, the colour draining from their faces. Harry looked concerned, Ron looked disgusted, and Draco appeared disturbed.

“Anything else?”

“Isn’t that enough?” Hermione asked.

There was a heavy moment of silence before Harry spoke. “Well we didn’t go through all of this trouble for nothing; let’s do it.”

Hermione stood up, staring at Harry intently. “All right, let’s...”

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Once Remus reached the forest’s edge, he Apparated near Grimmauld. He entered and was struck by how deathly silent it was. Usually, someone was there. These days it was typically Moody, Dedalus, Elphias, and Kingsley. But after walking around and nosing about for several minutes, Remus found it practically empty, save for Kreacher, who grimaced and retreated upon seeing him.

“Snape! Snape!” Remus called out.

The memory of Peter’s Dark Mark sliding in response to being called flashed before his eyes, and Remus heart sped up a little for Snape. He didn’t even know why he was concerned for the git, but he was.

Remus could still see Snape’s face. The git had been troubled, despite his usual indifferent façade, and now with the increasing slew of Muggle attacks, Remus wondered, how would the Potions Master fare in this war?

He secretly hoped that Snape was in hiding and out of harm’s way. Perhaps the git had just grown
tired of being in the old Black residence and had gone home.

Remus half thought he should do the same. He was sure Tonks missed him. But the memory of what he had done the night before removed any consideration of that from his mind.

He called out for the man once more, but was greeted instead by Mrs. Black’s portrait yelling at him to silence his half-human cries in her home.

“Half-human, indeed,” Remus muttered, turning towards the kitchen. He thought that a glass of Firewhisky would do him good right about now.
The Test

Chapter Notes

The artwork at the end of this chapter was created and donated by Forgetful_Love.

Glorious euphoria is my must
Erotic shock is a function of lust
Temporarily blind
Dimensions to discover in time
Each into the other…

Blood sugar baby
She's magik
Sex magik sex magik

“BloodSugarSexMagik” by The Red Hot Chili Peppers

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“All right,” Harry said. “So what do we have to do?”

Hermione walked over to the wall, holding the book in her hand as she read.

“Well? What does it say?” Draco asked impatiently.

Hermione huffed. “Just give me a minute! My Latin is a bit rusty.”

They waited in silence as she read. Concealing the growing smile on her face was futile, so she didn’t even bother to try. Their feet drew closer in curiosity.

“What is it?” Harry demanded.

“Good news, I hope,” Ron said.

Hermione tried to school her face into a sombre expression before explaining, “It is. The book says that Muggle-borns are naturally very powerful witches and wizards.”

Draco’s face reflected doubt, which compelled Hermione to push the book toward him so she could point out the passage as proof.

“See, right there…”

Draco moved in closer to read, when he looked up, he appeared baffled.

Hermione smirked. “I told you. This book says that Muggle-borns are extraordinary conduits of magic.”

“Does it give any particular reason why?” Ron asked sceptically.
Hermione briefly skimmed what she had just read so she could give an accurate summary. She could feel her heart racing, and she had to control her breathing so as not to show her excitement.

“Yes… right here.” She pointed to the passage in the book. “It says the birth of a Muggle-born is a terrific act and that the convergence of an enchanted life force embodied within a child born from non-magical parents is ‘Magic Manifest.’”

Giddiness and satisfaction were building as she tried to tame her smile. All of this time, everyone believed pure-bloods to be the most powerful because their blood was untainted by those with no magical abilities, but this new information asserted just the opposite.

Hermione felt vindicated, like some ominous authority had delivered judgment on every bigot she had ever encountered at Hogwarts. It was hard to conceal the pride she felt.

Draco eyes were fixed on the book in Hermione’s hands. His brow was wrinkled, and there was a frown of deep contemplation on his face.

“Magic manifest,” Ron repeated absently. “I don’t know, Hermione…”

“You don’t know what, Ron?” Hermione asked defensively.

Ron opened his mouth to explain, but it was Draco who jumped in to reply. “What Ron means is that it sounds… far-fetched.”

“Oh? Does it?” Hermione could feel her anger rising.

“Yes, it does,” Draco continued. “Think about it, Hermione. This book was written for Muggle-borns.”

“So?” Hermione asked.

“So, of course it’s going to say things that would appeal to Muggle-borns,” Draco explained.

Hermione scoffed. “You think that it’s a bunch of rubbish, then?”

“What I’m saying is that that book was written for a specific group of people who are probably desperate for any shred of evidence that they aren’t inferior.”

Hermione clutched the book closer to her, trying to remain calm. Ron and Harry stood by stiffly as if in anticipation of a row.

“You’re wrong,” she protested. “It makes perfect sense! How else can a Muggle-born with no magical forefathers acquire natural magical ability?”

Draco shrugged. “Perhaps being Muggle-born is just some sort of rare mutation, like someone born with five fingers or double joints,” he said flippantly.

A flash of anger rose, threatening to boil to the surface. She wanted to lash out and punch Draco’s arm, but managed to restrain herself and give him an angry scowl instead.

Draco sighed. “I didn’t mean it as an insult, Hermione. Would you please lighten up?”

“It’s not funny, Draco! We’re on the brink of war because of that kind of thinking!”

She pointed at the page in front of her. “Look, it says it would require an extraordinary force of magic to break through a non-magical bloodline of Muggles! How can you argue with that?”
“But, Hermione,” Ron interjected tentatively. “If Muggle-borns are _magic manifest_, or whatever you call it, wouldn’t that make them more powerful than the average witch or wizard?”

Draco shook his head dismissively. “No. I’m sorry, Hermione, but there’s no way. They can’t be. There’s a reason why most pure-bloods look down on mixing. Pure-blood witches and wizards have a documented legacy of wielding powerful magic. There are spells and abilities that are enhanced by blood purity. Why do you think the Dark Lord and even Salazar Slytherin, for that matter, want to rid the wizarding world of Muggle-borns?”

“Because they’re cruel and evil bastards?” Harry retorted.

Ron snorted. “He has a point there.”

Draco frowned. “It just doesn’t make any sense. I’m sure there are plenty of other explanations for the existence of Muggle-borns.”

“Oh? Well, name one!” Hermione challenged. “Just because we have yet to discover the scientific explanation for it doesn’t mean there isn’t one. Maybe it has something to do with an undiscovered magical gene or something. Either way, Draco, you can’t deny that the existence of Muggle-borns is incredible!”

Draco didn’t reply, but dropped his stare in resignation. Hermione felt both victorious and shaken by their debate. She had no idea how much being considered a natural born witch had meant to her. Until now.

“All right, Hermione, fine,” Ron said. “Let’s just say that what the book says about Muggle-borns is true - how do you explain why we’ve never heard about this before? In all the years we’ve been at Hogwarts, hell, in the centuries that Hogwarts has been standing, no one has ever mentioned anything about this... this theory of _magic manifest_. Even if it’s just some kooky idea, why wouldn’t they cover it in school?”

Hermione struggled to not lose her composure. Right now, she wanted to shake Ron. Since when did he side with Draco, or buy into pure-blood beliefs about superiority? She couldn’t tell if Ron and Draco were asking genuine questions or simply discounting the book completely because they didn’t want to believe it. Why was it so damned hard to believe that Muggle-borns were special?

“Because it would completely change the wizarding world, that’s why,” Harry replied.

Ron and Draco stared in confusion at Harry, but Hermione instinctively drew closer to him. As the full meaning behind Harry’s words began to sink in, Hermione nodded. It all seemed ridiculously simple now.

“Exactly, Harry!” she exclaimed. “Pure-bloods would no longer be so revered; at best, magical bloodlines would become irrelevant, and at worst, pure-bloods would take a lower status to Muggle-borns!”

Harry nodded. “Not only that, but Muggles would no longer be considered inferior. In fact, they would become more important.”

Ron eyes were wide with realisation. “The line between magic and non-magic people would become fuzzy.”

Hermione smirked. “And what a crime that would be. Perhaps the two worlds would even cooperate and mingle more. Work together, socialise together…”
“And we all know what that would result in,” Harry said.

“More half-bloods,” Draco murmured, his eyes reflecting a new understanding of it all.

Hermione nodded. “Yes, more half-bloods, perhaps even more Muggle-borns, but definitely less pure-bloods!”

Draco stared at Hermione for a long moment before finally nodding. “If what that book says is really true, then that makes you… very powerful.”

Hermione grinned. “I’ve always been powerful.”

Draco snickered. “You know what I mean, you’re special. Magical power is everything in the wizarding world. This information has the potential to dismantle the world as we know it.”

Hermione took in his flushed cheeks and dazed eyes; he was in shock. She took a breath. The revelation had been personally satisfying, but Draco’s face revealed the true implications of what they were saying.

She began to stroke the page in front of her in wonder, re-reading it over and over to make sure she hadn’t gotten wrong. When she glanced back up, all of the boys were gazing at her with a speculative reverence that made her blush.

“Stop staring at me like that… I’m still the same person,” she said.

“Only, you’re not,” Draco countered. “I mean, you’ve always been rather… different,” he finished awkwardly.

“Special,” Harry corrected.

“And brilliant,” Ron added.

“But now,” Draco said, as he drew closer to her, “You’re powerful as well, and that’s sexy.”

“Draco, really, I think you’d get turned on by a broomstick,” Hermione teased.

Draco drew back in mock offense. “I beg your pardon.”

“Guys, please!” Harry said impatiently.

“Right, the ritual,” Hermione said. “All right, listen, all of you. We’re here to break the rules, not make new ones. I don’t know about you, but regardless of bloodline and magical ability, I believe everyone should be treated equally. Do you agree?”

She was happy to see all of the boys nod without hesitation.

“So as far as I’m concerned,” she continued. “this is great news, but none of it really matters. We have to destroy him. Together. This won’t work without all of us.”

“Okay, let’s do it then,” Ron said.

“Hermione, I may never say this to you again,” Harry said with a smile. “But just tell us what we need to do, and we’ll do it.”

Hermione nodded, reading on. “Oh, no!”
“What’s wrong?” Harry asked anxiously.

“It suggests that the ritual be performed on the night of no moon.”

They all groaned.

“Just great,” Ron complained.

“It’s no matter,” Hermione said determinedly. “We just had a full moon, so technically it is the day of no moon. Besides, it’s just suggested. But it does require salt and sage,” she said, wondering where in the world they would acquire those ingredients right now.

“I could go downstairs and ask,” Draco offered.

Hermione sighed in relief. “Great, and while you’re down there, perhaps you could ask for a knife as well?”

Draco grimaced and then walked out, leaving Harry and Ron staring at each other in anxious silence as Hermione continued to read and translate the text.

When he returned Draco had a saltshaker, a decorative oil bottle, and a knife.

“Excellent!” Hermione said enthusiastically, “Now, before we begin, it says…” She moved off the wall and walked to the centre of the room.

“We have to form a circle.”

The boys all moved around to form a circle, but Hermione put up her hand to stop them.

“No, it says the Shadow should stand where the sun sets. That means west … over here,” she said, looking to Draco as she pointed to the west side of the room. Draco slowly walked over to her left.

“And the Self stand as the Shadow’s mirror.”

“That means you should be across from me, Harry,” Draco instructed.

“Right,” Harry said, walking over to stand directly across from Draco.

“All right…” Hermione continued. “Now, it says that the Animaga should stand south, so I’ll stand… here,” she said, walking past Harry and Draco to stand at the southern point of their half-circle.

“And Ron, you should be standing directly across from me.”

“‘kay,” Ron said, walking to his spot.

“Now, the circle needs to be anointed with salt and sage for protection,” she said to Draco, who gave her a funny look before walking around them all, shaking the salt and pouring the sage.

“I hope this cleans up all right,” he said.

“Don’t worry, we’ll return the room in the same condition in which we found it,” Hermione reassured.

When Draco reached his original position, he put the salt and sage on the floor.
They all looked to Hermione, waiting for her next instructions. She re-read the passage again and then put the book on the floor in front of her.

“Each of us must offer the Lady—”

“Lady? What lady?” Ron asked.

“The Goddess who rules over the magical realm we’re about to partake of,” Hermione informed.

“It’s a she?” Draco asked.

“Is that really so hard to believe, Draco?” Hermione snapped.

No one answered her, so she continued. “Each of us must offer her a gift…”

They all looked over themselves.

“All I have is money,” Draco said, reaching into his pocket to pull out the satchel of leftover Galleons.

“I have the new Lionel Schrasberg trading card. Just bought it,” Ron said proudly, pulling it out of his pocket.

“I suppose I could offer the bag of gummy flobberworms I just got,” Harry said, taking it out.

“Well, I didn’t buy or bring anything, but I do have this,” Hermione said, lifting her hand to retrieve the burgundy and gold twill camellia hair clip from her hair. She removed it, allowing her wild mane to fall around her face in chaotic curls.

“Now, our offerings must be made from our positions at north, south, east, and west of the circle.”

“And how do we make an offering?” Ron asked.

Hermione shrugged. “I suppose we should just place the object in front of us.”

Ron, Draco, and Harry all exchanged sceptical glances before placing their respective gifts before them.

“We offer these gifts, oh Goddess of passion, power, and birth,” she said loudly as she placed the barrette before her. The torches in the room flickered and then stilled. They all stared at each other in trepidation.

“What the hell?” Ron blurted out, looking around the room at the torches. “I don’t like this… it’s freaky!”

“Well, it gets freakier,” Hermione said, bending down to pick up the book once more. She swallowed. “Here’s the part where it calls for blood.”

“Hold on, Hermione, I’ve been thinking about this. My dad told me that spells requiring blood are bad. Really, really bad,” Ron warned.

“Ron, did you ever stop to think that spells depend more on the intent of the wizard casting it?” Harry argued.

“Yeah, but blood, Harry?” Ron retorted. “Whenever you introduce blood into spell, you’re tainting it; it automatically becomes dark. You should know that better than anyone!”
A dark shadow crossed Harry’s face, and he stared off for a moment, deep in thought. A grimace began to surface.

“What’s the matter?” Draco asked.

Harry swallowed. “You remember the Triwizard tournament two years ago?”

Draco nodded slowly, his eyes narrowing. “You mean when Diggory died? Yeah. I remember.”

Hermione bit the inside of her cheek as she thought of Cedric. Had it really been two years?

“Well, I witnessed Peter performing a spell that required blood, and it ended up bringing Voldemort back.”

The colour drained from Draco’s face and his eyes darted from Harry, to Ron to Hermione and then to Harry back again. He looked worried. They all stood in dead silence, the weight of his words falling like an anvil before them.

Finally, Harry took a shaky breath, straightening his shoulders as if preparing for a fight. “But that was different,” he said. “We’re different. We’re going to use this spell to destroy him.”

“We don’t even know how it works!” Ron said in frustration. “You think standing in some freaky sex circle will kill him, Harry? I suppose after we all get our jollies, he’ll just evaporate into thin air? Is that how works? You know, the more I think about it, the more mental this whole thing seems!”

Hermione tried to dismiss Ron’s rant as thoughtless ramblings of someone who was afraid, but she had to concede there was some truth in what he was saying. They really didn’t know anything about the ritual they were about to perform, and she couldn’t quiet the nagging voice in the back of her mind tell her to speak her own reservations.

“Harry, I think Ron may have a point…”

“What?” Harry looked at Hermione in disbelief.

“Well, this is serious. We don’t know how mixing blood and magic will affect us.”

“Yeah, it could be dangerous!” Ron added.

“Ron, you said that about the prophecy!” Harry reminded.

Ron threw up his hands. “Right! And look where it’s landed us! Skipping our only Hogsmeade trip to spend a creepy day in Knockturn. We’re in a whorehouse, for god’s sakes! And now you’re trying to come up with reasons for why we should cut ourselves open to perform some freaky sex ritual!”

Draco put up his hand to stop Ron. “Hold on!”

“But—”

“Just listen, all right?” Draco snapped. “I think Harry’s right. Any type of magic can be bad in the wrong hands. Now, we all knew this was dark stuff when we took it on, and most dark rituals involve blood, flesh, or bone. We’re just lucky it’s not asking for all three.”

Harry nodded. “Exactly, the spell that brought Voldemort back required all three of those. This one only requires blood, right?” he asked Hermione.
Hermione nodded slowly. “Right.”

“OK then, I think we should do it; we’re not dark wizards and witches. We have good intentions, and that’s what makes magic dark or light,” Harry said resolutely.

Ron shook his head but remained silent. Hermione glanced at Harry, who looked stoically back at her and then at Draco. She was still trying to grasp the weight of Ron’s words as she continued to read and absorb every bit of information to memory. Finally, she put the book down on the bed and pulled her shirt out of her denims.

“We’ll all need to disrobe.”

The boys glanced around at each other and began to follow her example. Once they were all nude, Hermione stared at the knife on the bed. She felt a chill cascade down her spine, trying to summon up the nerve to do what came next.

“Here goes nothing,” she said, picking it up. “Everyone hold out your left hand,” she instructed. Slowly, the boys extended their left hands towards the centre of the circle.

Hermione stepped to her left towards Draco. She grabbed his left hand with her right and then positioned the knife against his palm. Draco kept his eyes on her as she did. Hermione tried to keep her hand from trembling as she began to speak.

“Sanguis ad sanguinem, cor ad cor,,” she whispered, making a circular incision into his skin about the circumference of a Sickle. Draco held his arm and hand stiff while he watched the dark blood run over his palm and down his wrist before it began to drip onto the floor.

Hermione gave him an apologetic look as she let go and continued to walk the circle towards Ron.

“Haec minor est inter omnes hos ea maiori est.,” she said, grabbing Ron’s hand and pulling it towards her to steady the knife against it.

Ron whimpered as she began to cut, making the same design in his palm that Draco now bore.

She didn’t wait to see the blood drip from his hand and quickly walked on to stand before Harry, who was holding out his palm almost eagerly in wait for his turn.

“Haec donatrix opem. Amor, sitis, vita fossent hanc et imperent eos,” she said, making the same cut she had made on the other two. Harry tried to give her an encouraging smile, and she attempted to return it as she walked back to her place in the circle. She took a deep breath and then held out her own left hand.

Her hand shook a little as she pressed the blade to her palm. She tried to concentrate on the words she had to recite instead of the impending pain.

“Tenebrae et lumen gignantur. Suatur nexus cum corpore. Finiatur circus ut sortitum facturum sit!”

“Hermione, what does any of that mean?” Harry asked.

“Blood to blood, heart to heart, the least of them is the greatest. She is the giver of power. Let love, lust, and life run through her and rule them all. Bring forth both the dark and the light. Seal the bond with the flesh. Complete the circle to bring forth what has already been foretold to come to pass…”

Ron looked very disturbed but pursed his lips as if trying to hold his tongue. Hermione was grateful for his effort.
“Now, let’s hold hands. We’re supposed to let the power flow through us naturally and the magic will do the rest,” she explained, glancing around. Hesitantly, they extended their hands to either side before firmly grabbing a hold of the hand beside them. Hermione winced as Draco grasped her cut hand, her wound stinging against his loose, clammy grip. She looked to her right and gave Harry a sympathetic look as she tried to hold onto his bloody palm.

Her eyes took in each of their clasped palms; blood was running from their hands and over their fingers, dripping onto the floor.

“I really hope the cleansing spell gets blood out of carpet,” Draco muttered.

Hermione barely heard what he said, waiting for something, anything to happen. But after a few moments, when nothing did, she began to feel anxious.

“What now?” Ron asked anxiously.

“I-I don’t know, that was it,” Hermione replied uncertainly.

“That’s it? I knew it! That book is rubbish,” Draco complained, beginning to pull his hand back, but Hermione tightened her grasp, determined to keep them joined.

“Will you just be patient?” she scolded. “What good would a spell book be if its spells didn’t work? Something has to happen.”

They all stood silently waiting. Time seem to inch by with each minute. Hermione was almost resigned to Draco’s conclusion that perhaps the book was codswallop when she felt a tingling sensation deep in her gut. She gasped as it spread out, running through her chest, up her spine and down her arms. Her grasp tightened on the hands clasping hers. The wound in her hand seemed more open than before, and she could feel blood gushing from it. But she felt no pain, just a growing vibration that shook their joined hands and reverberated between their bodies like an invisible storm brewing.

She looked straight ahead at Ron and saw that his blue eyes had darkened considerably, and he was… snarling as he stared between Draco and Hermione. He looked absolutely livid with jealousy. She noted that Draco eyes were a much darker grey and he wore a smug smirk as he looked around the circle in a manner that Hermione found too reminiscent of the boy she formerly loathed.

Prat.

Draco gave Hermione a condescending once over, looking absolutely arrogant as if he were superior to her. Hermione forced herself to look away to her right. Harry’s eyes were just as dark as Ron’s, and he had a gloomy expression on his face. He looked just as troubled as he usually did after experiencing a traumatic event, and his brow was furrowed as he stared at the floor.

“I’m going to be sick,” Draco complained, glancing around at all of them with disdain. Hermione couldn’t tell if he meant he felt physically sick or was just displeased with his present company. She suddenly had the urge to smack him, but she resisted, and instead tightened her grasp on his hand.

“You’re such a cunt, Malfoy,” Ron snapped.

“Oh, shut it, Ron!” Harry said. “Maybe he’s really sick. Can you try and think of someone else’s feelings for a change?”

Ron narrowed his eyes at Harry. “What’s that supposed to mean?”
“You’re insensitive! You never think of what others are going through. Like the other day… it was Sirius’ birthday, and I was having a pretty rough time of it. You didn’t even bother to ask me how I was doing!”

Ron huffed. “How was I supposed to know you were depressed or something? You never talk when you’re like that, you just mope around like some tortured bird!”

Harry’s face reddened and his mouth pinched in indignation. “I have a lot on my mind! You’ll never understand the responsibility I have! You can’t even begin to image all of the shite I’ve had to deal with, no one can!”

“Oh, right, Harry! What do you want from me? A hug?” Ron asked sarcastically.

Draco sniggered, which made both boys and Hermione stare at him in confusion.

“Listen to you two. You sound like an old married couple. What a bunch of wankers you all are… Potter, stop crying and moaning about your pain, no one cares! And Weasley, just put a sock in it; you’re much more tolerable when you don’t speak.”

“Then why don’t you just leave, Malfoy! I don’t have to do anything I don’t want to, especially for the likes of you!”

“You’ll always be under me, Weasley, because your mouth moves faster than you can think.”

“You know what I’m thinking, right now, Malfoy? I’m thinking this whole thing is a bunch of bullshite, and I don’t want to do it anymore.”

“Here we go again,” Harry said, rolling his eyes.

“Yeah, here we go! You’re taking his side again!” Ron asked.

“I’m not taking anyone’s side, Ron,” Harry said wearily, looking frustrated with Ron.

“Of course he’s taking my side, Weasel. Anyone with half a brain would chose my side over yours,” Draco boasted.

Hermione shut her eyes, trying to drown out their bickering. What was wrong with them? They had all been getting along so well and now Ron was acting like a git, Harry was whining, and Draco was doing to his usual cocky prat schtick. As she thought about it, an insecure feeling of self-doubt and anxiety grew. Suddenly she felt very self-conscious and exposed.

What if she had been wrong about the book? Perhaps she had translated the Latin poorly and misinterpreted the ritual. That would be awful and it would reflect poorly on her… on all Muggle-borns. Only moments before she had felt pride about the magical power of Muggle-borns. If she mucked this up, it would only prove the book to be a lie. In that moment, all of Hermione memories of feeling insecure about being a Muggle-born and not being competent enough to be a witch came flooding back, almost overwhelming her. She could feel tears welling up as she remembered every single instance of not belonging. Right now, she just wanted disappear for fear of looking like a clueless incompetent Muggle-born in front of Draco, Ron, and Harry.

Her nerves felt frayed; she could feel her despair growing, and she thought of tearing her hands away from theirs to end this joke of a ritual.

“Stop!” someone shouted out.
Hermione’s attention snapped into focus, and she looked around the circle to see Harry breathing harshly, his face contorted with disgust.

“Stop!” he repeated. “The spell… I think it’s making us think and say bad things.”

Ron and Draco were staring at Harry in confusion. Harry gave Hermione’s hand a reassuring squeeze. “It’s not real, what we’re saying to each other or what we’re feeling… it’s not real. It’s the spell.”

Hermione tried to focus on what Harry was saying. She wished it were true, but her insecurity felt so real, it was overshadowing everything.

Think, Hermione. Think. Exhaling, she tried to return to rationality and shake off the nagging thoughts about her incompetence.

It’s not real. She was not inferior. No Muggle-born was. She was smart and didn’t have to prove that to anyone anymore. Harry, Ron, and Draco loved her and would continue to do so whether this ritual worked or not.

“So,” Ron practically growled. “Are you telling me it’s the spell that’s making me want to pound Malfoy’s face into the floor right now?”

“That’s not the spell, Weasley, that’s your jealousy of my good looks,” Draco quipped, his tone snagger than ever.

Ron bared his teeth.

“Stop it, both of you!” Hermione blurted out. “Harry’s right - the spell is bringing out the worst in all of us. We have to focus! Just think about how irrational your thoughts are at the moment. Remember, we’re not the same people we were a year ago. We all care for each other now… right?”

Draco and Ron glared at each other momentarily and then their faces softened as they averted their eyes from each other.

“Right?” Hermione insisted.

Both boys nodded reluctantly. Hermione squeezed Harry’s hand for affirmation, and he squeezed back.

“Good, then let’s focus on that. Concentrate on the relationship we’ve built this year. Try to think of every good moment we’ve shared.”

Hermione shut her eyes as she tried to remember all of positive moments she had ever spent with each of the boys. Her insecurities quickly dissipated and in their wake, a warm and comforting security began to take root.

Draco squeezed her hand harder, drawing a smile from her. Whether or not the ritual worked, they had all come a long way. She tried to just relax and enjoy the security of being surrounded by friends and lovers.

As she thought on it, a warmth in her chest began to grow and then spread. Her skin tingled, causing her nipples to harden. She felt dampness spreading between her legs, and an urge to be taken. More than an urge really. A need.

The air was growing heavy with a density much like heavy fog, only it didn’t obscure light; on the
contrary, the room seemed to radiate light more than before. There was only a tiny window and it was bleak outside, yet here it was as if the torches on the wall had multiplied tenfold.

Hermione heard the rising crescendo of a cracking noise not unlike footsteps on fresh fallen leaves, and thoughts of the last night they had spent at Snape’s became clear in her mind. Only this time, she felt different. Reckless and less inhibited. She wanted all of them, at once, and wanted to do whatever they wanted. Her mind raced with scenarios for how she could begin to achieve such a goal, but each thought collided with the other as her thinking became scrambled. Strangely, not being able to think clearly did not alarm her, as it usually would have. Instead, she felt whimsical. Trying to focus on coherent thought right now was like trying to catch butterflies in a wild field of grass.

Only the grass was too high and she couldn’t grasp any of them, and that was just fine. Her thoughts were muddled but she was happy.

The absurdity of it only made her smile harder. If she had ever drunk alcohol to complete inebriation, she imagined it would feel something like this. Draco, Ron, and Harry’s faces were blurring in and out of focus; her vision was shaky. The only steady, constant thing she could feel was the throb in her cunt.

“Mmm,” she moaned as she rubbed her legs together to soothe the ache there. Her body felt lighter, as if she were floating, like the angels her mother prayed to in St. John’s. At this moment, she was the angel. She had to be, because she felt lifted by wings and the air was beneath her. When Hermione opened her eyes, she was still on the ground, but the light in the room was blinding. A gasp escaped her as the air brushed over her body as if a great gust of wind had burst through the window.

There was a humming in her ears, and she could feel her body tremble as the air around them sent out tiny shocks, causing several of her hairs to stand on end. When she opened her eyes again, the boys were staring at her in a trance like state. They all had the same drunken look on their faces. There was an invisible force of energy between her and them now, and she was certain that the energy was coming from her, and each of them seemed beholden to it.

She closed her eyes once more, basking in the energy flowing through her; it seemed to stroke every fibre of her being. She could feel it from the bottom of her toes to her hair follicles, and it felt magnificent. She had been mistaken before. She was no angel—angels were beneath her. She was a Goddess and awesome power coursed through her veins. She was power.

She wanted to feel her new body, and so she let go of Draco and Harry’s hand and began to touch herself. She smiled as she did because her skin felt divine, smoother than a baby’s. Slowly, her hands caressed her breasts just as a lover would. She massaged them and then pushed them up towards her Masters, as if making another offering. Her hips swayed as if transfixed by a musical rhythm that only she could hear, and her hands slid down over her belly and then to her cunt.

The boys moved in closer still.

Harry gave her a sexy smirk while Ron began stroking his cock. “Bloody hell.”

“Definitely bloody,” Draco said seductively.

Hermione looked down at her body to see she had smeared blood all over herself. But the sight of crimson streaking her skin didn’t disturb her; rather, it made her body resemble a work of art. She was a masterpiece. Squeezing her cut hand, she began to milk her wound, painting the unblemished areas.
She wanted to be covered in it.

As she spread it over her body, the arousal radiating between her legs began to build. The boys were making noises now, groaning and cursing. They were randy as well, and their arousal only heightened hers. Swaying on her feet, she threw her head back, letting out a wanton moan. She was ready to announce that they could do whatever they wanted to her, when suddenly Draco grabbed her bloody left palm and lifted it to his mouth. She watched as his tongue slid out to lick the blood from her wound. She didn’t want him to stop. His eyes remained fixed on hers as continued to lap up her blood like it was syrup.

“Mmm, tangy, almost sweet, certainly not dirty,” he said in a low, sultry voice, making her squirm. Hermione felt as if her breath were leaving her as he continued. His tongue felt warm and wet, and she wanted to feel it all over her.

Draco moaned as his mouth moved to her wrist, sucking and licking up the blood that had run there. Her body seemed to sense his bloodlust, and the cut in her hand began to flow thicker than before. Hermione’s eyes opened in alarm at the sight of it, but Draco’s eyes were now shut as he continued to drink from her like a dehydrated man.

Her eyes shifted as Harry drew in closer. He raised his bloody palm to her breast, pinching a nipple, and the blood from his hand ran down her breast to her belly. She closed her eyes, enjoying the sensation of the warm liquid dripping over her. The sticky feel of Harry’s blood running down her body made her feel debauched but loved all at once. She wanted more.

Harry lifted his hand to her face, stroking her cheek with his bloody hand, coating her face with his blood and then offering his palm to her lips. Hermione only paused for a moment before she began lapping at his wound. The taste of blood was metallic with a hint of sweetness. Fascinated and enraptured, she continued to suck, tracing the cut in his hand with her tongue, as she watched for his reaction. Harry’s eyes rolled in the back of his head, and Ron grabbed him by the hair, tilting his head back to give a searing kiss. Hermione watched as Harry bit Ron’s lip until blood ran from their joined mouths. She half-expected Ron to draw back in anger, but he only moaned in response before pulling away. Then Ron lifted his bloody left hand above Harry’s face in a clenched fist. The blood from his fist poured out in rivulets, and Harry opened his mouth wide to catch every drop.

The sight of Harry waiting eagerly to catch Ron’s blood on his tongue was enthralling, and Hermione stopped sucking from Harry for a moment to stare. Draco growled, his teeth pressing harder into her hand, and she looked at him and saw that was glaring at her. He stopped sucking and pushed her back. Hermione let Harry’s hand go as she stumbled toward the bed.

She fell awkwardly on her bum, and Draco moved quickly, propping one knee up to climb atop of her, forcing her to lay back. His blood-smeared face looked wild as he moved to straddle her.

“Are you going to bless my cock with your magnificent Muggle-born cunt?” he asked, giving her a teasing smirk.

Hermione returned his smirk with one of her own, nodding. “Of course, I’ll bless you,” she granted in a condescending regal tone.

Draco’s smirk faded, and his eyes held new weight. “Of course what?”

Her cunt quivered at his stare and tone. “Of course… Master.”

“Make me powerful, Hermione,” he whispered as he swooped down to possess her mouth. She opened her mouth, welcoming his. His kiss was hungry and greedy, and she could feel his need and
possessiveness in it. His slim, smooth form was grinding against her. His cock slipped against the wetness between her legs, trying to find entry. Hermione tried to assist him but he seemed determined to overpower her, pinning her firmly to the bed. His grips on her wrists were tight and restrictive, but that only aroused Hermione more.

“Please, Master, please take me.”

Draco grunted, burying his head into the crook of her neck as he used his knee to pry her legs further apart. Finally, he found what he was looking for and drove himself forward without any warning.

Hermione cried out, clenching her fingers and concentrating on the cock buried deep inside of her. It felt like a piece she hadn’t realised was missing had been returned, and she crossed her legs behind Draco’s back to pull him in deeper. She didn’t want to let go.

Somewhere close, she heard Ron’s voice, but just barely.

“I’m sorry, Harry… about before,” she heard Ron say.

“So make it up to me, eh?” Harry said.

“Yeah,” she thought she heard Ron say and then there was silence save for Draco’s heavy breathing and her own moans.

Draco appeared to be inspired by her sounds, his eyelids lowered and he opened his mouth, letting out a soft grunt as his sweaty face hovered over hers was tight with lust and determination. He began to drive into her slow and steady, and Hermione pushed back with each thrust to encourage him.

“You like that?”

“Yes, yes, Master,” she moaned, twisting her hips daringly. Draco smirked, apparently enjoying the aggressive push and pull of their lovemaking, and began to pound into her.

There were faint slurping and sucking sounds coming from just beyond the bed, but Hermione could barely hear them and didn’t dare tear her eyes away from Draco’s as he continued to fuck her.

Her body felt like clay and any way he’d move his hips against hers she moved with him. She couldn’t think, and her thoughts became muddier than before as a new light filled the room. It turned from bright white to grey. Grey like a foggy October morning. Grey like Bound Skerry in the mist or the sky filled with gathering storm clouds. The grey descended, falling all around her, consuming her while blocking out everything else. Grey was the last thing Hermione saw before she blacked out for the first time.

When she awoke, her eyes felt heavy, but her body felt as light as ever, and there was still a needy ache pulsating between her legs. With blurry vision, she saw that Draco was no longer on top of her. Ron’s blood-streaked face was staring down at her, and she could feel the head of his huge cock pushing against her entrance.

“Come on, Hermione, open up for me… Give me my pussy.”

Hermione spread herself wider, her body urging Ron forward. It hurt a little, but she had accepted that it would always be this way with him. There was pleasure in this pain, and she found herself enjoying the sensation of being stretched open by his girth. He leaned in for a kiss, and Hermione wrapped her arms around his neck to pull herself up to meet his lips. His tongue invaded her mouth as he moved forward to penetrate her. They both groaned as he did, the tight fit of him completely encased inside of her felt intense. But he didn’t pause and wait for her to get comfortable. Instead, he
pulled back a little before plunging into her again and again, starting a relentless assault that left Hermione almost breathless.

Aside from the slapping of Ron’s skin against hers, she heard Harry’s lustful declaration of love followed by Draco’s soft moan. Turning her head, she saw Harry lying on the floor, his bloodied face thrown back in ecstasy as he rode Draco backwards. Draco was moaning, leaving bloody handprints all over Harry’s back as the boy moved up and down his cock.

The sight of it was immensely erotic, and Hermione found herself pushing back against Ron, wanting him to bury himself completely inside of her and stay. Ron moved up on his knees, bringing Hermione with him as he impaled her from a different angle. Hermione held onto his shoulder’s tightly so as not to fall. As Ron bounced her back and forth over his cock, it felt as if the earth itself were spinning. The haze that overwhelmed her before was back, and coherent thought escaped her once more as the light of room heated her skin.

The air became lighter, and Hermione opened her mouth wide trying to inhale as much as she could. But no matter how much she tried to swallow, there was never enough. Her head felt light as she grew dizzier. Everything was spinning out of control. She tried to focus on Ron. His blue eyes were wide with awe and adoration, and Hermione felt lost in them. Lost in blue. The whole room full of blue light, so blue that Hermione felt like she had taken a dive into the ocean. And she was drowning, losing air fast. She gasped, but air was out of her reach, and once more she went under.

It was sound of grunting that awoke her again. Hermione looked to her right and saw Ron straddling Draco, his hand between them, stroking the Draco’s cock and leaving bloody red streaks as he did. Draco’s eyes were closed as his hips rose to help Ron’s effort, his hands clutching Ron’s arms for support.

Hermione looked up in shock as her legs were hoisted up onto lean-muscled shoulders. Harry was on his knees, looking down at her. His glasses were gone, and his messy black hair was wet with sweat. He had a weird, lopsided grin on his face as he pulled her legs higher, letting Hermione know his intentions.

She wiggled her arse as it left the bed, trying to centre herself in preparation for what he was about to do as he lifted her legs off of his shoulders, spreading her wider. He moved quickly to bury himself inside of her. She squeezed her cunt around him, enjoying the feeling of his cock inside of her. It felt so good to be filled again. Harry was still smiling a little as his eyes followed the movement of her breasts as he fucked her. She twisted her hips over and against his cock, begging for more, and he leaned forward in response, driving himself into her faster and harder.

“Like that? Huh? Do you?”

“Yes, Master. I… love… it.” she sputtered as Harry continued to fuck her.

She thought she heard Draco grunt and call out Ron’s name, but she wasn’t sure. And then she felt pressure building as her climax approached. She was so close, and she wanted to feel herself fall apart with Harry deep inside of her, but her thoughts were growing hazy again and when she looked up, Harry’s eyes were half lidded, just the slightest gleam of his green irises peeking out.

Hermione tried to remain lucid, desperate to experience her approaching climax, but she was slipping again. The light was back, and it was heating up the bed once more, setting her skin on fire. It seemed as if the green of Harry’s eyes had bled into the room. Everything filtered through a prism of green light. As green as Slytherin Quidditch robes or the fields of the Great Lawn and Groves of Canterbury she had once visited as a child. It was as green as the Avada Kedavra she had seen in DADA class their fourth year, and for a moment, Hermione thought that if dying felt like this,
perhaps it wasn’t so bad. She didn’t care if the light took her under again; Harry was inside of her, and Ron and Draco were beside her, and that was enough. She closed her eyes and followed the green until it pulled her into blackness.

When she awoke, Hermione was hard-pressed for air. A tight fist was tangled within her hair, and her mouth was filled with Ron’s hard cock. She was holding Draco’s cock in her other hand, and Harry was still inside of her. He was kissing Ron, or more like devouring his mouth. The sight of them kissing above distracted her concentration of keeping up with their movements. After a few moments, Draco grabbed her hand to assist her effort and then threw his head back. Hermione closed her eyes just in time as his hot sticky come splattered over her face. He groaned and then fell back. Ron sped up his attention to her mouth, and his cock threatened to choke her as the head tapped against the back of her throat. She calmed herself and prepared for his climax, and not a minute later, he came in her mouth. He fell back as well, leaving only Harry.

Hermione and Harry locked eyes and it was as if she had performed Legilimency.

“You belong to me,” his eyes said. She shivered. Her body no longer felt like her own as Harry focused all of his energy on taking her once more. This time, as her orgasm approached, Hermione fastened her hands onto his arms, determined to keep her eyes wide open and see it through to the end without passing out. She worked her hips in tight circles. The pressure built and began to reverberate through her until she heard herself crying out. Her vision blurred again, but not before seeing Harry’s mouth fell open in a silent scream as fell over on top of her.

The light that had set her skin on fire before returned, enveloping the room in a red glow. It was dark and red like the fresh blood smeared over their bodies and faces, and it covered everything: her lovers, the ceiling, the walls. Dark red, but bright like one of those Muggle traffic lights. Red like the afterglow of a wicked hex. Hermione felt bewitched by it, and closed her eyes against it. She didn’t like the red. It wasn’t like the others. The red light made her feel anxious and fearful, and she longed for it to fade. She only had to wait a few minutes longer before familiar blackness consumed the red, pulling her down once more into a dreamless sleep.

She was awoken by Ron’s frantic yelling. Hermione scrambled onto her knees to assess what was the matter. Ron was shaking Harry, who was lying on the bed. Harry appeared to be out cold. Draco was standing near Harry, looking down with a worried expression. His eyes met Hermione’s, and she knew something was terribly wrong.

“Harry! Harry! Oh, god, what have we done? Harry!” Ron’s voice cracked and Hermione saw tears in his eyes as his eyes scanned the floor. He picked up his wand, pointing it at Harry.

“Ron, what are you doing?” Draco yelled in panic.

“I’m going to Rennervate him!”

“No, Ron! Please… I don’t think we should cast any spells right now. Even helpful ones may backfire with the magic in the room. I’ll handle it,” she said, moving quickly to get in position to do Muggle CPR.

She tilted Harry’s back and listened for breathing. There was none, so she quickly pinched his nose preparing to give him mouth-to-mouth. It was hard to stay calm; her nerves and anxiety were making her hands tremble, but she took a deep breath and then exhaled into his mouth until his chest rose. She gave two more breaths, counting them out before pulling back.

To her relief, Harry sputtered a series of coughs, doubling over onto his side, heaving for air.
“Thank Merlin!” Ron exclaimed.

Draco closed his eyes, exhaling in relief. Hermione took a gulp of air, her eyes returning to Harry.

“Are you all right, Harry?” Ron asked, kneeling by the bed, gazing up at the boy.

Harry nodded as his coughing subsided. “I’m-I’m fine.”

Hermione shook her head. “No, Harry, you’re not. Whatever we just did caused this to happen.”

“You were out cold! It was like before… only worse. We thought you were dead!” Ron explained.

Draco was still staring at Harry with concern on his face. “This ritual… I think it was bad. I felt it, that last time, when everything went red. It was as if the Dark Lord’s eyes were on us or something.”

They all stared at Draco. Hermione was unsure what to say; she had felt the unease and darkness of the red light as well.

Harry sat up fully. “Listen, I’m fine! I think the ritual is all right as well. I probably passed out because it was working. I think we should try it again.”

“No!” Hermione, Ron, and Draco said forcibly.

“Harry, once was enough. I can barely see straight right now. I feel sloshed,” Ron complained.

Hermione nodded. “Yes. Me, too.”

Draco blinked and then took a breath. “Well, at least we’re still alive to talk about it. Do you remember what Snape said about everyone before dying?”

“Do you have to remind us?” Ron groaned. “If this didn’t work, then I say we forget the whole thing… It’s not worth all of this! We’re going to wind up killing ourselves.” He gave Harry a look of trepidation.

Hermione glanced around. Her senses were beginning to become clearer, and as she took in their bloodied bodies and exhausted faces, she felt grateful that they had survived it, and that Harry was all right. It was as if…

She gasped.

“What? What is it?” Draco asked.

“We survived,” Hermione murmured.

“Yeah, lucky us,” Ron said sarcastically.

“No, Ron. If there were others before us that died performing this ritual and we managed to survive, what does that tell you?”

“That’s we’re damned lucky?” Ron replied in exasperation.

“No,” Hermione said, shaking her head. “What if… what if the ritual isn’t what we think it is… what if the ritual was a test of some sort.”

“What do you mean, test? Snape said that the prophecy required us to do a ritual,” Draco countered.
“No,” Hermione pointed out. “Snape never said what was required. He said a ritual may be involved, but he never said it was required to bring the prophecy to fruition. In fact, Snape didn’t even know a fig about the prophecy outside of the fact that there was one.”

“No, Hermione,” Harry asked in frustration.

“No, Harry,” she said, standing up, “What I’m saying is that the ritual may not be what destroys Voldemort. Remember when we first joined hands?”

The boys all nodded, trying to follow her reasoning.

“Well, the spell brought out the worst in each of us, and each one of us thought about walking away. And then, when we focused on how much we cared about each other, we went into some sort of trippy trance.”

“And then Harry passed out,” Draco said slowly, looking at Hermione in puzzlement. “And how do you think that figures into all of this?”

Hermione took a deep breath. Harry’s reaction to their bonding was something she had been worried about since Harry had started feeling faint at Snape’s.

“Right, about that. Harry, you have a connection with Voldemort—” she started.

“What?” Draco asked sharply. “What do you mean Harry has a connection with the Dark Lord?”

Harry shook his head. “Not anymore, not really. Voldemort and I… we used to have some sort of mental connection. He could see things, get into my head, and I could see and feel things he was seeing as well.”

“What?” Draco exclaimed, his face reflecting his fear. “Why didn’t you tell me that?”

“It’s nothing, Draco,” Harry said dismissively.

“Don’t tell me it’s nothing, Harry!” Draco practically shouted. “What if he saw what we did today? Or even felt something? This changes everything!”

“No, Draco. The connection has been blocked. He doesn’t try to get into my head anymore,” Harry insisted.

“And why not?” Draco demanded.

Harry sighed. “Look, I promise, I’ll explain later, but just trust me. It’s not something you need to worry about. He hasn’t tried at all since the end of last year. My scar doesn’t even hurt anymore,” he finished, looking between Ron and Hermione.

“Really?” Ron asked, staring at Harry’s scar.

Draco still appeared apprehensive, and Hermione felt every bit as fearful as he looked. She had to voice her concerns, despite Harry’s insistence that everything was fine.

“But, Harry,” she started cautiously. “If this ritual was some sort of test, and it affected you the way it did, then perhaps that’s confirmation that we’re very close to fulfilling the prophecy…”

“Good!” Harry said excitedly.

“No, what I mean is, whatever connection you had or still have with him may be affected when we
destroy him... What if we end up destroying you in the process?"

Harry huffed. “Hermione, I’m not Voldemort!”

“Harry, I know that, but—”

“Then I’ll be fine!” he snapped, pulling her hand off of his head.

“But—”

“But nothing! Do you think he and I share a brain or something?”

Harry’s eyes were wide and glaring, his skin flushed as if he were upset. Hermione was at a loss for words; she could tell her words had hurt his feelings.

“Well, do you?” he asked roughly.

Hermione shook her head quickly. “No, Harry, I just thought—”

“Well, you thought wrong! Whatever it is that we share, it’s miniscule, do you understand?” he asked gripping her wrist tightly

“Yes, all right,” Hermione said quickly to reassure him.

“Do you?” Harry asked once more. “Because I don’t want to hear any more about it. I’m strong enough to beat him.”

Hermione nodded, feeling guilty that anything she said had communicated doubt that Harry could defeat Voldemort.

“I’m strong enough to live through whatever we have to do to make the prophecy work,” Harry repeated resolutely, his fingers digging into her flesh. Hermione winced. His eyes were fierce and focused intently on her, searching her face for support.

“Yes, Harry, I understand,” she said, wanting nothing more than to ease the tension she felt coming from him.

“Now, what I want to know is, are you strong enough?”

Hermione’s brow furrowed, wondering what he was trying to imply. “For what?”

“To do anything I request,” he replied. What was Harry on about? She could sense his need for control by the grip on her arm. He was speaking as her Master now, and as much as it aroused her, it also made her nervous.

“Y-Yes. What do you want, Harry?”

Harry glanced up at Draco and Ron, who were staring back at him with questions on their faces.

Harry took her by surprise, grabbing her arm and bringing her face close to his, his nose almost touching hers. His eyes were flat and she felt an odd tingle in her belly. His breath was hot on her skin as he spoke.

“Let’s see. We just learned that the brightest witch of our age, and the most brilliant cocksucker I’ve ever known, just also happens to be one of the most powerful witches in the wizarding world. What do you think I want, Hermione? I want you permanently marked... as mine.”
Hermione’s mouth opened and then closed; she was shocked into speechlessness. The thought of being permanently marked both thrilled and scared her. She was wondering what he meant, exactly, by a permanent mark, when she heard someone clear his throat above her. Glancing up, she saw that both Draco and Ron had their arms folded over their chest, giving Harry hard looks.

“I suppose you meant to say as ours?” Draco asked with one eyebrow raised.

Harry sighed. “Right, as ours.”

“How do you want me marked?” Hermione asked.

“I want you pierced,” Harry replied simply. “Right now, before we return to Hogwarts.”

Hermione swallowed. “Pierced?” It felt surreal to say out loud.

Harry nodded. “Pierced,” he repeated, staring at her. He appeared to be waiting for her reaction.

Hermione struggled to speak, keenly aware that they were all staring at her and that whatever she said would change their relationship dramatically.

She had been thinking about it ever since Harry had proposed it the first time. She had never felt so tied to three people in her life, and she knew that no matter what they went through after this, they would always have a permanent bond. They wanted to claim her body with physical symbols reminding her of their ownership. She found the thought of being marked in such a way, as their property, sexy and strangely satisfying. They were hers, and she was theirs. She wanted to be completely theirs. If she said yes to this, there would be no turning back.

She took a deep breath and nodded.

“Yes, Master.”
Little Sacrifices

You're piercing me
This self will bleed
You're killing all of my securities
Lord, help me see the reality
That all I'll ever need is you

“Piercing” by Katy Perry

It's true; we're all a little insane.
But it's so clear, now that I'm unchained…
You poor sweet innocent thing,
Dry your eyes and testify.
You know you live to break me.
Don’t deny, sweet sacrifice.
Do you wonder why you hate?
Are you still too weak to survive your mistakes?

“Sweet Sacrifice” by Evanescence

Harry watched as Hermione picked up her wand to assist Draco in casting cleansing spells on all of them, as well as the bed and the carpet.

As they did it, Harry could feel Ron’s eyes on him but he did his best to ignore him.

Harry knew why Ron was worried, and truthfully, passing out during the ritual had frightened him badly as well. Hermione’s observation about his connection to Voldemort being a risk made perfect sense. The last light that appeared during the ritual, the red one, had contained a darkness unlike the previous flashes of light. Draco’s comment about the red light feeling like the Dark Lord’s eye upon them was disturbing. Harry could have sworn that the light had been radiating from Hermione, but he had to be mistaken; Hermione was no dark witch.

And while the idea of Magic Manifest was intriguing, it alarmed him that such a significant concept could be foreign to two pure-bloods who had grown up in the wizarding world. What other secrets did the wizarding world hold? And what was the point of getting educated at Hogwarts if there were vast conspiracies hiding the truth about the nature and order of magic?

The whole thing made Harry feel vulnerable. For a brief moment, his thoughts drifted to Dumbledore. He still held onto a small but significant longing for the time when he could share such revelations with the headmaster. But now, more than ever, Harry knew he could not trust anyone but Hermione, Ron, and Draco.

“There, all done,” Draco said as the last traces of semen, blood and salt evaporated.

Hermione bent down to retrieve her shirt and denims.

“Stay as you are,” Harry ordered. She paused immediately, dropping her clothing back onto the floor.

Her prompt compliance with his order was satisfying. He was already excited by the prospect of
piercing her. Although he would never admit it, Harry had been waiting months for this. The thought of having Hermione pierced had been floating in his head since they created the verbal contract agreement at Snape’s. He had no intentions of ever telling Hermione that, though; he didn’t want her to think he was some sort of sadist freak, even if he sometimes thought perhaps he could be one.

As the boys continued to dress, Hermione stood waiting in silence, completely naked, her eyes focused straight ahead. Harry privately wondered whether she was nervous or having doubts about what she had just agreed to do. She could have said ‘no’, and still could if she wanted. He had already decided that he would not push her and would drop the matter entirely if she refused. More than anything, Harry wanted Hermione’s submission. He knew it wouldn’t mean anything if she felt coerced to do it, nor would it be an expression of love.

He smiled to himself as he thought about how much his view of love and sex had changed within the short span of the school year. While initially the idea of owning someone had disturbed him, now it felt quite natural. It was another way to express his love, and the love he felt for Hermione—and Ron and Draco for that matter—was just simply different, no better or worse than conventional romances.

Whatever magical test they had passed, it had strengthened the bond they shared. For that alone, Harry figured it had been worth the trouble; they’d be ready for whatever challenge that awaited them. He wasn’t sure, however, that Ron and Draco shared his confidence. Ron’s eyes were still fixed on him in concern.

When Harry finished dressing, he walked over to stand before Hermione.

“Harry, you sure you’re all right?” Ron asked from behind him.

“Yes, Ron, I’m fine,” Harry sang in exaggeration, giving Hermione playful wink.

She didn’t look amused. “Harry—I mean, Master…”

“Yes?”

“Do you actually know anything about piercings? Perhaps we should go to a professional,” she suggested.

Harry was slightly amused at her apprehensiveness and touched that she was willing to consent to a piercing in spite of it. He gave her a reassuring smile, leaning in to kiss her on the forehead, and the nose, and finally her lips.

“Hermione, I’ve been reading loads of books on the topic.”

Hermione’s eyebrows shot up in disbelief.

“Don’t look so surprised. I know as much as I need to know: everything from preparation, to the actual piercing, to healing. I’ve memorised all the spells for them.”

Ron frowned. “Hermione, listen, it’s not too late to back out if you want. Just because Harry wants you to get pierced doesn’t mean you have to. You don’t have to prove anything to any of us.”

“Ron, I want this,” Hermione insisted.

Harry was relieved to hear it and secretly grateful that Ron had asked her once more.

“Besides,” Hermione said. “I’m sure a belly button piercing won’t be terribly painful.”
Harry’s frowned. “Er, Hermione… I was actually thinking of something more significant, especially since there are three of us.”

Hermione’s mouth dropped open. “Harry are you suggesting that I get three piercings?”

Harry reached out to softly squeeze Hermione’s right breast. “Yes, Hermione. Three. I was thinking that the right nipple would be pierced for Ron, and the left,” he said, sliding his hand over to caress her other breast. “Would be pierced for Draco.”

Hermione began to breathe faster as she stared up at Harry, her nipples hardening from his touch.

“And your cunt…” he said, sliding his hand from her breast to lightly touch her belly before slipping down to the shaved mound of her cunt. Hermione gasped, her body quivering. The rush of power Harry felt in that moment was heady.

“…is mine.”

Hermione’s eyelids fluttered, but whether it was from shock or arousal, Harry couldn’t tell.

“Is that all right with you?” he asked in a low voice, thick with his own arousal. He began stroking the slippery folds of her cunt, enjoying the feeling of slick warm wetness surrounding his fingers. Hermione squirmed a little, her eyes becoming heavy as she nodded.

“Yes, Master.”

“That’s going to hurt like hell,” Ron mumbled.

“Ron, I told you it wouldn’t. Not really. I’m not going to actually pierce the clit… just the hood,” Harry answered, turning back to look at Hermione. “I’m going to give you a vertical hood piercing; it’s the least painful and heals the fastest.”

Hermione gave him an impressed smile. “You have been reading.”

“I wouldn’t want to hurt you,” Harry said.

“Wouldn’t you?” she asked sceptically.

Harry smirked and pulled her by the neck so that their noses were touching. “Are you ready?”

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Hermione’s stomach did little flips as she replied, “Yes, Master.”

She could hardly believe the words she heard coming out of her own mouth. Her consent to being pierced must have come from somewhere deep within, somewhere she hadn’t realized existed. She could clearly recall how horrified she had been when Harry had first suggested it. It had only been a few short months ago that she considered such body modification too extreme.

That time felt ancient. Now, the idea of Harry wanting to mark her in such a way felt exciting and a part of her was honoured. Her acquiescence could have easily dismissed it as the effects the lingering inebriation of the ritual, but Hermione knew better. She had really found peace with the idea of being a submissive, and now she knew without a doubt that being a submissive didn’t require her to give up who she was or all of her power. It didn’t make her weak. Just like the night she had been re-collared, this just felt right. She wanted to please Harry and show him as well as Draco and Ron how genuine her submission was, and most of all, Hermione wanted to do this for herself. Every time she
showered or undressed, she would be able to see and feel the evidence of her relationship with them. The collar could be removed, but this sacrifice would remain.

Harry was staring at her with concern in his eyes. She felt unexpected relief when he withdrew his Gryffindor tie from his back pocket and lifted it up to her eyes.

There was a certain degree of comfort in the darkness, and when Harry finished tying the blindfold, she felt reassured, like he had given her a blanket or stuffed animal.

“It’s all right. Just relax,” he said softly. “Move with me.”

And she did, as he slowly guided her backward until her legs hit the edge of the mattress. He gently reclined her until she lay completely on her back.

The memory of them shaving her at Snape’s surfaced, and she recalled how nervous she had been when Harry had emerged with a bowl and razor. She reminded herself how pleasant that experience had turned out to be. In fact, she had gotten off to that memory a few times since.

But getting her bits pierced was completely different. Even if Harry used magic, she expected there would be some pain. Would it mean anything without a degree of sacrifice? Her thoughts were interrupted by shuffling nearby, followed by whispering, and then silence. The memory of being blindfolded and dangling from Snape’s ceiling by chains was fresh, and she could feel the same anticipation in the air, and she leaned her head to one side, trying to hear what they were doing. But all she could really tell was that the boys were moving about near the bed. She forced herself to stay relaxed and not tense up in fear.

Someone whispered something fiercely to her right. It was Ron, but she couldn’t discern what he was actually saying. It was followed by an aggravated sigh that she recognised as Draco’s, and then the mattress sank to her left as someone took a seat.

Slight panic set in. Who was beside her; was it Harry? Would he make quick work of the piercing, or take his time and draw it out? That thought birthed many more concerns, and they all raced through her mind as she tried to remain still and not display how nervous she felt.

A warm, slender hand began gingerly caressing her side. She froze at first, and then slowly exhaled. It was Draco and he was trying to soothe her with touch.

Hermione listened closely, waiting for him to say something, but no one spoke. Draco’s hand pressed firmer against her side as he caressed her. The mattress sank to her right, and then a large hand she recognised as Ron’s began feeling its way up over her belly to the valley between her breasts. His hand paused before finding its way to her right breast and squeezing gently. She gasped and then moaned. It felt nice enough.

There was soft shuffling in front of her, and then warm hands gripped her thighs, pulling her legs apart. Hermione instinctively squirmed, pushing herself back and up along the bed, away from the hands spreading her open. Perhaps she wasn’t as ready as she’d thought.

More hands fell on her, stroking her arms, sides, breasts, legs, trying to calm her. It was almost overwhelming, and she couldn’t keep track of whose hands belonged to whom. It felt good to be touched like this, and she was becoming aroused from their attentions.

Someone’s digit brushed over her clit and she moaned, arching her back and pushing her hips forward. She wanted to feel more, but the fingers were withdrawn quickly.

Then she froze as something long, thin and wooden tapped her clean-shaven mound. When the tip of
the wand traced the outside of her pussy and stilled to rest against her clit, Hermione pushed back to put space between it and her body.

Familiar big rough hands closed around her right wrist, pushing it into the bed tightly. She turned her head towards the person hovering above her, guided by warm breath hitting her face.

"Do we have to restrain you?" Ron asked.

She didn’t want to be restrained; she wanted to go through this on her own strength and will.

“No, Master.”

"Then settle down," Ron said. “Now are you sure this is what you want?"

“Yes, Master," she said, nodding.

She hissed, jerking slightly as two fingers pinched the hardened nipple of her left breast. A harsh scolding slap to the inside of her thigh caused her to still in obedience. She suppressed another moan as the same hand began to stroke her cunt once more. She knew those were Harry’s fingers and she tried not to writhe as he continued to tease her, sliding his finger up and down against her entrance but never penetrating.

“Last chance, Hermione,” Draco said. “You can back out now if you like.”

“I don’t want to,” Hermione replied.

“Yeah? Well, what do you want then?”

“I want to be marked, permanently.” Her voice was resolute but surreal and barely recognisable to her own ears.

She gasped once again as two fingers closed around her right nipple. Their teasing was maddening. Why were they doing it? Was this preparation? When would the pain come? And what if Harry made an error and performed the spell incorrectly?

"You don’t have anything to worry about, Hermione," Harry said, as if reading her thoughts. "We know what we are doing."

"We?" Hermione repeated in shock. “I thought you were going to be the one piercing me, Harry?"

“No, we will,” Draco answered.

Hermione opened her mouth to speak, but it had gone dry. “But—but do Ron and Draco know the spells?” she sputtered, hating how rattled her voice sounded but needing to know.

"Sure we do," Ron said. "We wouldn’t let Harry do this alone. Besides, we've all been practicing on flobberworms. There’s really not much difference."

Hermione laughed. It didn’t matter that it sounded slightly manic. The picture of all of them practicing to pierce her by torturing some poor flobberworms was mental.

Her laughter died quickly when they withdrew their hands. She held in a whimper at the loss of contact, suddenly feeling very cold and exposed. This was it. It had to be. She forced herself not to squirm or move as she tried to hold her breath, waiting for the inevitable. Waiting for pain.

In the next moment, there were three wand tips pressing ever so slightly against her flesh. There was
one wand tip aligned to each nipple, and the third rested at the top of her clt, just barely touching it. She tried not to think on it, trying to clear her head and fill it with loving thoughts about the boys, and why she was doing this, why she wanted to please. There was pleasure in pleasing, and she focused on that as they began to whisper unintelligible things above her. None of them spoke in unison, and she couldn’t distinguish their voices. It all sounded like mumbled chatter.

Her bits begin to tingle, and then she felt a tight pinch in the places where each of the wand tips pointed. It hurt but it wasn’t unbearable, and then the feeling of being pinched was gone replaced by a warming sensation that made her nipples and clt throb.

She shrieked as the pinching returned, this time it was harder and sharper. Tears began to form in her eyes and she choked back a sob. As soon as she did she felt soft, silky hair tickling her face. Draco was kissing her, swallowing her cries just as cold metal pressed against her right nipple. She felt it penetrate her flesh. The pain was sharp but fleeting, and then Ron’s large hand closed over it. Draco pulled back, and then she felt his slender hand positioning a cold metal ring against her left nipple. She held her breath until she felt the tickle of Ron’s mouth on her earlobe.

“S’allright, ‘Mione,” he whispered. “You’re doing really good… just a few more minutes.”

She nodded, trying to concentrate on Ron’s warm wet lips pressed against her skin while Draco inserted the ring through her left nipple. There was a prick of pain, but not as much as the first. She inwardly sighed in relief as his hand gently covered her breast. Slowly, the pain began to fade, until the only thing left was the strange sensation of circular metal rings lying against her flesh.

Ron’s mouth moved from her ear down to her neck and she turned her head to the left to give him more access. When she did, Draco’s mouth descended onto hers once more. She moaned as he squeezed the tender pierced flesh of her breast. The mix of pain and pleasure from his attention to her newly pierced nipple was so distracting so almost forgot to be scared about what Harry was about to do to her.

There was sudden flash of sharp pain where Harry’s wand rested, and then the flesh covering her clt warmed considerably. The heat spread and then it cooled as if someone were blowing on it. Hermione’s nails clenched onto the arms on either side of her as Harry began to press a thin metal ring against her clt.

“Almost over, promise. You’re such a good girl, Hermione,” Draco whispered. She tried to focus on his breath on her skin and the feel of Ron’s kisses against her neck as Harry slowly and carefully inserted the ring.

Even though she was waiting for excruciating pain, it never came. She was surprised to find that it hardly hurt at all. Instead, it tingled just like the first sparks of arousal she often felt when touched down there. Once Harry was done, his fingertips traced the ring and the flesh below it tenderly. Hermione trembled as his warm wet lips gave her cunt a gentle kiss.

“All done, let’s have a look at you,” Harry said.

The blindfold was lifted and Hermione blinked, adjusting her eyes and looking up at the boys. They were all standing over her, marvelling at her body. She looked down at herself and saw a white gold dragon encircling her left nipple, held in place by white gold bar spearing her flesh. On her right nipple there was a white gold lion’s head. She sat up and leaned over to look at her clt. There was a tiny white gold ring hanging from it, the front bearing the small likeness of a phoenix.

“A phoenix, Harry?” she said, giving him a look of disbelief. Considering Harry’s recent disillusionment with Dumbledore, a phoenix was the last thing she would have thought he’d want to
represent him.

Harry nodded. “Why not? It’s one of the only creatures able to conquer death.”

Hermione smirked. “Good point.”

Gazing up at all of them, she saw that they were all wearing new white gold bands on the ring finger of their right hand.

“You have matching rings?”

Draco smirked. “Of course. We’re just as bonded to you as you are to us.”

Hermione smiled up at them, taking comfort that the piercing meant just as much to them as it did to her, and that they also wore symbols representing their relationship as well.

“Well? How does it feel?” Ron asked, looking down at her. “Does it hurt?”

Hermione couldn’t really describe the feeling. It didn’t really hurt but there was a throbbing and tenderness where she was pierced, and she was slightly apprehensive about putting on clothing. She couldn’t imagine what sort of sensation that would produce, let alone walking or even showering.

“It’s a bit tender,” she finally replied. “But other than that, I feel perfectly fine.”


Hermione blushed; she was still getting used to Draco complimenting her so unabashedly, but it made her happy to see them all pleased. It had turned out much better than she had expected.

“It heals pretty fast, too,” Harry informed. “It should only take about a week to fully recover.”

“A week?” Draco groaned. “That means—”

“That means, no rough play or penetration; anything else that will cause Hermione discomfort. Can’t you hold it in your pants for seven days?” Harry asked.

Draco smirked. “I suppose we’ll just have to think of other things to do during our time alone.”

Hermione chuckled. “You mean like talking?”

Draco snorted.

They waited for Hermione to dress, which she did very carefully. The cotton material of her bra rubbing against her new rings tugged at the tender areas of the skin, causing a dull and constant throb in her nipples. She was grateful to be wearing knickers, preferring the feel of the light cotton to her denims against her clit hood piercing. It felt like a finger was constantly teasing her clit and she had to quickly gasp more than once as she became aroused by even the slightest of movements.

“What time is it?” Ron asked.

“Oh!” Hermione exclaimed, looking to the window. “It looks about close to three o’clock!”

“Damn!” Draco said, scowling.

“We really should be getting back,” Ron said anxiously.
“Yeah, but before we go, let’s make sure our story is straight again,” Draco insisted.

Ron huffed. “I doubt we’ll even get to use it. Everyone goes off on their own in Hogsmeade, and no one cares what you do.”

“But what about McGonagall? She’s ‘keeping an eye on us,’” Hermione said, imitating their professor’s voice.

Draco gave Hermione a quizzical look. “I thought McGonagall was your favourite professor…”

Hermione sighed. “I’ll tell you about that later. For now, we shouldn’t take any chances, just in case she starts asking questions.”

Draco nodded. “And I’m sure I’ll get interrogated by my housemates.”

“All right then. It starts out with you and Ron getting into a row,” Harry said. “Because, er…”

“But Draco called Ron a lazy good-for-nothing ginger,” Hermione finished.

Ron smirked. “And then I said, ‘Fine, Malfoy, you’re on! I’ll go into the Shrieking Shack alone…’ and that’s just what I did.”

“Only, you didn’t come back,” Hermione added. “After a few hours, when you didn’t show, we all went looking for you. It took a while, but thank Merlin, we finally found you.”

“Yeah, and when we did, you were just barely holding on after falling through a rotten floorboard,” Harry finished.

Ron frowned. “I don’t like the way this story ends…”

“It’s not a real story, Ron!” Hermione said in exasperation.

“Yeah, but it still makes me look like a daft git. You think they’d really buy it?” Ron asked.

“Yes,” Hermione, Harry, and Draco replied.

“All right, now that that’s settled. We should Portkey from here,” Harry said.

“Wait a second,” Draco said, going over to the side of the bed to collect the saltshaker, oil bottle, and knife. “I can’t just up and leave. I have to thank our hostess. Malfoys are known for their courtesy,” he said proudly.

“Yeah, they’re real courteous—just before they attack you,” Ron quipped.

Draco paused and smirked, offering only a shrug in agreement before exiting. Ron shook his head,
When Draco returned, Harry pulled the portable Portkey from his pocket and placed it on the dresser. "Ready?"

They all nodded, reaching out to touch it. A familiar pull and feel of being sucked into a vacuum shook Hermione, making her tender breasts ache until her bum hit the wooden floor of the upstairs parlour of Abe’s pub. Harry pulled out his invisibility cloak and gave it to Draco, who immediately pulled it over his head. Harry led them all out of the room and down the stairs.

When they arrived downstairs, to their relief, there were no recognisable faces, not even any professors. They exited the pub and saw that there was snowball fight just a few yards away and down the stretch of stone-laid road that connected Hogsmeade to Hogwarts there were a smattering of students walking in groups back up to the castle.

No one else appeared to be around. Hermione sighed. All clear.

Draco removed the invisibility cloak, handing it back to Harry. When she looked up, Draco was staring at her breasts. She looked down to see that one of the rings was ostensibly poking through her t-shirt. She pulled the shirt down, adjusting it, and the brush of the fabric over her pierced nipples sent a swift jolt through her whole body. She shifted on her feet and immediately felt it in her cunt as the ring there stimulated her once more.

Draco quirked an eyebrow, taking in her increasingly obvious aroused state. “Enjoying your new piercings?”

Hermione blushed as the boys all smiled at her apparent heightened sense of awareness.

“Yes, actually, I think I am,” she admitted.

“Good,” Draco said. “I wish I could stick around to watch you squirm, but I suppose I should try and find my housemates now. I’ve done enough spying on you three for the day.”

Hermione, Harry and Ron all smiled at him. There was an awkward silence that followed as they stood in the middle of the path of Hogsmeade.

Hermione eyes were focused on Draco’s in a silent wish that he understood everything she was feeling. Somehow the words thank you, I love you, be careful and I hope to see you soon wouldn’t come out.

But it was Ron who said, “Watch yourself, Draco… Be careful.”

Draco gave Ron a dismissive, bemused scoff. “I’ll be just fine. Just bring your best game on Friday, yeah?”

Ron shrugged. “We don’t have to wait until Friday to play chess. I’m available most days during free period if you ever want to play.”

Draco smiled. “All right, I might just take you up that. In the meantime, you three need to make nice with your own house. I’d hate to be the cause of any trouble,” he said with mocking false concern.

They smiled at him.

“See you later,” he said, giving them one last smile.
“Yeah… later,” Harry said. When Draco turned to begin walking, Harry reached out and pulled
Draco’s arm, yanking him back hard. Draco looked surprised as Harry moved in for a swift kiss.

Hermione felt her heart ache a little as she watched them kiss. Would it always be like this? Slytherin
was only half the castle and a few dungeons away from Gryffindor, and they always had a clear
view of Draco during meals. But right now, Draco might as well have gone to another school. She
didn’t know when she would see him next, but she knew she would miss him terribly.

When the kiss finally broke, Draco gave Harry a small smile and chuckled.

“Merlin, Potter, you act as if you’re never going to see me again… We’re still on for Patronus
lessons, right?”

“You already know the Patronus,” Harry said.

Draco smirked. “So teach me something new, then.”

Harry smiled.

Hermione couldn’t stand it any longer. She glanced around and then threw her arms around Draco’s
body, hugging him tight.

Draco appeared taken aback, and slowly wrapped his arms around her in return. “What is it with you
three? I’m not going anywhere! Hermione!”

Hermione squeezed once more before forcing herself to pull away.

“Are you all right?” Draco asked, looking at her strangely.

She nodded. “Just great. Make sure you’re in the library no later than seven o’clock sharp on
Tuesday evening!”

“Maybe I’ll catch you before Tuesday,” he said, wagging his eyebrows with a seductive smile.

Hermione smiled, shaking her head. “You better go.”

“All right, later then,” he said.

Hermione, Harry, and Ron watched as he slowly turned and began walking back along the stony
road leading out of Hogsmeade back towards Hogwarts.

Suddenly, Hermione felt anxious about their plan, anxious for Draco. Surely someone in Slytherin
would find it suspicious that Draco had totally ignored his house to spend an entire day with them.
Fake spy or not, how long could he keep that story up with no real information to show for it?

“You think he’ll be all right?” Hermione asked softly, watching as his slender form disappeared just
beyond the bend of Hogsmeade’s gates.

Ron scoffed confidently. “He’s Draco Malfoy, Hermione. He’ll be just fine. Right, Harry?”

Hermione’s eyes darted to Harry for reassurance about what Ron had just said. But Harry’s eyes
were focused on the place where Draco had been walking, and she could tell by the way he was
chewing on the inside of his lip that he wasn’t so sure.

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Severus strode confidently up the winding path leading to Malfoy Manor. A weaker man would have run—it was the Dark Lord who had summoned him after all—and Severus was late, two days, to be exact. But if he ran, it would make his alibi look dubious, and besides, he was always late when the Dark Lord called. Only now, he didn’t have a professorship at Hogwarts to use as an excuse.

Since being sacked by Dumbledore, Severus had been staying at Grimmauld—mostly out of pure spite. It was his final declaration of freedom. As much as he hated the Black residence and the company of Lupin, he took satisfaction in the fact that he was still a member of the Order. He could come and go from its headquarters as he pleased, and for now, Dumbledore had no control over that.

When he had first arrived at Grimmauld, he’d been expecting Dumbledore to make good on his threat. But there was no rude welcome or emergency Order meeting to deliberate his status as a member. In fact, except the occasional appearance of Moody, Tonks, Shacklebolt, the constant presence of Lupin, and the yelling portrait of Mrs. Black, Grimmauld stood very quiet.

In the two months Severus had resided there, he had even gotten used to Lupin’s company. There had been some tension between them when he’d first arrived because it was quite clear that Lupin hadn’t followed his suggestion to track Peter down, and Severus had wondered what Lupin had been doing with himself. Other members of the Order were either Aurors, worked in the Ministry, or had been busying themselves with tasks to help for the coming war. Lupin, however, had been sitting on his arse at Grimmauld, drinking hot toddies and lying about in Sirius’ room most days.

However, after a few weeks of bickering, Severus had come to accept that casting dirty looks and remarks Lupin’s way did nothing but make both of them miserable. Eventually, they developed an odd routine of sitting in complete silence and reading while sipping on tea or scotch, and sometimes both. Severus had been just getting used to Lupin’s company when one night, the git just up and left him. Severus didn’t really mind it, though; he knew the full moon was approaching, and truthfully, he didn’t care to see Lupin in his werewolf form, even under the protection of Wolfsbane.

Besides, Severus had things to do, and Lupin’s absence made it much easier without having to worry about questions. It had taken him several days of planning, but he was finally able to arrange for the creation, delivery, and news about the illegal Portkey for Granger and her little boyfriends so that they could slip away to Knockturn during their Hogsmeade trip. The Portkey had taken forever to make, and for a moment Severus had been resigned that it wouldn’t work. But it had. Searching for a rare Portkey that could be used without a trace on the black market and navigating through the wizarding world’s black market without alerting other Death Eaters, or worse, Order members, had been quite challenging. In the end, he was forced to Polyjuice himself as shady foreign smuggler with no loyalty or ties to the politics of wizarding Britain. But it was arranging negotiations with Dumbledore’s shady younger brother, Abe, which proved to be the most difficult out of everything, especially since the old goat didn’t trust Severus as far as he could throw him. But Abe’s distrust of Severus rivalled the man’s distrust of his own brother, and for that Severus was grateful.

When the Dark Lord had summoned them, Severus had been arranging for the word to reach older Hogwarts students that Abe could possibly be in possession of a Portkey that could be rented for the right price. Of course, he knew that no Hogwarts student in their right mind would want to rent a black market Portkey in such dark times. He trusted that Granger was smart enough to see the opportunity and use it to hunt down the ritual book. Whether or not they could was out of his hands. It made his stomach queasy to think that he had put so much trust in them to be steadfast and faithful to their oath.

None of this mattered right now. Right now, he was a Death Eater spy, and he’d have to shield every thought, every fear, and every hope he had on the four fulfilling the prophecy from the Dark Lord.
Tonight, he would be interrogated. He was sure of it. As he approached the Manor, he tried to not think of the many cruel ways the Dark Lord sometimes used to draw out information from his lackeys. The mansion’s large windows were darkened except for the faintest glow of candlelight casting elongated shadows.

When he reached the steps, the huge door opened immediately. It was a house-elf. The creature appeared quite shaken, and he was wringing his hands. Before Severus could open his mouth, Lucius appeared behind him.

The eldest Malfoy appeared calm and nonchalant, but Severus had known him long enough to know when he was not pleased or when he was anxious. Lucius did subtle well, but not to discerning eyes.

“You’re late,” Lucius drawled. “The Dark Lord is not pleased.”

It was time for Severus to put up his cloak of confidence and careful indifference.

“I’m always late, Lucius. But it’s good to know that I am missed,” he said with a smirk, ignoring Lucius’ need for some sort of reassurance that everything was all right.

Lucius put both of his hands behind his back, raising his chin to appraise Severus with speculative grey eyes. Severus didn’t have to cast Legilimens to know that Lucius was indeed worried. He was worried about Draco and about the handling of the prophecy. And if Severus had to make a guess, right now Lucius doubted him, and was second-guessing his decision to put trust in Severus to bring him and his family out unscathed. He also surmised that Lucius was probably frustrated with himself for agreeing to go along with such a preposterous plan.

They stared at each other for a few moments before Lucius sighed. “Everyone is in the drawing room, except for Pettigrew… and you.”

Severus raised his eyebrow in surprise but continued to walk towards the drawing room. Where was Pettigrew? He hoped that his absence meant that Lupin had taken his suggestion to track the rat down.

When Severus entered the drawing room, there was complete, utter silence, a tension in the air that would have made the hairs on his neck stand if he weren’t used to such suspense. That was his lot as a double agent. They were all staring at him. Bella’s lip was curled in her usual show of disapproval while the rest watched on closely, as if they were expecting a show. He expected they would get one.

He kept his face neutral as he bowed his head slightly in acknowledgment of the Dark Lord, who drew closer with a twisted smile on his noseless face.

“Severus, so good of you to finally join us! Did you have something better to do?”

“No, my Lord.”

“Oh, then why are you late? Now that you are no longer employed, I expected you to be among the first to show,” the Dark Lord said nastily.

“My Lord, I—”

“Crucio!” the Dark Lord screamed.

Blinding pain tore through Severus’s body as his knees buckled, bringing him down before the Dark Lord.
“Now, Severus, what lie were you about to tell me?”

The pain was searing, every nerve felt as it was raw and open and the curse was like salt raining down and seeping into each one. Severus struggled to hold onto his thoughts, to utter a reply that would end it, but instead of words, spittle flew from his mouth as his tongue got in the way.

He could hear Bellatrix cackling loudly and someone else sniggering. The Dark Lord, however, stood quietly, watching with cold, clinical interest as Severus continued to writhe in excruciating pain.

Severus tried his best to summon the willpower to put his Occlumency skills to work. He had to protect his thoughts, his feelings, even through the agonising pain. But time felt as if it were slipping. Each moment the Dark Lord allowed the curse to continue felt longer than the last. Had it been one minute or five? He really couldn’t tell. It only took several minutes for the Cruciatus to eat away at one’s mind. Severus had witnessed the Dark Lord use it on others before and knew that there was a chance he’d let it run its bleak course. How long would the Dark Lord allow it to rip through him?

“Severus, I’m afraid I can’t understand a word you’re saying. Speak up!”

Bellatrix laughed louder still, and Severus found a second of relief in the thought of choking the life out of her. But the pain crumbled all other coherent thought. He opened his mouth wide to gasp for breath as he began to choke on his tongue. He had always prided himself on his sharp mind but now he could feel the thin membrane between sanity and insanity stretching. No sane man could live with this pain; it would be so much easier to let go. Not that he would have a choice if the Dark Lord allowed it to go much longer. But if he did slip into insanity, perhaps it would be better than this.

The mind-numbing pain suddenly ceased and Severus collapsed, practically kissing the marble floor of the drawing room, drawing in ragged breaths as he tried to find his way back to rational thought.

Finally, he forced his eyes open and looked up; the next moments would be critical to his survival. The Dark Lord hadn’t moved an inch, but there was no more laughter or sniggering from the others, only dead silence and the sound of his own rapid breathing.

“My Lord,” he choked out, trying to gather himself so he could stand. “It is true; I was dismissed by the headmaster.”

“And why is it that you were dismissed, Severus?” the Dark Lord hissed.

“My Lord, he did not give me a sufficient reason, but I suspect that after last year’s incident involving Lucius, there has been considerable pressure from the Governors to have all former Death Eaters removed from the school.”

“And when had you planned to inform me of this?”

“As soon as I could get away, my Lord. I’ve been staying at the Order’s—”

“Nonsense! Dumbledore is head of the Order!”

“Yes, my Lord, but as you already know, he is also Headmaster of Hogwarts. He can’t be in two places at once. I needed to make sure that he didn’t block my access to Headquarters. I had to secure my membership. If I had disappeared after being dismissed, or come here as soon as you summoned me, it would have aroused suspicion and jeopardised my future with the Order.”

The Dark Lord stared, his red eyes boring into Severus’s. Severus tried to maintain eye contact to show he had nothing to hide. It was always a hard choice to make: when to be humble and when to
be confident in the presence of the Dark Lord. Right now was the time for confidence.

Finally, the Dark Lord gave him a smile that resembled a menacing snarl. “Good. Very good, Severus. Perhaps I rushed to judgment. You are my most trusted soldier. You will forgive me, won’t you?”

That was a trick question. Severus knew better.

“There is nothing to forgive, my Lord.”

Despite the fact that the Dark Lord had given him pardon, Bellatrix, Rodolphus, Rabastan, and Fenrir were still eyeing Severus with mistrust. He was used to it with them. They were jealous and suspicious of him, and that would never change.

“I’m afraid, though, that in my haste to locate you, I had Rodolphus and Rabastan burn down your house. It wasn’t personal, Severus. You do understand, don’t you?”

Severus could feel the pressure in his temple throbbing as his eyes strained not to water at the news that the only thing of value that he ever owned besides his wand was now gone. All of his books, all of his potions experiments, his lab, his toys, his sanctuary. Everything was gone.

Once again, he blacked out all thought and used his talents at Occlumency to pull another shield over his mind as he forced out his next words.

“Yes, my Lord… I understand. Although I haven’t been expelled from the Order, there are some that doubt my loyalty. I should be returning back to Headquarters soon, before my absence is questioned. Is there anything else you require of me before I leave?”

The Dark Lord smiled widely. That was never good.

“Yes, actually, there is one thing.”

Severus fought from sneering and raising his eyebrow in question. He felt a spark of hate flare, and he quickly pushed it down to give a slight nod, forcing the thinnest of smiles.

“Yes, my Lord?”

“Did you forget something when you left your post at Hogwarts?”

“My Lord?”

“Tut, tut. Severus, I put you in charge of looking after the youngest Malfoy this year, did I not?”

Severus’s mind raced as he thought of Draco, and his eyes darted to Lucius in question. Lucius’ face was stony and unreadable, as usual.

“Yes, my Lord. Draco is doing quite well, and still working on his assignment. To my knowledge —”

“...You have no knowledge, you idiot! You have no eyes! No ears! No way of even reaching the boy now that you’ve been dismissed!”

His Occlumency faltered for one moment as red-hot anger heat up his face. Being called an idiot felt worse than being spit on, but he forced his shields back up and his emotions down once more, keeping his face impassive as he waited for the Dark Lord to continue.
“In case you haven’t notice, Severus, I’ve been away,” the Dark Lord continued.

The thought of where the Dark Lord had been all this time flittered across Severus’s mind but he quickly pushed it away.

“I have, my Lord.”

“Tell me, why is it that in the nine months since Draco has been assigned to befriend Potter and his friends, I haven’t received any news about what he’s learned?”

Severus’s eyes briefly darted to Lucius, who stood stoically staring at the Dark Lord, his face giving nothing away.

“Perhaps because, my Lord, there is nothing to report.”

“Oh, but I get empty updates all the time! Do not make excuses. You risk more than your own life when you do. There’s someone here I’d like you to meet,” he hissed, turning to look at Nott. “Bring him out!”

Severus wrinkled his brow in confusion, looking to Nott, who appeared entirely too smug. His eyes darted to Lucius, who looked just as puzzled as he felt. That brought no comfort to Severus.

When Nott returned to the room, there was a balding, pug-faced, middle-aged man in a nicely tailored suit trailing close to him. The man appeared nervous, lacking the cultured cool veneer worn by Death Eaters and the seasoned, corrupt Ministry officials with whom they consorted.

“Nott has just introduced me to a close acquaintance of his. Severus, I’d like you to meet Mr. Parkinson. He works for the Ministry, and as you probably already know, Severus, his daughter, Pansy, attends Hogwarts with Draco.”

Severus held his breath, waiting to see where this was going. Whatever reaction Lucius made obviously wasn’t pleasing to the Dark Lord, who turned his red glare onto the eldest Malfoy, his cruel smile growing.

“Lucius, come closer. You don’t want to miss this.”

Severus saw Lucius take the tiniest of breaths as he stepped forward; his eyes were like cold shards of ice ready to spear Mr. Parkinson. Severus knew Lucius wanted nothing to do with the man.

“Nott tells me that his son has been observing Draco for many months now,” the Dark Lord explained.

Severus’s eyes flickered to Nott, who was the picture of barely constrained excitement. Ambition was a Slytherin trait that could never be underestimated. Severus inwardly groaned to think that it could cause severe problems for Draco.

“His son has informed him that Ms. Parkinson observed Draco in a rather precarious position with Potter’s Mudblood, the one I sent him to befriend.”

Severus raised an eyebrow at that. “Precarious, my Lord?”

The Dark Lord turned towards Mr. Parkinson, who was sweating at the brow, his beady eyes darting nervous from the Dark Lord to Severus.

“Tell him what your daughter saw!” the Dark Lord demanded.
“Ah—yes, um, well, Pansy… Pansy told me she saw Draco kissing Hermione Granger. She strongly
believes that Draco has feelings for the girl and has even openly shown favouritism towards her over
other perfectly respectable pure-blood girls.”

Severus sighed. This was easy. Draco’s assignment provided the perfect alibi for such behaviour.

“My Lord, it is understandable how Nott and Parkinson could have mistaken what they saw. Your
assignment for Draco would require—”

“Kissing?” Nott interrupted. “I don’t see how kissing a Mudblood could help Malfoy carry out the
Dark Lord’s wishes. Face it: he’s fallen for the girl.”

Severus watched as Lucius set his jaw and turned a steely glare on Nott.

“I assure you, Nott,” Lucius began, his voice dripping with disdain. “that my son is a proud pure-
blood and a diligent and loyal follower of the Dark Lord. He would do whatever was required to be
successful.” His eyes sharply turned to Mr. Parkinson. “Furthermore, Parkinson, your daughter is not
privy to the nature of Draco’s full assignment or the methods he has devised to carry it out. What you
should be concerned about is why your daughter feels the need to meddle in affairs that are none of
her business. Is she aware of the penalty for telling lies to the Dark Lord?”

Mr. Parkinson’s eyes went wide as he stared back at Lucius. “I—I do not think Pansy would lie—”

“Wouldn’t she?” Lucius sneered in a mocking tone. “It’s no secret your daughter is quite taken with
my son. She has been for many, many years.”

“Now, wait one minute!” Mr. Parkinson protested.

“I will not! You see, Parkinson, this is my home, and—”

“Lucius,” the Dark Lord interrupted. “You misspeak. This was your home. Do not forget your
place.”

Lucius’ lips twitched as he looked down deferentially. “Yes, my Lord.”

“Parkinson should be commended for coming forward,” the Dark Lord said with a leering smile. “It
is always good to have Ministry employees on our side.”

Mr. Parkinson quickly nodded to show his support and then pulled out a handkerchief to wipe his
sweaty brow.

“My Lord, pardon me, but have you at least considered why a lowly Ministry official would bother
to come forward with schoolgirl gossip passed on by his lovesick daughter?” Lucius offered.
“Clearly he wants something from you, just as much as his daughter probably wants Draco.”

Mr. Parkinson opened his mouth and then closed it as Lucius stood staring fixedly at him.

“Yes, Lucius, I have,” the Dark Lord replied. “And you are correct - Mr. Parkinson wants favour
with us. We will compensate him generously, and he will continue to look out for our best interests
inside of the Ministry. Whether or not his daughter fancies your son means nothing to me. But I am
concerned that Draco is losing sight of his original goal.”

“I assure you, my Lord, he has not,” Lucius said emphatically.

The Dark Lord glided closer to Lucius. “Then why have I not received any report on his progress in
many months?” he whispered.

“My Lord, pardon me once more, but as you have already said, you have not been here. If you would like a report, I am sure Draco will most eager to provide you with one.”

The Dark Lord’s smile grew more twisted as his upper lip curled. “I see, so I have to ask for information in order to receive it—is that what you’re saying, Lucius?” he asked in a daring tone.

Severus watched as Lucius took several moments to deliberate his next answer.

“Don’t bother answering that. I’ll let Draco answer for you,” the Dark Lord sneered.

“My Lord—”

“Silence! Nott!”

Severus watched as Nott eagerly stepped forward. “Yes, my Lord?”

“You may send for your son. He will be granted the Dark Mark for his loyalty.”

“Thank you, my Lord,” Nott said breathlessly, bowing steeply with a small smile on his face.

“Lucius…”

Lucius held his head up a higher. He appeared to be bracing himself. “Yes, My Lord?”

“I expected you to disappoint me. You’ve done it before. I had hoped that your son would redeem you. But alas, it appears he cannot be counted on any more than his father. Or can he? We shall see what exactly he’s been up to when you send for him.”

Lucius frowned. It was the first time Severus had ever seen him looking clearly troubled. When he didn’t reply, the Dark Lord drew even closer. Severus could feel the dark, threatening energy radiating from him even from his position several feet away.

“Bring him home.”

Lucius blinked and then his eyes wandered over to his wife, Narcissa, who was standing against the far wall, looking ill.

He pursed his lips, bowing slightly. “Yes, my Lord, of course, but… Draco is on an school excursion today.”

“Well, then you can go and retrieve him tomorrow,” the Dark Lord said, sighing and turning from Lucius.

“My Lord?”

“What is it, Lucius?” the Dark Lord said, turning back to stare at him.

Lucius’ eyes were focused, and Severus could tell he was thinking furiously of a way to stall bringing his son home. “My Lord, if you would consider, how it would appear to Dumbledore and the other teaching staff if both Nott and I were to arrive at Hogwarts to pick up our sons? We may cast unnecessary suspicion on them.”

The Dark Lord chuckled. “Very well then, Lucius. Let Draco have his fun today and rest tomorrow. I expect you to bring him home on Monday. Is that clear?”
Lucius pursed his lips. “Yes, my Lord,” he said.

“In the meantime, everyone take a seat, get comfortable.”

Severus wrinkled his brow in confusion. What else did the Dark Lord have planned?

An imaginary bell began to sound off in his head, growing louder as the other Death Eaters, except for Bellatrix, began to take their seats in a semicircle formed around him. Severus looked behind him. There was no chair for him. He turned to see the Dark Lord gliding towards him, his red eyes almost gleeful.

It wasn’t over. Not by a long shot. Severus summoned all of his will power and the rest of his reserve. It was going to be a very long and painful night.

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Lucius felt as if someone had hit him with a powerful Confundus Charm. Despite the fact that the Dark Lord was about to force him to watch Snape’s punishment and humiliation, his eyes were glued to his wife. Narcissa stood against the far wall. Even from this distance, her face looked paler than usual and her eyes glimmered in the faint candlelight, full of silent tears that she dared not shed in present company. No one else saw that she was just barely holding on, no one except for Lucius. They stood at opposite ends of the room, locked in a grave stare of understanding. Draco would be coming home soon. Lucius couldn’t rip his eyes from his wife, and the damning accusation that lay in her stare.

*What have you done, Lucius? What have you done?*

There had been a time when the thought of his son coming home would infuse Lucius with energy and excitement. Even though he maintained a cool demeanour around the boy, and rarely showed any affection, his heart always smiled whenever Draco was home.

But as the Dark Lord has just reminded him, the Manor was no longer their home, and once Draco arrived, his fate would be out of Lucius’ hands.

Lucius could feel bile rising from his stomach as he forced himself to look away from his wife’s condemning stare.

“Strip, and do it quickly,” the Dark Lord hissed at Snape.

As he watched Snape undress, Lucius recalled a time when he took pride and even some pleasure in carrying out similar punishments at the wish of the Dark Lord. He had even been praised for his thorough and sadistic knack for finding the most vulnerable places to hurt a victim. But now, watching torture was monotonous and it was a weary reminder of the sickness he had allowed into his home. Once Snape finished stripping off his clothing, revealing a thin and scarred body, Lucius felt a great measure of relief that he would not be the one performing the punishment tonight.

“How do you know why you are about to be punished, Severus?” the Dark Lord asked.

Snape gritted his teeth, straightening his posture and projecting confidence despite his nude form. Lucius had to give it to the git—he always took his punishment stoically.

“How because you were responsible for Draco. As head of Slytherin, you were responsible for watching over all of our boys. I had plans. Plans that now have to be reworked because there is no one inside of Hogwarts who can give them protection.”
“My Lord...”

“Quiet! Not only have you foiled my plans, but you’ve also failed to keep Draco on task. If it is discovered he is indeed in love with a Mudblood or worse, really thinks Harry Potter is his friend, I will kill him, Severus, and then you will owe Lucius an apology.”

Lucius felt like he had been hit with ice-cold water. He tried in vain to push the Dark Lord’s threat from his mind, but instead of Snape, all he could picture was Draco standing before him, at the mercy of the monster he had foolishly sworn allegiance to.

His heart hurt and thoughts of how he could make this right and find a way for his son to avoid such a fate began to form.

They were quickly vanquished when he heard the snap of a large bullwhip. He blinked as the sudden awareness that he was staring at Snape and not Draco became evident once more.

Bella was laughing. Cackling, really. He hated that bitch’s laugh. It always meant something foul was taking place—either that or she was having one of her psychotic episodes.

She was holding the whip, twirling it around playfully like she was handling a harmless piece of rope. This was going to be brutal, and Lucius tried to brace himself for what he was going to witness Snape go through.

“You know, Severus, I think you’ve grown accustomed to the Cruciatius...”

Snape didn’t reply, his eyes followed Bella though as she began to circle him.

“And it’s not really a very useful punishment... I can’t make use of a spy who’s insane. However, a whipping, a really good whipping, can last for weeks. But I don’t have to tell you that, do I, Severus? How many lashes do you think you deserve?”

Snape took a breath, his eyes darting to Bella, who put the bullwhip up to her lips, smiling tauntingly back at him.

“Whatever you feel is appropriate, my Lord.”

“Are you sure, Severus?” the Dark Lord asked with false doubt.

Snape was given no time to reply as Bellatrix reared back the whip. It sliced through the air, cracking as it did before landing on his bare chest, slicing his pale skin in a diagonal line. The blood barely had time to surface from the wound before she struck him with another brutal lash, this one crisscrossing the first, forming a bloody red X on his chest.

Lucius tried to keep his eyes on the display and not flinch despite the incessant vision of Draco taking Snape’s place. Truthfully, in some way Lucius felt Snape deserved this for not protecting Draco, for coming up with such a foolish plan, for talking Lucius into going along with it and giving him false hope.

It was stupid of Snape to think that a sexual prophecy could overthrow the Dark Lord, just as stupid as the ridiculous myth that Lily Potter’s love had somehow destroyed the Dark Lord and saved Harry Potter. That was a lie, a proven lie. The Dark Lord was standing right here in his drawing room, Lily Potter was dead, and Harry Potter’s days were numbered. The magic of love and sex were no match for such power. They were fool’s gold for those who lay stock in fairytales and happy endings, and yet, for one moment, Snape had managed to convince Lucius that happy endings were possible.
The whip cracked through the air once more, and Lucius was jarred from his thoughts by Snape’s reluctant pained outcry. After blooding his chest with several lashes, Bella had struck him across the thighs, leaving a nasty bright red horizontal welt. Blood ran from Snape’s wounds, down his abdomen and legs and began to collect on the floor.

Lucius gazed at Snape’s face; he still hadn’t shed any tears, but his mouth quivered as he struggled to hold his composure. But Bella was cold and determined, just the way the Dark Lord wished, and she seemed intent on breaking the man. She hit him once more on each side. Some of the wounds from her lashes were more severe than others. It had become difficult to distinguish the stripes; Snape’s chest looked like a bloody mess. Bella didn’t give him a moment’s reprieve as she circled him, quickly snapping the whip back to lay two more swift strikes against his back.

Although Lucius could not see Snape’s back, he saw the droplets of blood as they landed on the floor. He continued to stare stoically at the wounded man in front of him and began to feel a measure of remorse for thinking Snape deserved such a punishment. The man was barely holding on, struggling to stand, and his eyes were full of pain as he tried not to make another sound. It wasn’t long before Snape’s bravery caved and by Bella’s twelfth lash, he was openly crying out in anguish. Each lash of the bullwhip cut into his flesh, and Lucius began to measure whether the whip had cut flesh or muscle by the amount of blood and the pitch of Snape’s screams.

By the time Bella reached the tenth lash, Lucius had to force his hand against arm of his chair to continue watching. Snape fell to the floor, screaming.

Lucius dared not look away, for fear of looking sympathetic and affected. The Dark Lord was already convinced that he was a weak link, and everything he did now could be used as further proof of that.

He glanced up as his peripheral picked out a figure drawing closer. It was Greyback, and he was leering at Snape, licking his lips, a long strand of drool hanging from his mouth. The werewolf’s eyes lit up at the sight of Snape lying with open cuts on his body. Greyback stooped down to poke his finger in the puddle of blood on the floor and then licked it off of his fingertip, his eyes half closing as if the blood was as sweet as honey.

“He’s a lot tastier than he looks,” Greyback said, chuckling darkly and drawing closer to Snape.

Although Snape lay in a shaking mess on the floor, his greasy hair covering half of his face, the white of his eyes were wide and terrified as he stared back at Greyback. Lucius imagined beating the beast over the head with his cane, or even better, sending him outside to sleep in the wild, where he belonged. He always hated the oversized dog, but the Dark Lord was quite fond of him.

Greyback smiled widely, revealing all of his teeth. Even in human form, they were quite sharp.

“I know your fears, Severus,” the Dark Lord taunted. “You’re scared of werewolves, aren’t you? If you proved to be a liability, I could always feed you to him.”

The whip cracked once more, hitting Snape’s back, and he let out a strangled cry, keeping his eyes fixed on Fenrir. Bella paused, looking between them, and then gave Snape a nasty smile.

“Aw!” she cooed. “Would you look at that? He really is scared! Snape’s scared of the big bad wolf!”

Fenrir chuckled low in his throat, licking his lips as Snape struggled to move back on his knees away from the werewolf.

“Get away from him, Fenrir,” the Dark Lord said in a bored tone.
Greyback’s leer became a sour frown as he glanced up at the Dark Lord, retreating begrudgingly to his former place near the hearth.

Lucius’ eyes scanned the other Death Eaters; they were all watching. Rabastan and Rodolphus both wore impressed evil grins as they watched Bella. The Carrows were both grimacing, probably more at Snape than the actual punishment. Crabbe, Goyle, Nott, and Dolohov wore carefully planted neutral expressions, but Lucius knew better. Snape’s punishment was an example for everyone. The Dark Lord did not like mistakes, and he hated when things did not go as planned. Compared to such brutality, sometimes death and insanity were preferred.

Bella hit Snape one more time, causing the man to scream out in a way that Lucius hadn’t heard since they had tortured the Squib apothecary clerk who had refused to make a sale to Death Eaters.

“That’s enough, Bella. I don’t want to permanently cripple him. Leave him,” the Dark Lord hissed.

Lucius silently sighed in relief. Finally, it was over.

“I really hate punishing you, Severus. Believe me, it hurts me more than it hurts you. Don’t force me to do that again,” the Dark Lord said with feigned regret.

He stood over Snape, waiting for acknowledgement, and Snape lifted his head, croaking out a feeble, “Yes, my Lord.”

“Oh, no, no, Severus, that will not do. You should be thanking me for my mercy. It could have been much worse.”

“Thank you, my Lord.” Snape whispered, his body still shaking from the impact of Bella’s beating.

“Very good. Now, everyone, leave us!” the Dark Lord hissed.

Lucius gave Snape one last look before rising from his seat. He cast a quick glance towards Narcissa as he walked past her.

The other Death Eaters filtered out to various parts of his home: the dungeons, the first floor parlour, and the kitchen. As shaken as he felt, Lucius maintained a cool air as he walked calmly down the long corridor leading to his study. Once inside, he took a seat on the couch, staring past his desk at the large window behind it. It was night, and there was no moon, no stars. Just darkness.

Narcissa arrived not two minutes later, closing the door behind her.

“Lucius!” she cried, throwing her arms around him, burying her face against his shoulder. “What are we going to do? Draco can’t come home! You know what will happen if he does!”

Lucius closed his eyes, trying to gather his composure and dignity. Everything inside of him was shaking and there was a dull pain in his chest as the tears of his wife soaked through his grey silk shirt. He would not have a breakdown with her.

“Now, now, dear… please, stop crying,” he whispered, slowly wrapping his arms around her and holding her tight. But Narcissa’s sobs did not subside; they only grew louder as her whole body began to shake in his arms.

“You promised you’d find a way out of this!”

“Cissy…”
“You promised! Not Draco, not my Draco,” she cried over and over again.

Lucius felt helpless and guilty all at once. He hated it. Neither was very helpful at the moment. “Please, Narcissa… please stop crying,” he insisted a little louder.

“No! This is your fault! All your fault!” She grabbed his shirt and balled it in her tiny fists. “You’ve brought this on our house! Damn you, Lucius! Draco is just a boy!” she cried as she went back and forth between shaking him and embracing him.

That was enough to strengthen Lucius’ resolve. If anyone heard her, it would raise suspicion and cast doubts about their loyalty to the Dark Lord. Doing the Dark Lord’s bidding was supposed to be priority and having one’s son given an assignment by the Dark Lord was considered the highest honour next to receiving the Mark. There were eyes and ears everywhere, and Lucius would be damned if he lost the chance to get his family out this alive because of the cries of his distraught wife.

He stiffened, grabbing Narcissa by the wrists and holding them up in front of her, as he kept his eyes steady on hers. “Stop it!”

“No, Lucius—”

“Quiet Cissy! You’ve said enough!” he whispered harshly. “Now, it is my turn to speak. Do not interrupt me again, do you understand?”

Narcissa closed her eyes for moment and then closed her mouth tightly. When she opened her eyes again, she sat in silence, waiting for Lucius to speak.

“Now listen to me. Draco is no longer a boy; he is a young man. We cannot protect him. He is very smart and capable because we raised him well. I am sure he will make the right choice when he arrives. Regardless, we have to keep a strong and steadfast appearance. Despite our concerns, you must remember that our allegiance is to the Dark Lord first. That must never be questioned or all of our lives are at risk. Do you understand?”

Narcissa opened her mouth as if to protest, and Lucius’ grip on her wrist tightened. He needed her obedience right now—it was all he had left. They had to keep it together if they were going to make it.

One last tear escaped her eye before Narcissa nodded slowly.

“Tell me that you will remain strong for our family’s sake, for Draco… for me,” he demanded softly.

“I will, Lucius. I will remain strong,” she whispered.

Lucius sighed, pulling her close. “Good,” he said tenderly, giving her a kiss on the lips and then the forehead. “Now, go and get ready for bed. I will join you shortly.”

He tried to give her the best smile he could muster, which he knew wasn’t very good. Narcissa’s eyes were still full of worry but there was acceptance in them as well, and if Lucius wasn’t mistaken, a tiny sliver of hope. She took one last look at him and then rose to make an exit.

Once she closed the door behind her, Lucius stood up and withdrew his wand, casting a powerful locking charm on the door. He exhaled, closing his eyes. When he opened them, he glanced around his study until his eyes fell onto a moving portrait in the far corner.

Slowly, he walked across the room to pick it up and study it closely. It was a picture Narcissa had taken of him and Draco in the garden. Draco had only been nine years old at the time. There were
rules about teaching children how to fly too early, but Lucius had never taken stock in the rules, so he had let Draco practice on his broom. A genuine small smile appeared as he recalled with fondness how his son had nearly broken his arm trying to impress his mother.

And despite Draco’s trepidation afterward, Lucius had been adamant about his son getting up to try again. He even got on the broom with Draco to show the boy he had nothing to fear. Lucius remembered it as one of Draco’s first significant lessons about what it meant to bear the Malfoy name. He remembered telling Draco that Malfoys never repeated their mistakes, they learned from them. It was a promise he had made himself the day Draco was born. He wanted to teach Draco every lesson he had learned from his own mistakes, so that his son would never have to repeat them. Draco was going to be everything Lucius was not; a better man, a better Malfoy.

But as Lucius stared at the picture of his nine year old son flying safely within his arms, he realized he had learned his most important lesson much too late.

He reached out to grip the bookshelf for support, his eyes fixed on Draco’s smile, cursing his tears as he began to cry.
The Long Kiss Goodbye

I'm looking for directions  
For out of this place  
I start to wonder  
If you'll come back  
I feel the rain storming after thunder  
I can't hold back…  
Don't leave me

“Don’t Leave Me” by Greenday

Hey, hey, hey  
Ain't no mercy,  
Ain't no mercy there for me

I'm pain, I'm hope, I'm suffer

Do you bury me when I'm gone?  
Do you teach me while I'm here?  
Just as soon as I belong,  
Then it's time I disappear.

“I Disappear” by Metallica

By the time Hermione, Harry and Ron had arrived back in the common room from Hogsmeade, most of Gryffindor had already settled comfortably, talking, and sharing the sweets and magical gadgets purchased during the visit. When they entered, many looks were cast the Trio’s way, but Hermione’s heated gaze quickly averted most of the stares. She was in no mood for another row with her house, and she was ready to challenge anyone who felt like being nosy. No one did, though. Still, she held the satchel slung over her shoulders close to her body. The magical spell book was inside, and she wasn’t taking any chances at anyone getting a glimpse at it.

She spotted Ginny in the corner snuggled up with Dean. To Hermione’s surprise, except for a brief grunt, Ron didn’t give any indication that he cared as he walked to the opposite side of the room to sit on the couch.

Hermione ran upstairs to hide the book underneath her mattress. When she returned, Harry was sitting across from Ron with a chessboard set up between them. Hermione took a seat beside Harry, to watch them play. It wasn’t long before her thoughts drifted to Draco. She wondered what he was doing right now. Was he being bombarded by questions from his house?

“Hermione!”

Hermione blinked, unaware that Ginny had taken a seat beside her. Parvati was sitting directly across from her, beside Ron on the couch.

“Did you hear me?” Ginny asked, her eyes studying Hermione’s in frustration.
“Ah, no, what did you say?”

“I asked you, ‘where did you guys end up going’? We were looking all over for you!”

“Oh, er, Ron, well, he…” Hermione swallowed. “Got into a bit of trouble.”

Parvati looked to her left at Ron. “Oh? What sort of trouble?”

Ron rolled his eyes. “It’s no big deal, really…”

Harry laughed, “If you want to call pulling you out of the floorboards of the Shrieking Shack no big deal, then I suppose you’re right.”

“The Shrieking Shack?” Ginny gasped. “What were you doing there?”

“Long story.” Ron shook his head dismissively.

Ginny raised her eyebrows and leaned back. “Well, it’s not like we have anything else to do right now. Tell us what happened.”

Hermione leaned forward and began to weave their concocted alibi involving Draco and the wager for Ron to go inside of the Shrinking Shack, much to Ron’s chagrin. His huffs of disapproval became louder as she continued. While Parvati and Ginny listened in rapt attention, Hermione glanced over to see Ron lean back in the couch, staring daggers at her. Evidently, he found being portrayed as the clumsy git in need of rescuing more infuriating than she thought.

She smirked, somewhat entertained by his apparent anger. When he narrowed his eyes at her, she began to embellish the story, making Ron sound even dimmer than they had originally agreed upon. Hermione knew she was pressing her luck, but she just couldn’t help it. For some reason she couldn’t explain, getting under Ron’s skin always made her heart race a little faster. She almost enjoyed seeing him so affected by something she said.

She laughed, glancing in his direction. “And you know how easy it is to goad Ron into something; all Draco had to do was challenge him, and he ran off without thinking towards the Shrieking Shack…”

She froze suddenly as a strong tingling sensation grew in her right breast. At first, the vibration in the ring felt like an after-effect of her new piercing, but then the ring began to quiver as if someone were flicking it.

“And then,” she said, struggling to continue. “Uh… ah!” Hermione gasped, looking up and trying not to appear suspicious as she gawked back at Ron.

He was twisting the small white gold ring on his finger. There was a devilish smirk on his face and one of his eyebrows raised in a challenge. She tried to continue talking as he adjusted the ring once more. There was a pull on her right breast, it hurt but there was something else mixed in with the pain, something that made Hermione’s eyelids flutter.

“Hermione, are you all right?” Ginny asked, putting her hand on her friend’s shoulder.

“Yeah, Hermione, are you OK?” Ron asked with concern on his face.

Git.

“I-I’m fine!” she squeaked as he adjusted the ring once more, sending a tiny shock through her
“Well, finish the story. Perhaps I was wrong—it’s actually pretty funny, eh?” Ron said.

There was another pull in her nipple that made her wince. “Ah! Oh… well, I was being rather facetious before… It was very brave of Ron to go in there. I mean… I couldn’t believe he went in there alone!” she added quickly.

Finally, she felt the pull on her right nipple relax and then completely cease. She glanced back up at Ron, who was now fully concentrating on the chessboard in front of him as though nothing had occurred.

Parvati and Ginny were staring at her oddly but was grateful that the rest of the story seemed to distract their attention from her behaviour. By the end of it they were both giggling and sniggering as they cast amused glances at Ron.

“It’s not *that* funny,” Ron said in annoyance.

“No one told you to go in there by yourself, Ron. Honestly. If Mum and Dad knew half of what you’ve been up to this year—” Ginny said, shaking her head.

“Well, Mum and Dad aren’t here, are they? And I’d appreciate it if you’d stop bringing them up every bloody minute,” he snapped.

Ginny rolled her eyes. “Don’t bite my head off just because you’re scared to face them.”

Parvati and Harry watched on in interest as Ron glanced around at everyone. Suddenly Hermione felt bad for him. She had never really considered how difficult this year was for him with their relationship being outed and Ginny being right under his nose all the time.

“Ginny…” Hermione said in a soft but demanding voice.

Ginny huffed, giving Ron one last glance but keeping her silence.

“Hermione, would you like to see what I got in the new fabrics shop, Tills and Twillery?” Parvati asked excitedly.

Hermione nodded eagerly, happy to be switching subjects. “Of course.”

Parvati jumped in her seat and then began to unwrap the new scarf wrapped around her neck.

Hermione tried to keep her attention on the girl, but a hundred thoughts were running through her head: how the Weasleys would react if and when Ron broke the news about her and Harry, Ron’s recent display of power through the use of the magical ring, and whether or not Draco was fairing alright in his house right now. What exactly was next for all of them now that the ritual had been discovered and performed? What exactly were they supposed to do?

Inwardly sighing, she tried to smile as Parvati droned on about her latest purchase, wishing that for once, she did not think so much and could just enjoy conversation about such superficial things.

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When Draco returned to the Slytherin common room, he was met with conspicuous stares. He rolled his eyes, brushing them off with an amused smirk as he made his way over to Crabbe and Goyle. They both seemed to be concentrating particularly hard on their snacks.
“Hello, lads. How goes it?” he asked casually.

Crabbe and Goyle exchanged glances and cast brief looks his way, followed by curt nods.

Draco sat down, staring between them in puzzlement.

“Is there a problem?” he asked softly.

“Where were you?” Goyle leaned in and whispered harshly.

“You know where I was,” Draco said in exasperation, as if Goyle were being idiotic.

“No, I don’t. I have no idea where you’ve been. But I am pretty sure who you’ve been with.”

“And?” Draco said softly with a challenge.

“And you’ve been looking a bit too comfortable with them lately.”

Before Draco could speak, Crab cut in.

“Did you have to go and make a show of it?” he asked. “You broke away from the house to go and find them! And then you just up and vanish for the entire trip!”

“Exactly,” Goyle whispered furiously. “Why not just make a public announcement that you’re no longer our friend or something! Right now, the whole school thinks—”

“I don’t care what the whole school thinks!” Draco snapped, his voice raised. All chatter ceased, and the only sound that could be heard was ticking of the enormous serpentine clock on the wall. Draco turned his head around to see the entire Slytherin common room staring back at him, including Nott, Pansy, and Blaise.

Draco restrained a groan. So it had come to this. He hated this. He hated what he was about to do. He didn’t want to be associated with the snakeface freak occupying his home, he didn’t want to bear his father’s legacy of being a Death Eater, or confirm what everyone was thinking—that he was a Death Eater in training. He had managed to put that off for nearly the entire year, but the Death Eater card was his last one, and he had to play it.

Gritting his teeth, he stood up and turned around to face the room. “Talk about me all you like. I don’t care what any of you think! I am still a Slytherin. And if anyone here wants to question my loyalty, they can take it up with the Dark Lord. My business is his business.”

There were a few gasps and whispers, and he tried not to roll his eyes in disgust as several eyes widened and then dropped in embarrassment and shame. He was sickened by the thought that he was surrounded by so many who respected the Dark Lord.

When he turned back to face Crabbe and Goyle, he was disappointed to see that they were not as impressed as everyone else. In fact, they were looking at him even more suspiciously than before.

“Upstairs, now,” Draco ordered.

Crabbe and Goyle did not move, but remained staring at him defiantly.

Draco refused to walk away defeated, so he simply shrugged. “Fine then, stay here,” he said, turning around to head for the stairs.
By the time he made it up to his dormitory, Crabbe and Goyle were right on his heels. He waited for them to take their seats on their beds before shutting the door.

Draco leaned against it, waiting for whatever questions they had.

Goyle’s face was pinched in frustration. “Alright, Draco, now that we’re alone, you mind telling me and Crabbe just what the hell is going on? You’ve been keeping us in the dark for too long! We have a right to know!”

Draco sighed wearily. “Not because I wanted to, Goyle. It’s just that I—“

“Can’t talk about it,” Crabbe and Goyle said in unison.

Goyle shook his head. “Listen, Draco, whatever it is you’re up to, it’s not working.”

“Yeah,” Crabbe agreed. “Despite what you said out there, you look more like a blood traitor than a spy.”

“Crabbe, think!” Draco said furiously. “Of course I want to look like a blood traitor! This wouldn’t work if it became obvious I was spying on Potter and his friends!”

“We have been thinking, Draco, or are you surprised that we can think on our own?” Goyle retorted. There was resentment in his voice.

Draco stared back at him, surprised at their continued scepticism. His mind worked furiously, trying to anticipate where this was going. He never imagined it would take this much work to convince Crabbe and Goyle of anything. He had always taken their thickness and eagerness to please for granted. However, the look in Goyle’s face and his attitude conveyed that he was tired of Draco’s alibi and perhaps even offended by it.

“Crabbe and I think you’ve found yourself some new friends,” Goyle said with a challenge in his voice.

“You can’t be serious, Goyle!” Draco laughed. “Damn, I am good! I’ve even managed to fool you two!”

Crabbe and Goyle didn’t crack a smile as they stared back at Draco.

Draco huffed, going over to his bed to sit down. He threw up his hands in frustration. “Sometimes you two can really be moronic! Do you think this is easy for me? Why don’t you try it! Oh, yes, I forgot, the Dark Lord didn’t assign you to do it!”

Crabbe gave Draco a once-over and sighed. “Draco, Pansy said—”

Draco let out a dry sarcastic laugh. “You’re listening to Pansy now?”

“Well, she and a few of the other girls said they saw you chasing Granger down the hall like a lovesick bird.”

Draco shrugged. “So what? You know Granger is attention-starved. Why do think she’s always raising her hand and mouthing off in class? She likes to feel special. I’m just giving her what she wants. And it’s working! I practically have her eating out of my hand!”

“Yeah?” Goyle said. “So I suppose the Dark Lord will want to hear about all the progress you’ve made with them soon, eh?”
Despite the tug of panic bubbling in his gut, Draco kept his face impassive, trying not to betray anything. He would have to make a report soon. He had almost forgotten about it. Not being called on by the Dark Lord and the lack of communication between him and his family over the past few months had made it much easier to forget. A small part of him had even hoped perhaps the Dark Lord had decided his assignment was no longer of any use or interest.

“When the Dark Lord summons me, Goyle, he’ll be pleased with what I have to tell him,” he answered confidently.

Crabbe and Goyle exchanged another quick glance and then nodded slowly. Draco felt some relief in his stomach to see that they appeared more satisfied and convinced of his allegiance.

“For your sake, Draco, I hope that’s true,” Crabbe said. “Nott and Pansy have been saying things to their parents.”

The thought of what exactly they had been telling their fathers, and what his own father was thinking about him at the moment, crossed his mind, but Draco quickly pushed it away.

“It doesn’t matter,” Draco said confidently. “Nott and Pansy haven’t got the foggiest clue about what I’m up to. They can spread false rumours all they want. We’ll see who comes out the liar.”

“Just watch yourself, alright?” Crabbe said, displaying the same anxiety Draco had seen when he had come back with the Mark on his arm many months ago. It almost made Draco feel guilty for lying to them. Almost.

Draco shook his head. “You worry too much, Crabbe. We’ve been friends for too long for you to doubt me now.”

Goyle smiled. “Right… that’s true. And Nott is a slimy bastard. I don’t really trust him at all. Besides, I suspect he’s jealous of you.”

Draco smirked.

But Crabbe was still frowning. “Still, that doesn’t change the fact that it looked fishy—you spending your entire Hogsmeade trip with that lot.”

“It wasn’t easy, believe me,” Draco said with exaggerated weariness.

“Yeah? Well, what did you guys get into?” Crabbe asked, finally taking a seat on his bed.

Draco clicked his teeth in disdain. “It was a complete waste of time, really. The Weasel really gets on my nerves. The highlight of the day was rescuing him from the Shrieking Shack.”

“No way! How’d he end up there?” Crabbe asked with an amused grin.

Draco chuckled. “He’s a Weasley and a bloody Gryffindor, need I say more?”

Goyle chuckled. “So, what happened?”

“We got into it after he went shooting off at the mouth. You know how much rubbish he talks.”

Crabbe and Goyle nodded in understanding.

“So I bet him he couldn’t get up the nerve up to go in the Shrieking Shack by himself… I was only
joking, but the daft git actually went inside!”

Crabbe and Goyle laughed.

Draco laughed as well. “He was gone for a long time, and it wasn’t until we went looking for him that we discovered he had fallen through the floorboards.”

Both Crabbe and Goyle’s laughter grew louder, and Crabbe fell back on his bed, holding his stomach.

“The floorboards? That place is rotten—who would be stupid enough to go in there alone?” Goyle managed through his laughter.

“Ron Weasley, that’s who,” Draco said, shaking his head. “Potter, Granger, and I had to pull him out—after I got my winnings, of course.”

Goyle sniggered. “Good one.”

Draco was glad to see that the alibi held up and seemed amusing enough to ease the tension between them. “Well, what have you two been up to? I haven’t seen much of you two lately.”

“That’s because you spend all of your time hanging around them,” Goyle said with lingering bitterness in his voice.

“We’ve been around,” Crabbe said. “But, er…” He leaned in. “We have our own assignments to think about.”

Draco squinted at them in confusion. Crabbe and Goyle’s had assignments? He hadn’t noticed them doing anything unusual lately.

“Really? Like what?” Draco asked.

Goyle and Crabbe exchanged a look.

“We can’t really tell you,” Goyle said guardedly. “But, well… if you tell us what you know about Potter and his lot, then we’ll tell you what we’ve been up to.”

Draco narrowed his eyes. He’d have to give them something good.

“If I tell you, it can’t leave this room, not even your dads can know… not until I investigate it further,” Draco started.

Crabbe and Goyle both nodded eagerly, and their eyes lit up the way they used to when they’d share hurtful gossip and plan cruel pranks.

“Alright, here goes.” Draco sighed. “Potter and his friends are reforming Dumbledore’s Army…”

Goyle wrinkled his face. “Really? Are you sure? We’ve been scoping out the Room of Requirement and we know for a fact they can’t be meeting in there, so where are they meeting?”

“The Shrieking Shack,” Draco answered. “That’s the real reason we were gone all day. Potter is scouting it out as a possible spot for their new headquarters…”

“What?” Crabbe gasped.

“Yeah, and that’s not the half of it,” Draco continued. “They’re looking for other locations to
practice, off grounds. They’ve acquired contacts.”

“Contacts?” Crabbe repeated, looking impressed.

“Throughout Europe…”

“Blimey!” Goyle gasped.

Draco nodded gravely. “Yeah, there’s a worldwide blood traitor network. They’ve also been able to acquire a bunch of new spells, stuff they don’t even teach seventh years here, like real life Auror shite.”

“No way!” Crabbe and Goyle both said in astonishment.

Draco nodded.

“What are you going to do?” Goyle asked.

“The only thing I can do,” Draco said in resignation. “Observe and learn as much as I can. I’ll tell the Dark Lord when I’ve gotten all the information I need, and it’s safe.”

Goyle stared at Draco in awe. “Wow, Draco. This is huge! The Dark Lord will be pleased.”

“Yeah, and you’ll probably get some sort of reward!” Crabbe added.

Goyle shook his head. “I guess we owe you an apology. I’m sorry I doubted you.”

Draco waved off the apology with a dismissive hand. “It’s alright, Goyle. If I were in your position, I’d be suspicious of me as well.”

Crabbe smiled. “You’re a very convincing blood traitor.”

“I have to be; my life depends on it,” Draco replied. “But you both should know by now that I would never! I mean, can you actually imagine, me and Granger really getting together?”

Both Goyle and Crabbe made disgusted faces. “Yuck!” Crabbe said.

Draco laughed. “And being friends with Saint Potter and his clueless sidekick? I’d rather take a walk through the Forbidden Forest alone on the night of a full moon.”

Crabbed laughed. “Is it that bad?”

“It’s like torture, really!” Draco said. “They’re so boring. All Potter does is talk about himself and the press he gets.”

“Figures,” Goyle murmured, shaking his head.

“And Weasley can barely string a few words together to hold a conversation. All he really talks about is food, chess and Quidditch. And don’t even get me started on Granger. She’s the complete opposite of Weasley; she has something to say about nearly every subject! It’s like hanging out with McGonagall, Flitwick, and Sprout at the same time!”

“Damn, that’s enough to drive anyone mental!” Goyle said sympathetically.

“So sorry, Draco,” Crabbe said regretfully. “I guess we didn’t really put ourselves in your shoes.”
Draco sighed. “It’s alright. How would anyone know how bad it was unless they had to actually be around those three? Don’t worry though; all of this will soon be over. So that’s what’s been going on with me. Now, tell me, what exactly have you two been assigned to do?”

“You’ll never believe this, Draco…” Goyle said, pausing to glance at Crabbe who nodded his permission.

“Go on,” Draco encouraged.

Goyle took a deep breath. “The Dark Lord wants us to help him break into Hogwarts…”

At dinner that night, Harry tried his best to keep his eyes off Draco and focus on Ron and Hermione, but his gaze kept wandering over to the Slytherin table as Draco chatted it up with the two goons sitting on either side of him. His eyes flickered to Pansy, who, like Nott, sat farther away from the group of former friends. They didn’t appear pleased by the camaraderie that was taking place between Draco, Crabbe, and Goyle.

Whatever was going on, Draco didn’t appear to be worried about the apparent division in his house. He was laughing unusually loud and sniggering with his two old friends in a way that made Harry recall his first five years at Hogwarts. It diminished his appetite greatly, and he dropped his biscuit to sit back in disgust.

“Stop staring at him, Harry,” Ron whispered. “It looks like you have a crush on him or something.”

“I’m just worried, Ron. Something’s off.”

Hermione nodded. “It is odd. He’s laughing it up with Crabbe and Goyle, but just last week, you could have heard a pin drop over there.”

“Well, they aren’t all chummy,” Harry remarked, glancing over to Pansy and Nott.

Hermione frowned. “Pansy hasn’t made it any secret she hates him now. Probably because he’s nice to me.”

Ron leaned in. “Or maybe it’s because nearly the entire school knows he publicly rejected her to chase after you!”

Hermione blushed. “I didn’t tell him to do that, Ron!”

“It doesn’t matter, the damage is done,” Ron said. “She’s jealous. But who cares what goes on in that house anyway; it’s full of creeps. If you’re really worried about him, then the both of you need to stop looking over there.”

Harry and Hermione forcibly turned their eyes from the Slytherin table, which prompted a smile from Ron. “Now…can we talk about more important things, like when we’re going to sneak back into Hogsmeade so I can get a proper Butterbeer.”

“Oh, Ron,” Hermione sighed in exasperation.

Harry watched as she reached up to wipe a breadcrumb off of his cheek and tried to concentrate on anywhere else but the Slytherin table. Everywhere he looked, people were laughing and chatting loudly about their time in Hogsmeade, what they had bought, rumours about the recent attacks, what their families were doing in preparation. He felt out of touch, out of sync, and his head felt woozy.
Harry closed his eyes, feeling nausea building, and then took several deep breaths before opening them again. He tried to zero in on what Hermione was saying and will the nausea away. She was explaining contingency plans for her parents in Oxford, while Ron looked lost in thought about his own family, remarking here and there what precautions the Weasleys had already taken to strengthen the wards on the Burrow and how worried his mum was for Ginny’s safety, even at Hogwarts.

Harry glanced down the table at Ginny, who was holding hands with Dean. They were staring at each other like they were lost in their own world. He was very happy for her; it certainly relieved his guilt for the way he and Hermione had revealed their relationship to her.

An image of Mrs. and Mr. Weasley’s faces flashed in his mind, and he briefly thought about what they would think of him and Hermione dating their son. He could almost see the disdain and shock on their faces. Shaking his head and trying to think of more pleasant things, Harry’s eyes were instinctively drawn back to the Slytherin table.

Crabbe said something and pointed towards the first year end of the Hufflepuff table where there was a boy sitting with an oversized pair of ears, undoubtedly given to him by Crabbe. Goyle and Draco burst out laughing, as did many at the Slytherin table.

Harry frowned in disapproval, but not before catching Draco’s eyes. While Draco appeared to be laughing, his eyes were quite serious. He put his left hand to his mouth as if covering it and when he did, the charmed coin was lodged between his middle and ring fingers. He gave Harry a short but meaningful stare and then flipped the coin in the air as he said something that made Crabbe, Goyle and many of the younger Slytherins at the table burst out into a new wave of laughter.

“We need to have a meeting,” Harry said.

“A meeting? Why?” Ron asked.

“Dunno, but Draco wants us to meet, so we will. “

Later that night, when Draco’s coin heated up, he closed his eyes in relief. He found it hard to wait until all of his dorm mates were asleep and he really didn’t trust their snores as confirmation. Especially Nott. Draco kept his eyes trained on the boy’s bed as he slowly slid out of his.

Once he managed to get out into the hallway, he kept glancing over his shoulder, half expecting to see someone there. The castle felt alive and the sounds of the snoring portraits and the whistling wind hitting windows did nothing to ease his anxiety.

As he passed one stained-glass window, he heard a low moan. It stopped him in his tracks, and despite his fear, he had to see where the sound had come from. He turned his head to see the outline of a dark shadowy figure pressed against the window. Its face was obscured by thick fog on the glass, but he could see the wide-open gaping mouth. It was just floating there, staring at him.

Draco held in a gasp as he gaped back at the Banshee. Those creepy fuckers were so annoying! He willed himself to look ahead and keep his eyes focused on the dark hallway that would eventually lead him down to the second deepest dungeon area of the castle.

When he finally arrived, the other three were anxiously waiting for him. Hermione ran over to throw her arms around his neck and Draco warmed to the comforting feel of having her body pressed against his.

When she pulled back, her expression was worried. “Is everything alright?
“I’m fine. Listen, all of you, I just found out… Merlin, I can’t believe what I’m about to tell you,”
Draco confessed.

“What is it?” Harry asked.

Draco looked up at the ceiling and took a deep breath. “Crabbe and Goyle have been assigned to help the Death Eaters break into the castle.”

“What?” Ron gasped.

Hermione covered her mouth in shock. “Crabbe and Goyle are Death Eaters?”

Draco swallowed, but didn’t reply.

“Well? Are they?” Hermione demanded.

Draco sighed. “Yeah.”

“Blimey!” Ron said. “Should have known!”

“What do you mean, they’re going to help Death Eaters break into Hogwarts? How?” Harry demanded.

“No one can get inside of Hogwarts; it’s protected!” Ron insisted.

“Right, that’s what I thought,” Draco said. “But, remember what Snape told us, the castle has its own mind. It’s not under Dumbledore’s total control, at least not all of it. And what Dumbledore can’t see, he can’t protect. Besides, if you haven’t noticed, he hasn’t been around much lately.”

Hermione, Harry, and Ron all looked at each other with wide eyes.

“Well, we’ve been trying to avoid him!” Ron pointed out.

“Apparently, that’s not hard to do since he hasn’t been here,” Draco replied. “Not to mention, Filch has been Imperio’d.”

Hermione gasped. “What?”

“You heard me. Apparently he’s been under the Imperius for a while.”

“They just told you this?”

Draco nodded.

“But that means the school is already vulnerable to attack!” Hermione exclaimed.

Harry narrowed his eyes, walking closer to Draco. “Draco, tell us exactly what Crabbe and Goyle told you. When is the attack planned? How will they do it?”

Draco swallowed, feeling his nerves rattle under Harry’s intense stare. Guilt began to creep in. Was this his fault? Looking back, he had been overconfident and negligent as far as those two had been concerned. “Honestly, Harry, I don’t know… I mean, they don’t even know, really.”

“Bollocks! They have to!”

“No, Harry, they really don’t,” Draco replied. “When Snape got sacked, everything was put on
hold… but believe me, they’re looking for a way in, and it has something to do with the Room of Requirement.”

Draco’s thoughts went to Snape. He wondered where his former Potions professor was right now, and if getting sacked had jeopardised his safety within the Dark Lord’s ranks. From the sound of it, the Dark Lord had been counting on Snape staying at Hogwarts to pull this off.

Ron balled his fists. “Then we’ll just have to beat more information out of them!”

“Ron, you can’t!” Hermione pleaded. “If they find out Draco told us, then they’ll know he’s turned on them. You’ll be outing him and risking his life!”

“Not to mention, it may force Voldemort to change his plans,” Harry added. “And then we’ll be in the dark about everything.”

Ron grimaced, gritting his teeth. “Damn it! This is bullshit! Everyone in this school is in danger, and we have to stand around and wait for it happen? We have to tell someone, Harry! Maybe the Order can help us…”

“Ron, how can we tell the Order without getting Draco in trouble?” Harry asked.

Ron huffed. “Harry, he won’t get into any trouble. He’ll be protected—by us! By the Order!”

Harry glanced at Draco, biting his lip, while Hermione glanced anxiously from Ron to Harry to Draco.

Draco felt terrible about the predicament. Right now, he didn’t know what to say or do.

“What if it causes more trouble than it saves?” Hermione posed quietly. “Bringing the Order into this means bringing in outsiders. They’ll want to come in. That means more attention, perhaps even the press. There’ll be an investigation. They’ll interrogate everyone in Slytherin, and it’ll come out, one way or another.”

“And the parents will probably freak out,” Draco added. “And pull their kids out of school.”

“So what?” Ron said. “We’re trying to save lives! Who knows what You-Know-Who wants or who he’ll kill to get it? I think we should at least be thinking about calling a D.A. meeting.”

Harry shook his head. “It’s too risky. They’ll want to retaliate. It may pit house against house. Besides, after last year, with Marietta… We just can’t risk this getting out to the wrong people.”

“Wait a minute!” Hermione said. “Weren’t we just in the Room of Requirement? Let’s think… perhaps there’s something there we missed!”

Harry huffed in exasperation. “Hermione, we’re always in there! We practically know that room like the back of our hands!”

Draco shook his head. “No, that’s not true. You’re not always in there, and there are things in there that you can’t always see…”

“Like what?” Ron asked. “Every time we go in there, there’s a bed or chairs…”

Harry nodded. “Right, and when we used that room for Dumbledore’s Army there were Dark Detectors and shelves of combat books.”

“Because that’s what we needed it for,” Hermione explained. “The room only shows you whatever
“Right,” Draco said. “And when Crabbe and Goyle go in there, they’re looking for something in particular, so perhaps they’re seeing things that you guys aren’t.”

Hermione nodded enthusiastically, her eyes lighting up.

“Then we’ll just have to go in there looking for those things as well,” Harry said resolutely.

“What things?” Ron asked.

Draco took a deep breath as he stared back at Ron. “Crabbe and Goyle said they were to locate a Vanishing Cabinet in there. They were told to repair it, but they don’t really know how, and that’s only half of their assignment. The other half has yet to have been given. They’ve been waiting months for the rest.”

“Months?” Hermione said in astonishment.

“Well, we’ll just have to figure out how to sabotage their efforts before they can! We’ll destroy it!” Harry said emphatically.

“Won’t destroying it have the same effect as outing Draco? I mean, they just told him about it…” Ron said.

Harry clenched his fist. “Bugger!”

“Well, if we can’t sabotage them that way, we can at least make it difficult for them to get into the room until we can figure something else out,” Draco suggested.

“Or hide it from them, perhaps?” Hermione suggested.

“But if the room is set up to show you what you want to see, I don’t see how that’s possible…” Ron said.

“Well as long as they don’t figure out how to repair it, we’re fine. Either way, I think we should wait it out… find out more. I’ll do my best to stay on top of it,” Draco offered.

“You’ll have to do better than that; we’re talking about Hogwarts!” Harry insisted.

Draco drew back, the sting of Harry’s words hurting more than he wanted to admit.

“I know that, Harry. Why do you think I’m telling you all of this?”

Harry’s determined stare faltered, and he appeared apologetic. “I’m sorry, Draco. I know this is hard for you and I know you’re in a difficult position, but this is our school, our friends, everything we love.”

Draco nodded silently. He understood all too well what was at stake. This whole thing seemed to be growing more unwieldy and dangerous. They needed allies. Perhaps seeking out the Order’s help would do them some good. Except, eventually, it would also expose him and his original assignment, an assignment given to him by the Dark Lord himself. If only the Trio knew that one little detail, it would make planning a defence so much easier. He wouldn’t have to worry about that variable ruining everything.

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Draco took a deep breath, bracing himself for what he wanted so desperately to confess. “I think there’s something I should tell you guys,” he started slowly, forcing himself to maintain eye contact
“What else could you possibly tell us?” Ron asked, with apprehension in his eyes.

Draco chewed the inside of his bottom lip as he stared back at all of them and then took a deep breath. “Well, I—”

He paused, closing his mouth. Looking at their tense faces, he realised that he just couldn’t bear to tell them everything. Especially now with the latest string of Death Eater attacks all over London, a pending Death Eater attack on Hogwarts, and his own status as a double spy. How would they ever trust him if they knew he had originally been assigned to befriend them by the Dark Lord himself? It had the potential to ruin everything they had worked and sacrificed to accomplish.

He just couldn’t.

“Never mind. It’s not something I’m ready to discuss right now,” he said awkwardly. It sounded weak, but it was the best he could think of in lieu of the truth he wasn’t ready to tell them.

“Spit it out, Draco,” Harry demanded.

Draco sighed, irritated at Harry’s perceptiveness. “Oh, alright. I just wanted to tell you three that things may get pretty intense soon and there may be a chance I’ll be questioned.”

That was closer to the truth and sounded plausible. He was relieved to see that they appeared worried instead of sceptical.

“By whom?” Ron asked in alarm.

“I don’t know. Perhaps my father,” Draco said.

“Or Voldemort,” Harry said matter-of-factly. “Right?”

“What makes you think the Dark Lord would want to talk to me?” Draco asked guardedly.

Harry surveyed his face and then dropped his eyes. “It’s not you. It’s your dad, it’s who he consorts with. He is with him right now, isn’t he?”

Maintaining eye contact with Harry was hard. It was difficult to lie to the boy—Draco felt like Harry knew him so much better now and could perhaps even see right through him.

“I’m not sure,” he said, keeping his eyes on Harry’s and his tone even and casual through the lie. “My dad is probably at home, with my mum. As for the rest… I couldn’t say.”

“Draco, your dad is a Death Eater!” Ron exclaimed.

“Right, and he’s probably helping to plan the attack,” Harry added.

“Pardon me?” Draco asked defensively. “You don’t know that! My dad cares about this school! You don’t know my father! You don’t know anything!” he snapped, feeling his anxiety and anger taking over his control. He turned his back to them to collect himself.

He stiffened when he felt the soft touch of Hermione’s hands on his arms.

“Draco, we aren’t trying to hurt you. We’re just worried about you… and Hogwarts.”

“That’s right. If your dad sends for you, you can’t leave,” Ron said. “Not now, knowing what we
know. Not after everything we’ve been through. If You-Know-Who even gets a tiny whiff of what we’ve been up to, you’re dead.”

Draco turned around to look at him. “Ron, I’m not even sure that I’ll be questioned. I said it’s just a possibility.”

“A possibility that needs to be prevented,” Hermione insisted. “Draco, you can’t go home! Not until we figure out what’s going on!”

“You act as if I have a choice, Hermione. He’s my father. Besides, he’s not going to let any harm come to me.”

“You think he’ll be able to stop You-Know-Who from getting information out of you?” Ron asked. “Huh? He can get in your head, Draco. He’s good at it. Ask Harry!”

Harry nodded, staring back at Draco. “Ron and Hermione are right… It’s too dangerous for you to leave Hogwarts, you can’t go home—”

Draco laughed at Harry. “Even if I were questioned by the Dark Lord, which I highly doubt will occur, I know Occlumency.”

Harry narrowed his eyes. “You know Occlumency? I don’t know Occlumency.”

Draco smirked. “Surprise, surprise, I possess another skill that the great Harry Potter hasn’t mastered. Yes, Harry, I know Occlumency. Snape and my crazy aunt taught me.”

“Your aunt?” Ron asked.

Draco looked at the ground, ashamed. “Bellatrix.”

“Oh, right,” Ron said awkwardly.

“Anyway, I’m pretty good at it. I can block anyone from getting in my head. Not that I will need to,” he said with a confidence he didn’t quite feel.

“So… what exactly do you intend to tell your dad if he questions you?” Ron demanded.

“I’ll tell him the truth,” Draco said simply.

The Trio all gasped, staring back at Draco in shock. He smiled wide, tickled at how Gryffindor they were in that moment.

“You guys are so naive. Think Slytherin for once in your life.”

“So you’re going to lie,” Ron murmured.

“I’ll tell him that you’re reassembling Dumbledore’s Army and planning a massive resistance movement,” he explained. “complete with help from top-notch wizards from all over the continent. He’ll be proud I took the initiative to unmask your plot.”

Ron laughed. “That’s rich.”

Draco smiled, pleased to hear Ron say so.

“In the meantime, I think we all should do what we’ve been doing. No sudden changes or anything that would arouse suspicion,” Draco said. “I’ll keep an eye on Crabbe and Goyle.”
He was relieved he received no protest from any of them, only nods of affirmation.

“We’ll figure out what to do with the Order, I suppose,” Harry said with resignation.

“I guess we should head back to bed, then,” Draco said.

“Hold on, not so fast,” Hermione said.

They all looked at her curiously as she reached out and yanked Ron’s right hand.

“Hey!” Ron protested.

“How come you three didn’t tell me about these?” she asked, pointing at Ron’s ring.

Draco exchanged a quick ‘uh-oh’ glance with Harry and Ron before realizing the ring was a symbol of his ownership. He had nothing to apologise for, and he wouldn’t.

“We knew you’d find out eventually, one way or another,” he said, smirking at Harry, who glanced at Ron as he tried to hide his own smile.

Hermione folded her arms over her chest. “Well, I don’t think it’s very amusing. My bits hurt. I mean, they’re sore. I don’t need you pulling on them to remind me they’re pierced.”

Ron smirked, while Hermione narrowed her eyes. Draco and Harry stood in silence, watching her.

Draco was waiting if Hermione would say something cheeky to Ron, but instead, she glanced around at all of them, a slight blush growing on her face as she pursed her lips.

“All I’m saying is that you should have told me,” she said irritably. “That’s all. Anyway, it is getting very late, and I have a full day of studying tomorrow. Are we done here?”

“Yes, we’re done, Hermione. Good night,” Harry said, a shadow of a smirk on his face.

“Alright, well… good night,” she said, her voice quivering as she gave them all a quick glance and walked away as poised as Draco had ever seen her.

When she left, they all looked at each other with faint knowing smiles.

Draco shook his head. “She’s right, we shouldn’t abuse it. We don’t want a repeat of what occurred before…”

“Exactly, and we don’t want her to get used to it too quickly, either,” Harry explained.

Draco nodded. “Right, we have to be discriminating about when we use it.”

“Fine,” Ron sighed. “I’m going to bed…”

“Go on then, I’ll be up soon,” Harry said, glancing to Ron and then back at Draco. Ron looked between them and nodded before exiting.

Once he was gone, Harry and Draco stood in silence. For Draco, it felt heavy with unspoken confessions and declarations he wasn’t ready to make. He wanted to tell Harry everything, his assignment from the Dark Lord, his fear that he would be called home and questioned by the monster and perhaps even tortured, his realisation that for the first time in his life, he actually loved and cared for people other than his family, and that he would do anything to protect them. But he held it all in. What good could come from such confessions? He couldn’t even tell what Harry was thinking right
now. The boy just stood there, gazing at him with a curious expression on his face.

Draco narrowed his eyes. What did Harry want? Perhaps to give Draco a lecture about loyalty and working to the best of his ability to find out how to prevent Crabbe and Goyle’s plan. He stiffened, ready to be chastised.

“Draco…”

“Harry, I know what you’re going to say,” Draco interrupted.

“You do?” Harry asked in confusion.

“Yes, and you don’t have to worry. I’ll do whatever I can to prevent this,” Draco said earnestly.

Harry shook his head. “Draco, that’s not what I was going to say. I know you will. I trust you.”

Draco had to catch his breath. Hearing that Harry trusted him never got old. Never. Yet, it never sounded quite real. He wanted to hear it again and again, even if he didn’t feel he deserved it.

“You do?”

Harry nodded, stepping closer to him. “Yes, I do,” he said softly.

Draco could smell the boy in front of him before they touched. He suddenly hated Harry’s glasses—they were an obstruction and he wanted nothing more than to discard them and pull Harry’s head closer so he could fall into his green gaze.

“Draco, I want you to know that, if you’re called home…”

Draco lifted his finger pressing it against the Harry’s soft lips. Harry immediately stopped speaking and puckered his lips, causing a shiver to run down the Draco’s finger to his hand and straight to his crotch. “I’ll be fine, Harry,” he whispered. “I’ll be safe at home. I know you don’t like my father, but he loves me… Please, just drop it.”

Harry rocked on his feet, looking frustrated. “If you need us, you have the coin, and now you know how to cast a proper Patronus. Promise me if you have to, you’ll use it.”

Draco gave Harry a small agreeable smile, knowing he would never use either, even if he wanted or needed to do so, not from his home, not in front of his father or the Dark Lord.

“Alright, Potter,” he replied, smirking.

“Crazy year, huh?” Harry remarked.

“I don’t know what’s nuttier: the prophecy, working on the prophecy at Snape’s, or actually going to Knockturn to perform the ritual so that we could try to fulfil it. And now this…”

“Yeah, sometimes it doesn’t feel real,” Draco said. Harry stared back at him, leaning in closer.

“But it is,” Harry whispered.

Draco’s eyes were drawn to his lips, but he stopped himself. “I really should get back before someone notices that I’m gone.”

Harry lifted his hand to cover Draco’s, pushing it down to his chest and holding it against his heart. “Just tell them you were with me.”
“Yeah?” Draco said, swallowing, feeling his whole body respond to Harry’s sultry low tone.

Harry nodded. “Yeah, tell them you had to stay and listen to me plot world domination so I could establish a new wizarding order.”

Draco chuckled. “You know, I think they’d actually believe that.”

Harry smiled. “Good, then they’d completely dismiss the possibility that you and I were somewhere snogging…”

Draco smiled, shaking his head. “And you call me the randy one?”

Harry raised his right hand to the back of Draco’s hair, pulling him down into a kiss. Draco always felt knocked slightly off kilter by Harry’s kisses; they were so rough yet affectionate, wild but controlled, and it still made his heart beat twice as fast to know that this boy, the one who had rejected him so many years ago, wanted him.

He moaned against Harry’s mouth, pushing him back until they were pressed against the stone wall of the dungeon. Harry began to claw at his pants, reaching inside the elastic to squeeze Draco’s arse. When he did, Draco’s cock immediately responded, poking and searching as he ground himself against Harry.

“You want to shag? Right here?” Draco gasped as he broke the kiss to breathe.

“Why not?” Harry asked. “We’ll make it quick.”

Harry swiped Draco’s neck with his tongue, ending the lick with a light nip. Draco moaned reluctantly. “We’re being watched, you know.”

“Yeah? And since when has that ever stopped us before? Are you seriously turning down sex?” Harry asked, letting his finger drift to the cleft of Draco’s arse, causing him to squirm and push back to encourage more exploration.

Instead of answering Harry, Draco found his mouth once more, allowing his body to enjoy everything that was being done to it. He didn’t know when he’d get to feel Harry this close again, and he wanted to savour every moment and show Harry everything he felt, even if he couldn’t say it.

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The next day Hermione managed to spell the Muggle magical spell book into a normal-sized book and alter the cover so that it looked like one of her texts. Since opening it, she hadn’t been able to tear her eyes away. There were all sorts of spells and little-known history about Muggles, Muggle-borns, and the wizarding world. She had been in the library for nearly four hours, double-checking Latin footnotes and references from the book. Once she was finished, she decided it was time to give more attention to the protective shielding potion she had been monitoring since Snape’s dismissal. She withdrew a sample she had retrieved from his potions’ lab to survey the contents as she read on about variations of outcomes. That was, until someone covered her eyes with slender, smooth hands.

She gasped. “Draco?”

He dropped his hands and took a seat beside her. “Your eyes could probably use the rest. You really are a boffin, Granger.”

Hermione rolled her eyes, both pleasantly surprised to see him and annoyed by his jab.
“What are you doing here? We study on Tuesdays,” she reminded him.

“Are you complaining?” he asked.

“No, but…” She looked around to see who was watching them.

“What? We’re friends, aren’t we?” he asked, leaning in to give her a playful shoulder shove.

“Some may say even more than that, if you aren’t careful,” she warned, raising her eyebrows and glancing around meaningfully once more.

“Yeah? And what do you say?” he asked, leaning in closer. His blond hair fell over his forehead, obscuring his right eye, and Hermione couldn’t help but to push it to the side. She knew how intimate it must have appeared but it was hard to resist, and in that moment, he looked so damned good.

She heard someone gasp but she didn’t dare look over. They could all sod off, anyway. She grinned wide. “I suppose I would say you can get as close as you like… we are very good friends, after all.”

Draco hummed, giving her a smirk. He pointed to her book. “What on Earth could you possibly be studying? We just had exams, and I know you’re already ahead in all of our assignments.”

“I’m still researching the properties of the protective shielding potion,” Hermione said.

Draco rolled his eyes. “Hermione, give it a rest.”

“No, I won’t. I’ve been comparing the leftover samples in Snape’s lab and reading and I think at least three of the vials are almost at completion, including ours.”

“Exciting,” Draco said with sarcasm.

“It really is,” she insisted.

Draco shook his head, smiling at her. “The consummate bookworm. So what have you gained from watching this little experiment?”

Hermione shrugged. “I saw it to completion. Now I know approximately what it would take to make a successful trial of the potion.”

“A potion that no one needs,” Draco pointed out.

“Never say never. I still think Snape gave us that assignment for a reason this year, and I’m saving all of the vials, just in case.”

“Snape didn’t really have a plan for the potion; he certainly didn’t have a clear one for us.”

Hermione tilted her head. “Oh, I wouldn’t say that. He had a goal, and so far we’re working towards it. You sound rather put out about him.”

Draco sighed. “I’m just wondering what the hell we’re supposed to do now. The ritual didn’t even work!”

“Well, we don’t exactly know that. I mean, it could be a part of something bigger.”

Draco shook his head. “You and your bloody Gryffindor hope. It’s almost infectious.”
“Good,” she said, smiling. “Because we all could use a little hope.”

She fought the urge to cover his hand with her own. Instead, she forced herself to return to reading, frustrated that she couldn’t show any affection towards him here. It was hard to concentrate, though — she could feel him watching her.

“So, er, how are your piercings?” he asked softly, sliding a few fingers down the outline of her thigh towards her knee. She had to tell herself not to squirm when he began tracing her kneecap lightly. The feel of his fingers through her robe was maddening. He was so close but not close enough. She shifted, causing the ring in her cunt to move. It sent vibrations through her entire body, forcing her to stifle a moan.

Draco chuckled. “Sounds like you’re getting used to them.”

Hermione opened her mouth and then looked away from his intense grey stare. “Slowly, yes.”

“Do they hurt?” he asked with what sounded like genuine concern.

“A little. Sometimes I’m sore,” she answered truthfully.

“Aww,” he said, licking his lips and giving her a small sympathetic frown. The fingers on her knee drifted back up over her robe-covered thigh. And then his entire hand. He gave her a gentle squeeze and then just let it rest softly, just enough to conjure forth the memory of his hand on her flesh the previous day.

Hermione adjusted her seat; the rings in her nipples brushed against her bra, causing her to shudder and stiffen, which sent another vibration through the ring in her cunt. She was very wet, and from the way things were going, this was going to get much more intense.

“They certainly keep things interesting,” she managed to say. “There hasn’t been a dull moment, so far.”

He smiled. She looked down at her book and considered it for a moment. She had been working for over four hours, had already read every book for all of her classes at least twice. She really could use a break, and she wanted to spend time with him.

“Do you want to take a walk?” she offered suddenly.

Draco gave her a puzzled look. “No. I want to study,” he said matter-of-factly.

Hermione frowned. “You do?”

“Get over yourself, Granger. I didn’t come in here just to see you—it takes work to maintain my impeccable marks,” he said in exasperation as he hoisted his bag onto the table and pulled out a book.

Hermione tried to hide her disappointment as she nodded. “Right.”

Concentrating on the page in front of her was difficult, overshadowed by her desire to go somewhere alone with him and let him do whatever he wanted with her. Secretly, she still had hopes that their close proximity would ignite in him a desire to abandon their studies for other activities. She just had to be patient. Besides, she still had plenty to read.

They read in silence for several minutes, so long that Hermione almost forgot about her previous desire. She was fully engrossed in her reading when she felt a warm breath of air hit her face,
causing a stray curl to blow in her eye. She glanced up to see Draco grinning at her.

“You look so serious when you’re reading… and innocent,” he whispered. Hermione glared at him. He was teasing now. Not nice or fair. She returned to reading.

“But you’re not,” Draco continued. “Innocent that is. How does it feel knowing you’re every bit the dirty little tart that people say you are?”

Hermione felt a flash of indignation at his remark, and something else in her bits. She focused on her book. If he didn’t want to take her somewhere private like a proper gentleman, she wasn’t going to play his games here.

“Ignoring me? Or are you embarrassed about being a tart?”

That did it. She huffed, glaring at him. “I’m no tart!”

Draco’s smirk disappeared as he stared back at her with a stony expression. “Eyes on your books, Granger. I didn’t say you could look at me.”

Hermione wrinkled her forehead and then slowly returned to looking at her book. Her nipples tingled as Draco leaned in closer.

“You are a tart – for us. Only us. And you like it. I could order you to your knees right here, and you’d do it. Wouldn’t you?”

Hermione swallowed. “No. I have my dignity.”

“Right. And we wouldn’t want you to lose that,” Draco drawled in a low, sultry voice. His fingers brushed over her knee once more, climbing higher to her thigh. “But you would, wouldn’t you? If I asked you, you’d do it for me.”

Hermione could feel her breath becoming harder to manage and the wetness between her legs growing as she tried to concentrate on the words on the page. The idea of being a dirty tart was deplorable, except when Draco said it. He made it sound like a term of endearment, sexy. She felt charged, fully aware of every part of her body.

“Yes…”

“Manners, Granger.”

“Yes, Master,” she whispered.

Draco sighed, flipping the page of the book in front of him.

“You like it when I call you Granger, don’t you?” he asked, his eyes still focused on the page before him.

“What?”

Draco smiled, leaning closer as if re-reading something. “I think you like how impersonal it feels. It sounds cold and if I say it right, it could even be taken as an insult.”

Hermione bit her lip and straightened her posture in an effort to brace herself. She wasn’t sure where Draco was going with this, in the library, no less.

He stretched out his arms and then brought his hands together in front of him, clasping them. As
soon as he did, Hermione felt a tingling in her left breast, like someone was playfully moving the ring there. She inhaled, trying to appear unaffected, and gave him a sharp look.

“Huh, now this is interesting,” he said, keeping his eyes fixed on the book.

There was a tremor vibrating through her left nipple. She stifled a whimper, gaping at him. He looked absolutely fascinated by the book in front of him. But the ring finger of his left hand was making tiny circles over the ring on his right hand, and with every complete circle Draco made, Hermione could feel the ring in her nipple turn.

“Oh!” she gasped.

“Shhh, this is a library, Granger. I’ve heard of good books, but try to control yourself.”

Hermione bit her lip, gripping the book as the ring in her left nipple continued to twist until finally it stopped. She sighed, relieved that he was granting her a reprieve—except then it began to vibrate, sending tremors straight to her pussy,

“Have you been a bad girl?”

“What?” she stammered as the pull in the ring increased.

“I asked, have you been bad? Touching yourself like a little slut?”

“Hmm,” she hummed.

“I can’t hear you, Hermione.” His voice was louder, demanding.

“Yes, Master,” she whispered.

“Show me,” he said as the ring vibrated against her breast.

Hermione twisted in her seat, glancing up to see if she had an audience. She felt so exposed, but no one was looking at them.

“Show me how you touch yourself.”

“Right here?”

“Hermione, I’m not going to repeat myself,” he said, twisting the ring, which caused a strong pull. Hermione held in a squeak. It was an intense feeling, bordering on pain, but not quite there. Whatever it was, she wanted him to do it again.

“Yes, Master.”

“And keep your eyes on your book as you do it. I would hate to be accused of distracting you from your studies.”

Hermione put her hand to her mouth and then cradled her chin as if in deep contemplation, before sliding her hand down to her neck and rubbing it as if she had a sore throat. Her fingers drifted to the top of her chest and then quickly over her breasts and down her stomach.

She could feel the heat in her cheeks as she did it, hoping that no one was watching them.
“Go on, put two fingers in that pretty cunt of yours,” he said, sliding his tongue out to lick his bottom lip.

Hermione quickly glanced up. Luckily, no one was directly in front of them, and everyone appeared to be concentrating on their studies.

She took her forefinger and middle finger and slipped them past her knickers to touch her wet and swollen pussy lips before slipping them inside. The clit ring brushing over her fingers created a wave of sensation not unlike a tongue, forcing her to close her eyes briefly. She sat up straighter, trying to concentrate on maintaining her composure.

“Well? Are you fucking yourself?” he whispered.

“Yes, Master.”

“Tell me about it,” he demanded, turning a page, keeping his eyes focused on it as if he were still reading.

“It… it feels good,” Hermione sputtered. That was an understatement. With every push of her finger, the clit ring would move, sending tiny shocks into her cunt and through her body.

“Well? Well? Are you fucking yourself?”

“I-I do. I like fucking myself,” she whispered, trying to close her mouth and maintain her composure. She glanced up again. Everyone seemed to be focused on their work, paying her and Draco no mind. She worked her fingers in deeper, and her eyes began to glaze over as she imagined that her fingers were his. She unconsciously spread her legs even more. Forgetting herself, her fingers pushed against her clit ring.

“Oh!” she squeaked.

Draco chuckled. “Mmm, that’s it. Keep going, deeper, and don’t you dare stop until I tell you to.”

Hermione slid her bum closer to the table, continuing her rhythm.

“Do wish it was my cock?”

“Yes, Master,” she answered without thinking. Of course. It’d feel so good to have him inside of her right now.

“Do you wish I could just fuck you, right here?”

“Yes,” she whispered breathlessly before swallowing. This time closing her eyes briefly as the memory of Draco taking her came back strong. Something was building, and the clit ring brushing against her fingers was beckoning it.

“Fuck yourself the way you’d want me to fuck you right now, but don’t you dare come without asking me permission first. Understand?”

Hermione couldn’t believe what he was saying, or what she was doing, but she didn’t want it to stop. She was getting so close. She could hardly answer him but she managed.

“Y-Yes, Master.” She panted quietly and she continued to furiously work her fingers in and out of warm slick heat. Her climax was building; she was getting so close.

“Don’t you dare…” Draco warned.
Hermione bit down on her tongue to keep from whimpering. The pressure in her cunt was heavy, and she could feel every piercing as the tremor in her core grew.

“Please,” she whispered fiercely, closing her eyes.

“Please what, Hermione?”

Hermione gasped, not sure if she could hold on much longer. “Please let me come, Master,” she begged.

“Go on, then. Come.”

Hermione’s mouth fell open in a silent scream as she reached out with her free hand to grab Draco’s arm for support. She was in public. She was in public. She had to keep reminding herself of it, but it was no use; she was falling apart right here, in her seat in the library, and it felt so damned good. Her nails dug into Draco’s arm as her orgasm reverberated through her body.

She closed her eyes and instead of darkness there were a hundred tiny specks of light. There was a steady dull throb in her clit, when she opened her eyes, she immediately looked around, grateful there was still no one looking at her. Draco, however, was grinning ear to ear, only he was covering his smile with his hand as he stared down at his book like he was reading something particularly amusing.

“We definitely have to study together more often,” he said smugly.

Hermione quickly slid her fingers out of her cunt, hating the sticky residue coating them. She sighed, about to cast a cleaning spell underneath the table when a hand smacked her thigh.

“What?” she asked.

“Clean your fingers off the right way,” he said, staring at her.

Hermione gaped back at him in disbelief. Surely he didn’t want her to—

“No.”

She had tasted herself a few times while sucking one of them, but this was… nasty.

“Go on,” he insisted.

Slowly, Hermione brought her fingers to her mouth, smelling herself before quickly engulfing both digits in her mouth. It wasn’t so bad; actually, she could taste the appeal. She continued until every bit of her taste was gone.

“Good girl,” he said, returning his eyes to the book.

“You’re going to get both of us in trouble,” she scolded quietly.

Draco yawned exaggeratedly.

Hermione frowned as her previous concern about him returned. “I’ve been thinking…”

“No news there…”

But Hermione was not in a joking mood. This time, she put her hand on his thigh and squeezed. “Draco, if your father sends for you …”
“Hermione, leave off,” Draco whispered harshly. “I’m not discussing this with you, and certainly not here.”

“I’m just worried…”

Draco grit his teeth. “Didn’t anyone ever tell you? Worrying doesn’t help. It only causes more grief. All of you just need to relax.”

“Alright, then, just promise me one thing,” she demanded. She needed to hear him say it.

“What is it?”

“If you are questioned, don’t play the valiant hero. If your father asks about me, or Harry, or Ron, lie. Do whatever you can to smooth things over so you can come back to us as soon as possible.”

Draco smiled at her in amusement. “You don’t mind being my dirty little Muggle-born secret, then?”

Hermione sighed. “I don’t want you to get pulled from school or whatever it is your father means to do, and if that requires that I have to be your dirty little secret, so be it. I don’t mind at all.”

Draco’s smile faltered as he stared back at her. “I don’t want you to be,” he whispered, leaning in closer.

Hermione held her breath, her eyes focused on his lips as they approached.

“What’s going on here?” Madam Pince’s voice boomed over them. Hermione and Draco both looked up, startled.

“There’ll be none of that in here,” she scolded, forcing both of them to pull away from each other.

The few students who had been deep in their studies were staring at her and Draco curiously. Madam Pince gave them both one last glare before turning away.

Once she was gone, there was tense silence until they looked up from their books and at each other, then burst into sniggers.

“Her timing is wonderful,” Draco said sarcastically.

Hermione smirked. “To think, she missed the best part.”

Draco chuckled. “Well, I think that concludes our study session for today.”

“Why? We could actually study, you know,” Hermione suggested.

Draco sighed, giving her a small smile. “Fine, let’s study then.”

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On Monday, during free period Ron remained in the dining hall, like he usually did. The elves often put out leftover dessert from the night before or would even bring him a third helping of lunch. Sometimes Harry would stay and eat and play chess with him, other times, Ron would play chess against the board by himself.

Today, Harry had excused himself. It hadn’t gone unnoticed by Ron that both Harry and Hermione
seemed to be on edge. He reckoned it had everything to do with the aftermath of the ritual and what Draco had shared with them on Saturday night. Truthfully, Ron was concerned as well. He hated feeling vulnerable, and powerless, and even worse, he hated being worried.

But he was very worried. He had lingering concerns about the ritual, especially after witnessing Harry pass out. The thought of it made his stomach queasy. The red light that had appeared during the ritual still haunted him. He couldn't figure out where it had come from. At first he'd thought it had come from Hermione, but now he wasn't sure. He'd never been really afraid of Hermione before, but in that moment, he had feared her. But then things had returned back to normal. The piercing had gone pretty well, and she seemed to take to it fine. Everything had gone back to normal, until they'd returned. Now, however, his nerves were frayed once more as he worried about the future of Hogwarts, the safety of his friends, and feeling very suspicious of Crabbe and Goyle. He wanted to confront them badly, but he knew it would endanger Draco.

And that was the real clincher—Draco Malfoy.

Ron would never admit it out loud, but that was what bothered him the most. He was worried about the ferret. Only Draco was no longer a ferret to him. Over the past several months he had become so much more, and while the Slytherin prat could still easily get under Ron’s skin with the right word or look, there were many things Ron had come to respect and value.

Ron admired Draco’s stoicism, his ability to think strategically, and most of all the risk he was taking to save his family. Family had always been important to Ron, and he understood all too well the willingness to put everything on the line for one’s kin.

The thought of Draco being questioned by his creepy father and Merlin knows who else was very unsettling. He recalled his promise to Draco at Snape’s, remembered the sobering sight of seeing Draco shed a tear as he declared they were all doomed to die. Ron feared that if the threat of Lucius Malfoy could cause such an extreme reaction in the otherwise cool younger Malfoy, then Draco was indeed in danger, despite what he said.

Suddenly, the black queen walked over to Ron’s white queen, and kicked it fiercely, bringing his piece down to its knees. The chessboard’s movement startled Ron out of his thoughts, and he gawked up at the person standing in front of him.

“Snap out of it, Ron!” Draco said.

Ron paused, studying Draco. He had come to admire other things about the boy as well. Draco’s skin was flawless, and his eyes always seemed to pierce anyone he was staring at, and right now, Ron didn’t mind being pinned by his stare. Not at all. He couldn’t help but grin as he swallowed the rest of his pudding, leaning over to clear off the table, making a space for Draco to sit.

But Draco just stood there motionless as he waited and Ron felt instantly flustered, his ears burning pink, he was sure. He couldn’t understand why he was suddenly acting like a silly bint with a crush, just because Draco fucking Malfoy had dropped by to talk to him, alone. But he did feel special, almost, like Draco actually---he glanced up to catch Draco’s smirk and the thought faded away.

“I was bored and had a few minutes to spare. Thought you might like to play a little.”

Ron nodded quickly. “Sure,” he said, trying to sound nonchalant but feeling anything but. What the fuck was wrong with him? This was Malfoy. Draco. They played wizarding chess all the time.

“I’d like to play white today,” Draco said.
“Oh, er, alright,” Ron replied awkwardly, bewildered by Draco’s sudden change in preference. They each called out their first move, and then a long silence ensued as they sat studying the board. Usually, Ron could easily get lost in thought about the next strategic move for both him and his partner, but today his thoughts were still cluttered. It felt like he had a hundred things on his mind, and the biggest one right now was sitting right across from him. Ron tried to keep his eyes on the board as Draco called out his piece, but the smell of Draco’s soap was wafting up into his nostrils, and the memory of that soapy smell was becoming tainted with the light musk of sex was creeping in.

Unconsciously, Ron licked his lips and glanced up at Draco again. The boy’s fingers were tapping quietly as he contemplated his next move. Those fingers were slender and pale as they landed in a quiet elegance along the wooden surface of the table in a way that fascinated Ron. Everything Draco did seemed to be smooth, polished.

Ron gulped, not daring to look up at Draco for fear that he was as transparent as a sheet of glass.

“You know, Weasley,” Draco said slowly, not taking his those steely grey eyes off the board. “For someone who plays chess as much as you do, and as well as you do… you can’t be nearly as gormless as people think you are.”

“Excuse me?” Ron asked, scowling. He should have known, just when he was starting to let his guard down too. The ferret bit him, and it hurt.

Draco rolled his eyes. “Calm down.”

“Don’t tell me what to do! And who the hell thinks that?”

Draco’s grey stare was as unreadable as it was penetrating. Suddenly self-conscious, Ron began to fidget in his seat.

“What?”

“I think I know what it is,” Draco said finally, dropping his eyes to the board once more.

“You think you know what what is?”

“Did you ever stop to think about why that stupid story we came up with about you falling through the floorboards was so easy to believe?”

Ron felt his anger flare once more. He hated that stupid alibi. Why was he the one used as the fool who needed help? Who would have ever thought he’d be dumb enough to go into the Shrieking Shack alone and then need rescuing? It still pissed him off.

He scowled.

“It’s the way you carry yourself. It doesn’t take much to get you all worked up. And then when you do, your execution is all bumbled…”

An uncomfortable knot was forming in Ron’s stomach as he clenched his fist, and he could feel his temple throbbing and a light sweat break on his brow. Draco was belittling him again. It seemed like they were going backwards, and it hurt more now than when they’d not been so well acquainted.

“Piss off, Malfoy…”
“I’m just saying… well, it goes back to what we were talking about before at Snape’s house.”

Draco fucking Malfoy was giving Ron a lecture on how to ‘present himself’? Right now, Ron wanted to just punch the arrogant prat in the mouth. He didn’t need advice on how to act, he didn’t need…

“Ron! Are you listening to me?”

Ron narrowed his eyes. “I don’t have to listen to you! Hermione and Harry like me just fine, and I like who I am. Anyone who doesn’t can just sod off!”

Draco huffed. “Ron, I didn’t mean… fuck, you’re taking this all wrong…”

“No, I think I understand what you’re saying just fine, Malfoy. And you know what? I don’t give an ounce of troll dung what you think.”

“I wasn’t talking about me!”

“I don’t care what your friends think of me, either!”

“They’re not my friends!”

Ron scoffed. “Right, you could have fooled me. You haven’t changed a bit, have you? Just when I was beginning to think you might actually be a decent bloke, you try to find a way to tear me down.”

Draco shook his head. “Look at yourself. Right now. You’re doing it again, you git. You’ve got yourself worked up into a tizzy and you’re not even attempting to hear what I’m trying to tell you.”

Ron set his jaw, glaring at Draco. “Alright, then. Fine. Say what you have to say, and then leave me the fuck alone.”

Draco sighed, shaking his head. “Confidence, Weasley.” He went back to studying the chessboard. “Knight to E5.” The knight speared Ron’s bishop, splitting him in half.

But Ron didn’t care, not about the bloody chess game, anymore. Draco was staring at him again, talking about confidence, and his intelligence in a manner that both unnerved and confused him.

“Don’t talk in riddles! If you have something to say, say it!”

Draco pushed aside the chessboard and stared back at Ron. It was too intense, and there were too many things there, things Ron wasn’t ready to face or talk about. He looked down at the cleared space between them, holding his breath in silence, waiting for Draco to speak… or do something.

“Confidence. I don’t get why you’re so unsure of yourself. You’re smart, good looking, a skilled Quidditch player, and obviously a very strategic thinker. Your lack of confidence, your insecurity, it works against you. It’s what allows you to get all worked up over nothing. You let people get under your skin too easily. It throws everything off and you end up looking like an emotional witless imbecile sometimes. There—is that plain enough for you?”

For a moment, Ron was rendered completely speechless. Did Draco really just say he was smart and good-looking? He replayed the boy’s words again. Was it necessary to couch such a compliment in condescending advice, though? Well, Ron could dish out a few backhanded compliments of his own.

“Yeah? Well, you know what I think, Malfoy?”
“I’m sure you’re about to tell me, in the most offensive way possible.” Draco sighed.

Ron leaned over the table, scowling in Draco’s face. “You may be rich, halfway smart and decent looking, but your overconfidence makes you look like an arrogant prick. No one here actually believes that you’re better than anyone else—least of all, me. Because it’s all an act, isn’t it? I don’t even think you believe you’re that great. Show-offs never do. Take away your dad’s money and the attitude, and you’re just average. But I suppose it’s easier looking down your nose at everyone than being an average nobody. Daddy wouldn’t love you so much then, would he?”

Ron held his body taut, waiting for a scathing comeback, but Draco’s expression was impassive. They sat there for several seconds glaring at each other before Ron started to feel uncomfortable again.

“You’re right.”

Ron swallowed. “What?”

“I said… you’re right. I don’t have any money of my own. I don’t really have any friends, do I? At least, none worth talking about. I make decent marks, but so do a lot of people in this school, and while I play a pretty good game of Quidditch, I’ll probably never be a star athlete. But do you know what I have that you don’t?”

Ron watched him in bewildered silence.

“Confidence. I have confidence in myself, Ron. You could take away my father’s money, my good looks—and don’t look at me like that, I know I look good—my Quidditch skills, and even my marks, and I’d still have my confidence. Sometimes confidence is all we have. And it’s the difference between people accepting your bullshit and people thinking you’re a fool, whether you are or not.”

It was unnerving. Ron felt suspended somewhere between wanting to punch the git in the face and being strangely affected by Draco’s admission. Why was he saying all of this to him? Did Draco really care about what other people thought of Ron?

“I do have confidence…” Ron said in a barely audible whisper. Even as he said it, though, his self-consciousness and doubt gnawed at him. Was he really that insecure? Is that what people saw when they looked at him?

Draco covered Ron’s hand with his own to give a reassuring squeeze. “You need more of it. It was too easy to tell that stupid story. I don’t like it when people think they can make fun of people I care about.”

Ron’s gaze dropped to Draco’s pale slender hand barely covering his. It was cool and clammy, and he could tell by the tentativeness of the hold that Draco was a little nervous about both his action and his words.

“I’ll take that under advisement,” Ron said, finally taking a breath. “Thanks.”

Finally Draco’s sober expression cracked into his usual smirk. “Good, because you could be so hot if you wanted to, Weasley.”

Ron stared at Draco in bemusement and then sniggered. “Yeah?”

Draco nodded. “Yeah.”

Ron’s own hand went clammy when the memory of being inside of Draco while the boy was bent
over a desk revisited him; the debauched but surprisingly arousing experience of having Draco’s cock in his mouth flooding him with warmth. He licked his lips, and Draco’s eyes seemed immediately drawn to him.

“This game is getting old… What do you say we find something new to play?” Draco asked with a raised eyebrow.

Ron’s eyes were drawn to those intense grey eyes. He nodded in agreement, feeling short of breath. He couldn’t believe he actually wanted Draco Malfoy, right now, and not because of some damn ritual or to show him up. He wanted to feel every inch of him and his heart was pounding out of his chest. “Yeah, I think that’s a good idea.”

“Let’s get out of here.”

Ron nodded, then did a quick Evanesco, making the board disappear.

Draco was still staring at him, but it was no longer icy. There was heat there, and Ron felt it lighting up every part of his body. He quickly rose, and Draco stood with him.

“Where?” Ron asked breathlessly.

“Well, we don’t have much time before the next lesson starts,” he said, looking around. “How about the antechamber.”

Ron laughed. “This is mental.”

Draco chuckled with him. “Yeah, but who cares. Let’s go.”

They walked briskly towards the front of the dining hall where an antechamber was located just beyond the Head table.

Ron watched Draco’s confident walk, the sway of his soft blond hair from the back, the lean outline of his back, and the faintest hint of his buttocks and he wondered briefly how they would do it. Even though it had hurt both his ego and his arse for days after, he had enjoyed the feeling of Draco inside of him, but he also enjoyed taking the boy. He had just decided he would leave it up to Draco to decide when someone called Draco’s name. They both stopped in their tracks.

“Ah, there you are. We’ve been looking all over for you,” Ron heard the Headmaster’s voice say.

He turned around to see Dumbledore and Lucius Malfoy standing at the entrance of the Great Hall. Lucius looked as haughty as ever, his head high, his eyes cold, and even from the distance Ron was at, he could see the tell-tale sneer forming on his lips.

Ron and Draco locked eyes for a moment, and then Draco took a small breath and looked straight ahead as he began to walk towards his father. Ron’s stomach twisted as panic rose in his chest.

“Draco!” he called.

Draco continued to walk ahead, and Ron’s mind raced. He had to intervene. He looked to Dumbledore. While he no longer trusted the man, Ron knew that he was still on the right side and wouldn’t willingly let any student fall into danger.

“Dumbledore!”

The Headmaster squinted, looking down the aisle of the Great Hall at him.
“I-I mean Headmaster…” Ron said apologetically as his brisk walk turned into a light run. Fast, trying to pass Draco.

“What is it, Mr. Weasley?” Dumbledore asked.

“You can’t let Draco go home. Not with him!” Ron said, pointing at Lucius.

Lucius’ lip curled as he stared back at Ron, affronted and disgusted. “Do you actually believe you or anyone else can prevent me from taking my son home?” Lucius sneered. “Since intelligence is obviously lacking from your gene pool, I suggest that you to keep your mouth shut, boy.”

The thought of snatching Lucius’ cane from him and beating him over the head with it came and went. Ron opened his mouth to offer a retort, but before he could say a word, Draco cut in.

“Father…”

Lucius’ glare on Ron softened as his eyes turned to his son. “Draco. I’ve come to take you home. We have a private family matter to tend to.”

Draco glanced at Ron, who shook his head in protest.

“Yes, Father.”

“No, you can’t go!”

“Ron—Weasley, stay out of this! This has nothing to do with you.”

“Draco, you don’t have to do what he says anymore! Dumbledore, do something!”

The Headmaster sighed, looking down over his spectacles at Ron. “Mr. Weasley, while I appreciate your new found friendship and loyalty to Mr. Malfoy, I do believe his father knows what is best. Unless Draco’s safety is at risk, I cannot prevent him from leaving.”

“But he is at risk! His father is a Death Eater!”

Lucius gasped in offense, setting his glare back on Ron. He appeared to be contemplating whether or not to hex the boy in front of him, and Ron reached in his back pocket and withdrew his wand.

“Mr. Weasley, that is not necessary,” Dumbledore said softly.

But Ron kept his wand pointed at Lucius and his eyes set on him, waiting for the man to reveal his true nature.

Dumbledore sighed wearily. “Draco, forgive me, but I must ask. Do you have any reservations or concerns about going home with your father?”

Lucius scoffed, giving the Headmaster a distasteful once-over. Draco glanced up at his father and then to Ron and the Headmaster.

“No, sir. Of course not. I’d like very much to go home.”

Ron lowered his wand, gaping back at Draco in disbelief.

Dumbledore nodded. “Very well, then. We look forward to your return, whenever that may be.”

Draco gave the Headmaster a curt nod and then turned to his father. He didn’t even bother to give
Ron one last look before turning to follow Lucius out. He simply let himself be led.

Ron stared wide-eyed at Dumbledore, feeling helpless and frustrated with the Headmaster’s stance. He couldn’t stand there and watch this happen. Didn’t anyone care that Lucius Malfoy was a fucking Death Eater? Didn’t anyone care about Draco Malfoy’s well-being?

“Draco!” Ron said, moving forward to reach out and pull the boy back roughly by the arm.

Draco turned to look at Ron, his face twisted into a nasty snarl that made Ron flinch and loosen his grip. “You know what, Weasley, you are as stupid as everyone thinks, after all. You can’t even work out when someone is playing you and when something is real.”

Ron let go of Draco’s arm, his mouth agape in shock.

Draco gave him a patronising pout. “Aww, did I hurt your feelings? Are you going to cry now? Why don’t you go find Potter and Granger—they’re the only ones who’d care, anyway.”

Lucius turned to give Ron one last sneer before glancing to his son, who turned his back on Ron completely.

And then they were gone.

Ron stood in numb disbelief, staring at the empty Entrance Hall that lay just beyond the open doorway. When he felt two light hands on his shoulders, he didn’t even bother to look up at their owner.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Weasley. That was a most unfortunate exchange. Mr. Malfoy is very lucky to have a friend like you, and I suspect he didn’t mean what he said,” Dumbledore said softly.

But whether it had been true or not, Ron didn’t care. His chest felt heavy with shame and guilt. The sting of betrayal and fear for Draco’s fate were warring with each other. He didn’t know what to feel; he wished he couldn’t feel anything at all.

When Ron glanced back up, Dumbledore was watching him closely. He gave Ron a small, sad smile. “One day soon, Mr. Weasley, you’ll find that you can only help those who want to be helped. As much as it pains me to say this, I believe Mr. Malfoy’s fate was sealed long before you became his friend. If only you, Harry, and Ms. Granger had befriended him sooner, perhaps things would have been different for him.”

“But…”

Dumbledore gave Ron an encouraging squeeze on the shoulder. “It’s best not to dwell on it. Let him go. If he returns, then perhaps you can sort it out then. But I should remind you, these are dark times, and the future is not promised to any of us.”

Ron didn’t know what to say to that. He stood numbly, staring past Dumbledore, his thoughts heavy with Headmaster’s ominous words.

“Ah, look at the time—I believe you should be preparing for class,” Dumbledore said. “I do not want to hold you up.”

Ron nodded absently as Dumbledore patted him on the back.

“Take care, Mr. Weasley, and tell Harry I said hello. It’d be nice if he’d paid me a visit soon. It feels like ages since I last saw him.”
Ron was only vaguely aware when Dumbledore made his exit, leaving him alone. Free period was almost over and he'd have to hurry if didn't want House points taken from him for tardiness. But his feet felt glued to the floor. How would he tell Harry and Hermione about this? And how would they react? As mental as it seemed, Ron felt partially responsible, like he had somehow failed Draco.

Taking a deep breath, he forced his feet forward. He had to tell Harry and Hermione now, class be damned.

As soon as Ron found them, he led them outside to the lake. They nagged him all the way there about what was so urgent that he had to interrupt class and cost them a hundred house points.

When they finally got to the rocks, Hermione threw up her hands. "Ron! What's this all about? And why couldn't you tell us inside?"

Ron closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "It's about Draco…"


Ron balled his hands into fists. "Lucius Malfoy came... and took him."

Hermione stared at him with wide, disbelieving eyes. "What do you mean he came and took him? You were there?"

Ron's chest felt constricted and he could hardly stand to look at her. Her eyes were watering, and she was clasping her mouth with one hand like she might be sick. "Yes. I tried to stop him, but…"

"No…" Hermione said, shaking her head.

Harry stepped in closer to look Ron in the eye. "Tell us everything. What happened?"

Ron shook his head. "Draco and I were in the dining hall during free period, and then his dad shows up with Dumbledore. He said there was family business that needed to be tended to. Dumbledore said he couldn't interfere with him taking his son home."

Harry's eyes narrowed. "You mean Dumbledore didn't stop him?" Harry asked incredulously. "I don't understand. He knows Lucius Malfoy is a Death Eater!"

Ron nodded. "Right. That's what I said. So then Dumbledore asked Draco if he was in danger and if he wanted to stay at Hogwarts."

"And what did Draco say?" Hermione asked.

Ron huffed in exasperation. "He said he was looking forward to going home!"

Hermione rolled her eyes, pushing her hair back, tears sliding down her cheeks as she did.

Harry stood staring ahead at the lake. "Let's just calm down. We knew this was coming. Draco warned us. Lucius will probably just ask him a few questions…"

"Yeah, about us, and gods knows what else!" Ron said. "He's a Death Eater, Harry! You-Know-Who can't be too far away."

"Do you have to point out the obvious?" Hermione snapped.

Ron gritted his teeth and bit his tongue, not wanting to upset her any worse.
"It’ll be fine," Harry said absently, still staring at the lake. "Draco promised me he’d send a Patronus if he needed us. We’ll know if he’s in danger."

"And then what, Harry?" Ron asked. "We don’t even know where he is! Malfoy Manor is out in the sticks! And even if we could find it, how are we going to get in there and get him out?"

Harry swallowed. "We’ll tell the Order, we’ll get Remus, and—"

Hermione leaned over, holding her stomach as if she were going to be sick before straightening once more. "Harry, we’ve already been over this! We can’t tell anyone! It’ll start a war and it’ll expose Draco to even more danger."

Harry nodded slowly, his eyes cast to the rocks. He looked defeated.

"Besides, Draco said he’d be safe with his dad. He said his father wouldn’t let anything happen to him." Hermione sounded as if she were trying to convince herself.

"And since when do we trust Lucius Malfoy?" Ron asked. He knew that wasn't a helpful question, but it was out before he could hold it back.

"What other choice do we have, Ron? All we can do is wait!" Hermione said as fresh tears fell. "Oh, gods, I hate this!"

Ron stepped in closer and wrapped his arms around her. He held her tight as she sobbed into his chest. "It’s alright, Hermione. Draco will be alright. He’ll probably be back in a few days."

Ron kissed the top of her head and then looked up at Harry, searching for some reassurance from his lover that his words weren’t hollow promises. Harry stared back at Ron, but he didn’t seem to be looking at him at all. His gaze was distant; he looked lost. Ron shut his eyes, concentrating on Hermione’s sobs, trying to ignore the rising dread and uncertainty in his heart.
Snape sighed in appreciation as Narcissa tended to his back with the healing salve. Between the woman’s soothing touch and the cooling agent in the salve, his back no longer felt raw and gaping. He could actually sleep for most of the night without waking up, gasping in pain.

Based on the number of meals he’d had, Snape surmised that at least two and a half days had passed since his beating. He was still confined to the drawing room, which had been designated as off limits. The Dark Lord had paid him several visits over the past two days, sometimes crouching down beside Snape to pet his hair soothingly, his eyes filled with something that looked very much like regret. But Snape knew better. The Dark Lord was not capable of such an emotion in regards to others, only when it applied to his own failure to acquire something for personal gain.

It appeared to be late morning, judging by the light, and as Narcissa continued to apply the balm, Snape heard the muffled thud of boots on the carpet making their way over to him. Heavy robes slid over the floor like a snake over grass. Narcissa’s hands began to tremble as she continued treating his scars.

“I’m so sorry to have kept you, Severus. You should have returned by now. Whatever will you tell them when you return?”

Snape bit back a groan as he turned over, the pain cutting through the cooling agent with each slight movement. “My Lord, I will tell them whatever you see fit. You are the master strategist, after all.”

The Dark Lord chuckled. “Yes, this is true. Which is why it is best to never veer from my plan, a lesson you have undoubtedly learned over the past few days, I assume?”

“Yes, my Lord.”

“Good, because next time I give you an assignment, you cannot fail,” the Dark Lord said, glaring down at him in warning.

Despite the fatigue weighing on his spirit, Snape gave the slightest of nods.

“Narcissa,” the Dark Lord hissed.

She raised her head stiffly, poised. “Yes, my Lord?”
“Go find Nott, Crabbe, and Goyle for me, and tell them to come here immediately.”

“Yes, my Lord,” she said, giving Snape one last caress before rising to her feet. Snape closed his eyes, trying to focus on the cooling tingle on his wounds, but the pleasant sensation was fading fast, and its wake, a dull pain pulsed deep within his skin. His whole body felt as if it had aged years within a span of days.

Minutes later, he heard the sound of multiple footsteps breaching his temporary prison. Snape tried not to grimace at the sight of the three older dullards staring curiously at him. When his eyes met theirs, they all looked away before bowing their heads before the Dark Lord.

“You called, my Lord?” Nott said.

“Yes. We have a lot of work to do, but first, I would like an update on our reinforcements.”

“My Lord, we have secured control over the trolls,” Goyle informed him.

“As well as most of the giants,” Crabbe added.

“Most?” the Dark Lord said with displeasure.

Crabbe glanced nervously to Goyle. “Er, yes, my Lord. It appears Rubeus Hagrid has persuaded a few of them to join the fight against us.”

“I see,” the Dark Lord said, the weight of his stare hastening Crabbe to continue.

“My Lord, we do have some promising news that will please you.”

But the Dark Lord revealed no excitement at this revelation, only impatience. His red eyes glared in silent demand that Crabbe share his news as quickly as possible.

“My Lord, Nott and I have been making connections with the criminal Muggle underground.”

The Dark Lord raised an eyebrow, his frown deepening.

Nott quickly jumped in. “My Lord, they are willing to help us. They have Muggle weapons that can cause considerable damage. They also know all of the weak areas in each of the cities we want to strike.”

“Yes, and they have also informed us that there are corrupt Muggle police that would be willing to look the other way for the right price,” Crabbe added.

“Really?” the Dark Lord said, drawing nearer to Nott. “And tell me, why would Muggles want to help us destroy them?”

Nott and Crabbe exchanged a glance. “My Lord, they don’t know our intentions. They think we got fancy magic tricks that can help them break into banks and jewellery stores. All it took was a flash of a gold Galleon and a few diamonds, and we had their complete attention.”

“And how do we know we can trust them?” the Dark Lord pressed.

“They want in on anything that will reward them with money. They’re a greedy lot and don’t have any scruples about doing whatever it takes to get what they want. As long as we can give them that, they are as good as our willing slaves,” Nott explained.

The Dark Lord studied both men silently, and Snape could see Crabbe holding his breath under the
scrutiny. “Do not look so pleased with yourself, Nott. You have placed entirely too much trust in the Muggles. Criminal Muggles at that. But I will consider it.”

“Yes, my Lord, of course. Even without the Muggle criminal underground, we have enough trolls, giants, and Dementors to keep the Order and Aurors busy,” Nott said, waiting for affirmation.

But Snape knew better than the rest that the Dark Lord rarely gave any sort of affirmation. Instead, the Dark Lord turned his back on Nott to peer down at Snape on the floor. “And if I wanted to launch a strike today, would they be ready?”

Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott all looked at each other.

“My Lord, today is short notice…”

The Dark Lord whirled around, a snarl on his face.

“But yes, yes we could arrange it if that is your wish,” Nott said quickly.

The Dark Lord’s snarl sank into a smirk. “Good. We must be able to keep the Ministry and Aurors —”

An anxious looking Macnair suddenly came bustling through the door, bowing quickly before his master. “My Lord, I’m sorry to interrupt, but Parkinson has just owled, informing us that the Ministry has recently come into possession of a silver hand. He said that there is evidence indicating that perhaps the owner of the hand was… eaten…”

There was a gasp from the corner where the three goons stood, and the Dark Lord’s eyes widened. Snape’s held in his reaction. To his knowledge, only one person had such an appendage. And what about the rest of Pettigrew? Snape could only hope…

The silence in the room was acute as everyone stared at the Dark Lord, waiting for his reaction.

“Eaten? By what?” the Dark Lord asked sharply.

“They are not sure, but the owner’s clothing was also found strewn in the general vicinity, ripped to bits, and there was a great deal of dried blood.”

“And nothing more?” the Dark Lord hissed.

“No, sir,” Macnair said shakily.

“And how did they come to be in possession of the hand?” the Dark Lord demanded.

Macnair took a breath. “My Lord, it was turned over to them by way of Hogwarts. Dumbledore and the groundskeeper, Rubeus Hagrid, who found it in the forest.”

Snape’s mind raced. Someone had killed Pettigrew. That much was certain. Remus popped into Snape’s thoughts, but that was ludicrous, surely? There was simply no way in Salazar’s name that the gentle, misguided man he had come to respect and almost like would do such a thing, especially on a regimen of Wolfsbane.

But Snape’s inwardly groaned as the possibility of it began to sink in. If Remus had been tracking Pettigrew and had been led to the Forbidden Forest during the full moon perhaps things had gone awry. Snape had never fully trusted Wolfsbane, anyway, recalling the relief he’d felt when he had parted ways with the man right before the full moon cycle began.
He closed his eyes, his momentary disbelief now slowly giving way to relief. The rat was really
dead, and his secret was a little safer.

The sound of a robe dragging along the floor shook him out of his musings. He looked up to see the
Dark Lord approaching him with narrowed eyes. Snape pushed down his relief and glee about
Pettigrew’s demise and cleared his mind once more.

“In the Forbidden Forest, you say, Macnair?” the Dark Lord questioned, his eyes fastened on Snape.

“Yes, my Lord,” Macnair said.

“I wonder, what would Pettigrew be doing there?”

Snape gaped up, wondering if he was being asked, and why. Did the Dark Lord suspect something? He
could never be sure.

“My Lord?” Macnair asked.

“I’m not talking to you,” the Dark Lord snapped.

Macnair bowed his head in deference as the Dark Lord continued to glare at Snape. “Severus, isn’t
the forest warded?”

Snape struggled to rise, feeling the painful stretch in his back once more. “Yes, my Lord, the
perimeter around the Forest is warded from Apparition, but hypothetically, one could Apparate right
outside of the Forest and track through it.”

“But I know that you cannot penetrate the school grounds, even if one tracked through that forest.
I’ve tried.”

Snape nodded. “You are correct, my Lord, but that would not stop someone from trying to get as
close to the school as possible through the forest. In theory, a great deal could be learned by hiding
out at the forest’s edge.”

The Dark Lord’s eyes never wavered from Snape. His gaze was sceptical and studious. Snape
discreetly gnawed at the inside of his mouth, feeling an irrational need to help the Dark Lord make
sense out of these events in a way that explained Pettigrew’s demise quickly and irrefutably. “My
Lord, as you are already aware, there are a great many dark things that dwell in that forest. It is quite
possible that Pettigrew fell within the grasps of a cursed creature…such as a werewolf that may have
been tracking him for food or sport.”

The Dark Lord’s eyes narrowed. “Perhaps…”

“Another possibility, my Lord, well… it’s too sinister to mention. I shudder to think on it…”

The Dark Lord stared down at Snape, his eyebrow raised in question. “Speak.”

“I make no accusations, my Lord, but in your absence… there are always certain power struggles
that occur. Those who are seen as being in your favour are mistrusted and often envied.”

“What exactly are you implying, Severus? That someone here tracked Pettigrew down into the forest
and killed him?”

“It is my deepest wish that it were not so, but without your brilliant leadership, anything is possible. I
wouldn’t rule it out,” Snape said ominously.
“Yes, and it is also possible that you’re trying to implicate Greyback because you would like me to get rid of him. That would please you very much, wouldn’t it, Severus?”

Severus remained quiet.

“Hmm,” the Dark Lord hummed. “I shall think on it, but for now, we have more important matters to tend to.” He turned to face his henchmen.

“Nott… where is your son?”

“He’s in the parlour, my Lord,” Nott said quickly.

“Go get him,” the Dark Lord ordered.

“Yes, my Lord,” Nott said, turning around with obvious excitement.

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Ever since Draco had been pulled out of school, it felt as if a dark cloud was looming over Harry, Hermione, and Ron. In class, Harry’s eyes would fall on Draco’s empty seat and he’d often catch Hermione doing the same. Ron, on the other hand, seemed unusually interested in his studies, his face stuck in a book or focused on whatever lecture was being given. Among all of them, there was an unspoken anxiety that kept them silent during meals and leisure in the common room. Conversation didn’t seem necessary; they were all mired in the same thoughts and worries.

*What was happening to Draco right now?*

Over the next three weeks, as they waited, Harry had reconvened the D.A. and there was renewed enthusiasm among the members, considering the recent attacks.

None of the D.A members seemed suspicious of Harry’s sudden interest in reconvening, especially in light of the rising attacks on Muggles and wizards alike, which were increasing in frequency day by day. Something big was approaching, they all could feel it.

As they sat in the Great Hall, eating in their usual silence since Draco’s departure, Harry couldn’t help but notice that the buzz around them had grown louder with each passing day. Talk of pending Death Eater attacks and the possibility that Malfoy Manor was now Headquarters.

Sitting a few seats down from Hermione, a few fifth years were engaged in a heated conversation about the possibility that the majority of Slytherin were now either Death Eaters or helping Death Eaters. When Nott and Draco’s absences were brought up many eyes turned towards the Trio, waiting for any reaction that would confirm or deny theories about what their absences could mean.

Harry glanced at Hermione and Ron. “Suddenly, I’m not feeling very hungry. Care for a walk?”

Hermione and Ron didn’t even have to answer; they simply nodded and rose from their seats to follow Harry out onto the castle grounds.

They walked in silence until reaching the rocks, where they all took a seat on whatever flat surface they could find near each other. Ron seemed to be musing about his shoes; occasionally glancing up at the castle, while Hermione drew her knees to her chin as she stared blankly out at the light ripples breaking on lake. It was overcast, giving the mid-spring air a late winter chill. But the wind was no match for the fire of turmoil burning within Harry’s heart. He put his hand on Hermione’s head, gently caressing her curls down her back. The feel of soft hair under his palm was comforting, and it felt good to be able to offer her physical affection without peering eyes and whispers.
“Harry, do you think that his father asked him to come home so that they could... could….” She choked on the unsaid words, refusing to finish.

Ron and Harry exchanged a glance, and there was a moment of silence as the weight of it hung over them. Harry’s tongue felt stuck to roof of his mouth. He didn’t even want to think of it.

But Ron had plenty to say. “Of course he would,” he argued. “He’s Lucius Malfoy, the same arsehole who stood by and watched Harry get Crucio’d after You-Know-Who killed Cedric! They were only kids, just like Draco. He’s also the same creep that slipped a cursed diary to my sister and nearly got her and half the school killed. Not to mention fighting and threatening us last year so he could get his manicured hands on Harry’s prophecy and deliver it to You-Know Who! He’s a heartless bastard, and son or no son; I wouldn’t put it past him to force Draco into it.”

Harry didn’t know what to say to that. It felt true, but he didn’t want to give up hope that some measure of fatherly love would prevent Lucius from forcing such a fate on his son. Surely there were rules about age when it came to Death Eater membership?

“Maybe it’s what Draco said it was,” Harry said. “Perhaps Lucius just called him home to ask him questions and make sure he’s not making friends with the wrong sort.”

Hermione swallowed and then nodded her head resolutely. “You’re probably right, Harry. Just the idea of Draco consorting with the Harry Potter, a blood traitor, and a know-it-all Muggle-born would probably be enough to turn that arrogant bastard’s hair completely white.”

Ron smirked and nodded, while Harry felt a small measure of hope returning. Perhaps they had been listening to gossip too long and letting their imaginations get the best of them.

“Besides,” Hermione continued, “Draco understands more than anyone what the Mark means. He would never take it, not now, not after everything we’ve all been through together. He’s nothing like his father.”

Harry looked over to Ron for affirmation, but instead, his boyfriend had picked up a large pebble and proceeded to throw it at the surface of the lake. They all watched as it skipped twice, each of them drawn in their own private thoughts.

When they arrived back inside the crowded Gryffindor common room there was a noticeable hush. Harry made eye contact with several of his housemates daring them to make a derisive remark about Draco, but no one said a word, and so the Trio took seats by the hearth. The chatter around them soon resumed to its usual level, but Harry spied two unwelcomed pair of feet walking towards him and looked up to see Seamus in front of him.

Harry sighed. “Look, Finnigan, if you’re going to give us shit or ask questions about Malfoy, just save it.”

“I wasn’t going to rib on you, Potter. I just wanted to say that no matter what disagreements we may have had this year; I don’t want anything bad to happen to you. We’re still housemates, and we’re still all members of the D.A — that has to count for something,” Seamus implored, sparking Harry’s curiosity.

“I suppose you’re right, it does…” Harry said.

“Good,” Seamus said. “Then please, whether you like what I have to say or not, just hear me out, OK?”

The Trio didn’t reply, watching him with wary suspicion.
“I know you all think Malfoy is your friend, but now that he’s back, well…where exactly has he been for the last few weeks? What’s he been up to? All I’m saying is to remember the first rule of D.A.—stay vigilant,” Seamus offered ominously, giving them all a meaningful stare before returning to talk to Dean and Neville.

Harry attempted to mask his sudden swell of excitement at the news, his relief flooding through him like warm bathwater in his vein. He’d almost asked Seamus to repeat what he’d just said. Harry scanned the room again, noticing how the other students were watching the Trio closely for their reactions, yet quickly looking away at the onset of his gaze. When he glanced back at Hermione and Ron, they both acknowledged the veiled interest in the room with a look skyward and a shrug. Hermione reached for a book while Ron conjured up a chessboard.

An hour after everyone had turned in to their respective dorm rooms; the sound of snoring was the only thing to be heard. Harry retrieved the Protean Charmed coin, setting it to a half an hour later, down in the lowest dungeon. He did an extra cleansing charm on himself, changed into his most flattering t-shirt and denims, checked his breath, and retrieved a small morsel of dark chocolate he knew Draco was fond of, saved from dinner.

Ron smirked when he saw the effort Harry was putting in to preparing for their reunion, but said nothing. They snuck out of their dorm room one at a time and found Hermione waiting for them at the bottom of the stairs.

Her eyes were brighter than Harry had seen them in weeks and she was smiling hard. She looked just as excited as Harry felt.

“I can’t believe he’s back,” she said in a hushed whisper.

“Yeah, well, we’ll see him soon enough. Let’s go,” Harry said.

Their silence was thick on the trek down, but Harry was bubbling with anticipation, practically running the rest of the way. When they arrived to the lowest dungeons, they found it empty. After a few minutes had passed, Hermione clasped her hands in front of herself anxiously. “I hope he didn’t lose it.”

“Don’t be silly,” Harry said. “He said he’d keep it on him. He swore to it.”

Ten minutes went by, and then twenty.

“Call it again, Harry,” Hermione urged.

“I’ve summoned it twice. You felt it, right?” Harry asked.

Hermione nodded her head sadly. “Yes.”

After about a half an hour, Ron sighed. “He’s not coming.”

“Let’s just give it a few more minutes,” Harry said.

“Oh, listen, maybe he did lose the coin,” Ron reasoned. “Or maybe it was taken from him. We should try to arrange to meet with him tomorrow. Maybe he’s being watched right now. I’m sure it’d be hard for him to sneak out of his dorm after being away for nearly three weeks.”

Harry balled his fists in frustration, crushing the chocolate treat in the process. “I suppose that makes sense.”
“Let’s just go to bed,” Ron said. “At least we know he’s back,” he reassured them before they turned to make their way back.

But for Harry, sleep would be far behind.

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When Hermione woke the next morning, her mind hazily seized the idea that something had changed, something exciting, and it hovered just out of reach like the remnant of a dream. Then it hit her. Draco was back! She quickly sat up, short of breath, and gathered up her clothing on the way to the bathroom to shower and change. It had become a familiar routine she’d adopted to avoid bothersome questions about her piercings and lingerie. Today, especially, she had no time or patience for such questions. When she came out of the bathroom, both Ginny and Parvati were sitting on their beds, looking bewildered.

“Hermione!”

“Sorry, I, er, I have to get down to breakfast early. Ron needs some last minute tutoring in Transfiguration. I’ll see you two down there, yes?”

“Oh, sure,” Parvati said, glancing to Ginny.

Hermione had already bolted out of the door and was down in the common room, where both Harry and Ron were dressed and waiting for her. They shared a secretive smile, no words necessary, and headed out for breakfast.

They took their usual seats when they arrived, Hermione keeping her eyes ahead on Ron while discreetly scanning the Slytherin table behind him. After several minutes and no sign of Draco, she sighed.

“Well? Has he shown up yet?” Ron asked, helping himself to another piece of toast.

“No,” Harry said despondently.

“You know, maybe Seamus was lying, trying to get a reaction out of us,” Ron suggested.

“Ron, Seamus wasn’t the only one. I’ve heard others talking about it as well.”

“Yeah, well, I’ll believe it when I see it,” Ron muttered.

“Well, start believing,” Harry said breathlessly, looking beyond his boyfriend.

Hermione felt the nervous knots in her stomach unravel and her heart skip a beat when she saw Draco’s profile. He was walking between Crabbe and Goyle to take his usual place at the Slytherin table.

She couldn’t draw her eyes away. Draco’s skin had more colour than usual, giving his complexion a healthy flush, and his hair looked shiny and soft. He had a radiance about him that was alluring. He looked beautiful.

Perfect, even.

Ron turned around and then back to his lovers. “He looks… good.”

She narrowed her eyes. “Yeah, really good. Almost too good.”
“What do you mean? He’s a Malfoy. Vanity and all of that,” Ron said.

“No, Ron. Look at him.”

Ron turned around once more, and Harry leaned in further as well.

The way the dining hall light hit Draco’s skin, it almost gave off a glow, like he was wearing makeup or…

Hermione gasped. “He’s wearing a Glamour.”

“How can you tell?” Ron asked.

Hermione pursed her lips. “I just can. I’ve seen enough girls use them.”

They all exchanged an anxious look.

“You think he was beat up?” Ron asked.

Harry scowled. “Dunno. But we’re going to find out. Let’s talk to him after breakfast is over. We’ll just have to be a few minutes late for class.”

The Trio prolonged their breakfast, trying to keep an eye on Draco. When he rose, Crabbe and Goyle rose with him.

“Damn it.” Harry frowned. “How are we going to approach him with those two hanging around?”

Hermione smirked. “Let’s just walk right up to him. He’s supposed to be spying on us anyway, right?”

Harry smiled, nodding. “Right. We’ll just make it a bit easier for him, and then he can dismiss the other two. Come on, let’s hurry before the lesson starts.”

Drawing onlookers and whispers, the three of them strode up to Draco and his apparent bodyguards as they stepped out into the hallways from the Great Hall. Hermione didn’t bother to hide her ebullience.

“Draco!”

Draco’s face was impassive when he exchanged looks with Crabbe and Goyle.

“Welcome back,” Ron said, with a forced smile, eyeing the other two suspiciously.

Draco gave Harry, Hermione, and Ron a once over and then rolled his eyes. “What do you want?”

Harry frowned. “Just to catch up. You know, that’s what friends do. Do you mind if we have a word, alone?”

“Friends? You really are a nutter, Potter. We’re not friends; we never were.”

Harry appeared temporarily stunned, his mouth gaping open, but Hermione stuck up her nose in indignation. “How peculiar, because I could have sworn hanging out with us for the past six months meant otherwise!”

“Didn’t Weasley tell you? Oh, I forgot, he’s not very articulate, is he?” Draco sneered, glancing up at Ron, whose ears were turning pink. “I was just using you for information, and now that I have what
I need, I’d very much appreciate it if you never spoke to me again."

Goyle and Crabbe both smirked at each other.

Harry continued to gape at Draco, looking truly flabbergasted, while Ron’s face was twisted in anger. Hermione, on the other hand, was trying to make sense of what exactly was going on. On a gut level, she didn’t believe a word Draco was saying.

“Well, fuck you, too, Malfoy!” Ron said, turning away abruptly with Harry.

Hermione gave Draco one last disbelieving look before following after Ron. She stared at Ron’s back as they briskly walked down the hall in stunned silence. When she looked to Harry, she could see he shared her confusion.

“I don’t understand.” Harry said once the crowd in the hallway had thinned out. They were definitely going to be late for class, but for once, Hermione couldn't care less.

“It’s obvious, isn’t it? He’s a liar, and damned good one, too,” Ron bit out.

“I don’t believe it. It has to be an act,” Hermione insisted.

Harry nodded. “That’s probably it.”

Ron stopped in his tracks and looked back at the both of them. “Are you blind? It’s the same thing he said to me three weeks ago. I thought he was trying to save face in front of his dad, but this time… he had no excuse. He just told us right to our faces that he was using us the whole time! Face it, we’ve been had. If those two goons weren’t standing there with him, I would have let him have it.”

“Ron, calm down. Let’s think rationally about this,” Hermione insisted. “Draco’s been through too much with us for it to all be phony. Who knows what his father threatened to do if he continued being friendly with us. What you just saw, that was the lie! We put him on the spot right in front of Crabbe and Goyle and left him with no choice.”

Ron balled his fists. “There’s always a choice, Hermione.”

“Perhaps if we each tried to talk to him alone, away from the others, we could get some real answers,” Harry suggested.

“Harry, if you’re up for being insulted again, be my guest,” Ron said.

“Well, it’s worth a try,” Hermione insisted.

“Fine. Do what you want, I’m done with him,” Ron said.

Hermione and Harry exchanged an anxious glance. “I suppose we better get to class,” she said awkwardly.

Harry nodded, biting his bottom lip. He looked every bit as worried and concerned as Hermione felt.

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After earning a rare deduction of points for coming to class late, Hermione managed to fake her way through the next two lessons. By the time lunch arrived, though, she could hardly think of food. Throughout her entire lesson, she had been distracted with thoughts of Draco. What had his father asked him? Had he been threatened, or even worse, hurt? What did Crabbe and Goyle know, or think that they knew?
As she headed down to the Great Hall for lunch, with her mind turning over all of the possible ways she could get Draco alone, Pansy’s voice rang out behind her.

“Tough luck, Granger.”

Hermione turned on her heel to see Pansy, Millicent, and two other Slytherin girls advancing towards her.

“Excuse me?” Hermione asked curtly.

Pansy’s smirk was far too smug. Hermione wanted to wipe it off of her face, but instead reached into her robe pocket, ready to brandish her wand.

Pansy chuckled, glancing at Hermione’s wand hand. “No need to get defensive. I just wanted to pass on my condolences.”

The other girls sniggered.

Hermione refused to take the bait; she knew immediately what Pansy was referring to and simply scoffed. “Whatever it is you think you know, Pansy, subtract that by half and multiply it by zero for the truth.”

Pansy narrowed her eyes. “I know Draco doesn’t want to be associated with you anymore. We all saw your pathetic display this morning after breakfast.”

“It’s about time. I’m glad he’s finally come to his senses,” Millicent said.

“Thank Salazar for that,” a girl in the back commented.

Hermione gave them an exaggerated eye roll.

“At least you can say you almost kissed a real pure-blood.” Pansy sighed loudly in false lament. “So close.” She pouted. "Better luck next lifetime, Granger.”

With a haughty air, she pushed past Hermione. It was the final straw—Hermione’s contempt for the girl broke through and she acted without thinking, sticking her foot out. Pansy tripped, bumping into Millicent, who stumbled back. There was an audible gasp among the girls as they all gawked back at Hermione.

“You cow!” Pansy exclaimed, reaching for her wand.

Hermione raised hers in anticipation. But instead of hexing Hermione, Pansy lowered her wand, her eyes focused down the hall, as the triumphant smirk on her face returned.

Hermione kept her eyes on Pansy, intent on not falling for her trick.

Pansy smiled wide. “Oh, look, here comes your ex-friend now. Hello, Draco…”

Hermione turned abruptly. Draco gave Pansy a bothered glance and then looked back at the other girls, his eyes never meeting Hermione’s.

“Not going to stop and chat with your friends?” Pansy asked, prodding him.

Draco sneered as he stopped and turned once more to glare at Pansy. “If I saw any, perhaps I would.” He turned and walked away, the other boys following him.
Hermione’s heart ached to hear him say such a thing, but then she reminded herself that Draco undoubtedly had a reason for pretending not to be her friend any longer, and if anything it confirmed that Pansy was definitely not in his inner circle.

Still, Pansy wore a smug smirk. “I guess it’s official. You’ve been dumped.”

“Sounds like you have, too,” Hermione retorted with a raised eyebrow.

Pansy scoffed. “I was never just Draco’s friend, Granger. We have our little spats from time to time, but he always comes back when he gets lonely. See you around,” she said with a wicked smile.

Hermione pictured smacking the bitch dead in the jaw, but instead, squeezed her wand tighter in an effort to restrain herself. As she stood watching Pansy and her friends walk away, Draco’s words still echoed in her head. He couldn’t even look at her. She blinked, feeling tears gathering. This really couldn’t be happening. What had his father done to him?

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It was hard not to notice Hermione’s subdued presence at lunch. She was playing with her food and when her eyes lifted to meet his, she appeared on the verge of tears.

“Hermione, what’s wrong?”

She glanced up at the Slytherin table. “He’s changed.”

“No shite,” Ron said. “I told you.”

“What happened?” Harry asked.

Hermione took a deep breath, glancing up at the Slytherin table once more before explaining the incident that had taken place earlier involving Pansy.

“I know something is terribly wrong, because he hates her, and he hates the way she talks to me. He would have defended me if he could. But he couldn’t even look at me.”

It felt like a great weight had been dropped on Harry’s chest as Hermione spoke. The fear that their lover had somehow been coerced or threatened to distance himself made him sick.

“I’m going to get to the bottom of it,” Harry said with determination. “I’ll talk to him myself. Alone.”

Ron gave Harry a doubtful look. “And what if he doesn’t want to be alone with you, Harry?”

“We’ll just see about that,” Harry said with finality.

After lunch, Harry went to Advanced Transfiguration with Ron. For most of the class, he watched Draco from behind. Staring at the back of the boy’s white blond crown, a torrent of memories and feelings began to build like a storm. He remembered how Draco had promised to use his Patronus if he was in trouble, and how he had waited for days and then weeks, but no Patronus ever came. He remembered Draco telling them that if he had to go home, he would tell them everything when he came back. He’d said that everything would be fine. He’d told Harry he loved him. There was no way in hell all of that could have been a lie. How could Draco fake those kinds of feelings?

The memory of waking up next to Draco at Snape’s sparked renewed hope. His anticipation for the end of the lesson was increasing by the moment. He would corner Draco after class and find out the truth. Just one look, one question, one touch would tell Harry everything he needed to know.
After class, Harry told Ron he’d catch up with him and promptly turned in the direction Draco had gone. Crabbe and Goyle were nowhere to be seen, and Harry didn’t know how much time he had before Draco reconnected with them. He looked around as he got up behind the boy, and saw that most students seemed to be preoccupied with getting to their next destination. Seizing his chance, Harry reached out and tapped Draco’s shoulder.

“Draco…”

But Draco did not turn around; quickening his pace in an instant. So did Harry’s. He felt foolish, chasing after someone who was ignoring him so wilfully, but there didn’t seem to be any other recourse.

“Draco!” he said more sternly as he caught up. This time Harry grasped the right shoulder of the boy’s robes, pulling him back a little.

Draco turned around in annoyance, a menacing glare in his eyes. “The next time you touch me, Potter, you’re going to be missing a hand.”

Harry searched his eyes for any hint that this was a façade or show because they were in the middle of a hallway. But there was nothing in Draco’s eyes but hard truth. Still, Harry refused to believe it.

“Meet me later, alright?” he whispered.

Draco shook his head and offered Harry a pitying smile. “Not only are you visually impaired, Potter, but apparently you need your ears checked as well.”

Harry felt his childhood frustration and anger with Draco rising and crashing against the longing and love he had developed for the boy. He moved forward without a second thought, backing Draco near a suit of armour, behind which there was a discreetly tucked away broom closet.

In a swift move that underscored his talents as a Seeker, Harry grabbed the front of Draco’s robes and, in one motion, opened the broom closet door, pulling him inside.

“Just what do you think you’re doing, Potter?” Draco asked angrily.

He couldn’t see Draco very well, but Harry could smell him, and as if in reply, Harry’s mouth fastened over Draco’s, tasting him. He moaned as soft moist lips yielded and then opened to his demanding tongue. Draco’s taste was just as he remembered it and he wanted so much more. Harry pushed and pulled at the thin muscular body, tasting him, and pleading with him silently to drop the pretense of hating him.

For a moment, Draco gave in, kissing Harry back just as fiercely as he was being kissed. They both moaned as their arms were frantically fought, grabbing, and struggling, until Harry finally got a hold of Draco’s wrists and pushed him further back into a thicket of magical brooms and mops. Draco almost slipped and there was a clatter that seemed to break the bubble of intense attraction and need that had sprung up from that one kiss.

Draco pushed Harry back forcibly.

“Get off of me!” he gritted out, turning to exit.

Harry pushed him back, blocking the door. “Not until you tell me what’s going on! I know you didn’t mean what you said. I felt it in your kiss! You don’t have to lie to me, Draco. It’s me… Harry. I’m not going to let anyone hurt you!”
Draco scoffed. “Potter, are you a complete idiot? You just pushed me into a broom closet. People are going to wonder why we’re in here!”

“Everyone is in study hour or lessons.”

“If you don’t move out of my way…” Draco threatened.

With his hope rapidly disintegrating, Harry felt a desperate anxiety growing in its place. He drew back from the door, nodding resolutely. “Fine, go on then. But I made a promise to you, Draco, and I intend to keep it. I know you’re in trouble, and I know you probably don’t feel safe right now, but you can still count on me, on all of us. Perhaps you can’t talk right now… but I won’t stop trying. You know how to reach me when you’re ready.”

Draco scoffed, chuckling coldly. “And I suppose you expect me to send you a Patronus or use that silly charmed coin. You have no idea how far in over your head you are, Potter. Read my lips: stay away from me.”

Everything Draco was saying felt ridiculously scripted, like a Muggle picture show. It was as if Harry was listening to someone else speaking. He continued to stare at Draco as if he hadn’t said anything at all, still hoping for some sort of affirmation that this was a game.

But Draco shook his head warily and opened the door to the broom closet, causing Harry’s eyes to blink against the light hitting his glasses. Draco’s white blond hair was highlighted, and so was a fading purple bruise on the back of his neck. Harry gasped at the sight of it, realising that Hermione was correct in her assessment that he was indeed wearing a Glamour. Slowly and numbly, Harry stepped out into the empty hallway after Draco, hating the helplessness penetrating his thoughts. There was a hollow feeling in his chest, and all Harry could do at the moment was watch Draco walk away.

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The following day in Herbology, Professor Sprout’s voice seemed distant in Hermione’s ears. She knew whatever the woman was talking about was supposed to be important, but it didn’t feel relevant next to the turmoil swarming her heart. Draco had changed seats, sitting next to his Slytherin housemates, and every time Hermione tried to make eye contact, he would turn his head and begin talking to someone or busy himself with his lesson.

Not wanting to look like a fool in love, Hermione forced herself to stop staring at him and instead focused on Sprout, who she could not really hear.

Why was Draco trying so hard to distance himself? He could at least make eye contact or give her a sign. Something. They had spent too much time building something special. No matter how bad things were, Hermione refused to believe that Draco could turn his back on his friends and lovers.

Her mind worked furiously to think of way to get him alone, and five minutes before class ended, she raised her hand insistently.

“Yes, Miss Granger?” Sprout called wearily.

“Professor, Draco and I need to finish up with the samples left in Snape’s storage,” she said matter-of-factly.

Sprout narrowed her eyes. “I thought you were done with that?”

“No, Ma’am. Many of them were still in formation and couldn’t be moved. We were under the
process of observing and taking notes, but if they are left down there without attention, it might create even more of a mess. Certainly the smell will spill over eventually and stink up the entire dungeon.”

Sprout looked doubtful but also reluctant to get into a debate about something she wasn’t informed about. “Oh, alright. You and Malfoy have my permission to finish up down there. And I do mean finish up. This Shielding Potions nonsense has gone on long enough. I don’t want it taking up any more of your time—you both have real assignments to tend to.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hermione said eagerly, looking back to Draco’s table where he sat, glaring at her.

They walked down to the dungeons in thick silence, Draco dragging behind her. Every time she tried to slow down, he would slow down, refusing to walk beside her. She finally just gave up and hastened her steps to Snape’s old classroom. Once inside, she waited for Draco to enter before closing and locking the door.

“There, now you can drop the act,” she said in a rushed breath, turning toward him.

Draco faced her slowly, his features impassive. “For fuck’s sake. First Potter and now you! What are you going to do? Try to hold me hostage?”

Hermione searched his face in confusion, shaking her head. “No, I… Draco, we’re alone—you don’t have to pretend you don’t like me. Now, please, just tell me what’s going on. What happened when you returned home? I know you’re wearing a Glamour.”

She reached out to touch him and he drew back.

“Don’t.”

Hermione’s hands flew to her head and she contemplated pulling her hair out in frustration. “What is wrong with you? What did your father do?”

“Nothing,” Draco snarled. “And don’t you ever speak of my father again. You’re not worthy to be in the same room with him, let alone speak of him.”

Hermione stood, dumbfounded, staring back at a stranger, or at least a person she had long forgotten. It was as if an old ghost had arisen in the place of her former lover.

“Are you saying that this isn’t an act?” she asked in confusion.

Draco began a slow clap. “Very good, she finally gets it! Now, let me out.”

Hermione shook her head vehemently. “No. I don’t believe it.”

Draco seemed to be struggling to keep his composure, a vein throbbing at his temple as he scowled. “Well, believe it! I was using you. Now, don’t make me tell you again. If you don’t unlock the door, I’ll go right through you and do it myself.”

Hermione backed up but didn’t stand aside, pressing her back firmly against the door. “Do it, then. Go through me if you have to. I’m not letting you walk out of here until you tell me the truth.”

Draco’s huffed, pulling out his wand. A rising dread about what it meant if he was willing to hex her to get away from her made it hard to breathe. Still, Hermione persisted, a slow dying hope driving her to press for more.
“Did he threaten you? Or perhaps someone else did? You can tell me, Draco; we’re alone in a
warded classroom. No one can see or hear us. Please…”

Draco scowled, his wand not wavering. Hermione extended her arms, making clear her intention to
block his exit at all costs.

“It’s over, Hermione! Move!”

Hermione laughed sardonically. “Just like that? You said you loved me… You can’t just walk away
from everything, from us… from me!”

“How many ways do I have to say it? I’ve completed my assignment, I’m done with all of you!”

Anger and disbelief held Hermione still before breaking, spurring her to speak. “I don’t believe you!
You can’t tell me you faked everything. I know it was real. I felt it!”

Draco’s eyes narrowed and a sneer grew on his face. “How do you know what you felt? All you
care about is getting off!”

Hermione gasped. His words stung like a hex and she instinctively slapped him across the face. She
was no longer worried about his response; she wanted him to feel the same pain he had caused her.

“Lie all you want, but don’t ever insult me like that again!”

Draco’s face was red from her assault, but there was something else there. His mouth was slightly
open, his eyes wild. He had the look of a man about to confess everything.

But then he closed his lips and gritted his teeth. His grey stare cooled once more.

Hermione felt her determination grow. She was getting to him; he was protesting too hard, and he
still hadn’t pushed past her to leave. She just had to press a little harder…

“Say it over and over again, Draco—I still won’t believe you. I know you, and this is an act.”

Draco lowered his wand, leaning into her menacingly, but she held her ground, raising her chin.

“You don’t know shite, Granger! You fell for an illusion…very easily, I might add,” he said with a
nasty snarl.

Hermione moved away from the door, closer to him. Draco immediately stiffened and backed up a
few steps.

“I think I can tell the difference between illusion and the real thing,” she said softly.

He waited, not saying a word in response, and her intuition told her to reach out and take his hand.
When she did, she found it compliant and sweaty. He was nervous. More proof. She gave it a
reassuring squeeze. “This is real, Draco.”

Hermione stared up at him, taking note of every detailed line of his face, his measured breath, and the
way he swallowed reluctantly, his eyes revealing something more than malice and frustration. There
was sadness there. And for one moment, Hermione could feel his struggle not to squeeze her hand
back. Perhaps if she encouraged him, wrapped her arms around him, he’d know it was alright. But as
soon as the moment came, it was gone, and Draco was glaring down at her with hardened eyes. Like
one determined to rid themselves of a bothersome pest.

He snatched his hand from hers, scowling as he stepped to the side as if to pass her.
"Draco," she said, stepping in front of him, blocking him once more. She steeled herself for a confrontation as she reached out again, grabbing him around his waist and stepping closer so that her face was resting against his chest. “Don't push me away like this… let yourself feel…”

His chest lay still; he was holding his breath, but she could still hear his heart beating wildly. She closed her eyes, taking in his fresh soapy scent, remembering.

“Don’t you remember that I’m yours?” she asked, her arms circling his waist in a loose hug. She allowed her head to rest more comfortably against his chest, and then she felt it sink as his exhaled. He was breathing again, and if she wasn’t mistaken, smelling her hair.

She smiled, wanting to exclaim how she’d known it was all an act. She wanted to ask him once more what had happened while he was at home, but the moment was tenuous—anything could break it. Now that she had proof that he indeed missed her, she felt more confident he would tell her everything on his own terms in a few moments.

A few moments passed, stretching into more than a minute of silence. "It’s alright… you can talk to me," she finally offered, giving his waist another affectionate squeeze.

His tranquil stillness broke, and Hermione felt the body against hers stiffen once more. She gasped as she was pushed back, stumbling to regain her footing.

“You are still mine, aren’t you?”

His smile was nasty and didn’t touch his eyes. There was no light in them; they were cold.

“Hmm?”

Hermione nodded slowly, wondering where this line of questioning was leading.

“That means you have to do anything, I say… right?”

She tried not to look too cheeky as she replied, "Well, I don't exactly have to. But you know that I will."

Hard grey eyes bored into her own as Draco stepped closer. When he reached her, face-to-face, he didn’t stop, forcing Hermione to back up until, once again, she was pressed against the door.

Draco’s eyes were hungry with lust as his raised his hands to either side of her head, trapping her against the door.

“What do you want, Granger? One last fuck? Huh? Is that it? Scared you won’t be able to get by with only two cocks to play with?” he taunted cruelly.

Hermione pushed the insult aside, determined not to let it deter her. “Your insults are getting weak, Draco. They don’t hurt, because you don’t mean them. I love you, and you can’t honestly stand there and tell me that you don’t love me. I know you do,” she said with confidence.

“Wrong. I don’t love you, Granger. Get this through your thick skull: I can’t love you. You’re a Mudblood, and that will never change. We don’t make sense,” he said matter-of-factly.

Upon hearing the offensive epithet roll off his tongue so easily, Hermione instinctively raised her hand again. This time, Draco caught her by the wrist, pushing her arm back against the wall.

Hermione pursed her lips. “Are you in danger?”
Draco growled in her face and straightened, lifting his chin in defiance.

“You don’t have push us away like this,” she insisted. “Whatever type of trouble you’re in, we can help.”

Draco stared down at her in quiet contemplation. “What would you do to help me?”

Hermione’s heart unclenched and she felt a great sigh of relief leave her as tears begin to roll down her cheeks. “I’d do anything. We took a vow, remember? Whatever you need, Draco, just tell me.”

“Show me,” Draco said, ignoring her questions.

“What?” she asked, confused.

“Show me that you’d do anything for me,” he dared her, his eyes gleaming dangerously.

Draco let go of her arms and stepped back, surveying her body slowly. The look of desire in his eyes was affirming: it was proof that everything he had said before that was just a part of the act.

Bringing her arms to her sides, she licked her lips and slowly lifted her robes over her head. She was encouraged to find that his eyes were fastened on her body.

“Play with your nipples.”

“You could help with that,” she said seductively, her eyes searching his hand for his ring. But it wasn’t there. “Draco, where’s your ring?”

Draco narrowed his eyes, his mouth becoming a scowl. “I’ll ask the questions. You’ll speak only when spoken to, understand?”

Hermione felt a chill and shuddered. How deep undercover did he have to go to remove his ring? No one even knew of its meaning…

“Granger?” His voice shook her out of her thoughts.

“Yes, Master,” Hermione said quickly.

“Take off your shirt, now. Kneel before me and do what I told you to do,” he ordered, his eyes fastening to hers and glancing down to the spot where he wanted her.

Hermione considered him for a moment. He was trying to use her submission to put distance between them. She felt defiant, but confident that he would break somewhere along the way. So she did as instructed, removing her shirt and tie before lowering herself on her knees.

“That’s a good slut,” he said mockingly, the usual affectionate tone that came with the pet name now missing. Hermione gulped hard.

“Now do what I told you to do.”

She blinked as her mind raced to his previous command. Her hands fastened to her breasts quickly, pushing them up and kneading them as she watched for his approval.

“Pinch them,” he ordered.

For the past several weeks she had become accustomed to playing with them, even pulling on them to test her limits in applying pain to herself in preparation for whatever the boys would do to her. So
she felt no trepidation tweaking the rings hanging from her nipples for pleasure.

The pull of the metal sent a small shock wave through her already hardened nipples. Draco moved forward, stopping just short of touching her. She continued to pinch and trace the rings in her breasts, hoping to see some sign that he was pleased.

“You look like a whore,” he sneered.

His words didn’t even hurt—they just made her feel weary. She had done everything she could, obeyed his commands, debased herself, let him objectify her without any of the former intimacy or aftercare she had come to expect from him.

"What do you have to say now? Do you still think I’m lying?"

“Yes.”

He narrowed his eyes, balling his fists. “Then you’re dumber than I thought,” he said. "Pathetic, really. Perhaps you and Pansy really are the same."

Hermione held in a sob she could feel building within her chest, holding a stoic expression.

“Goodbye, Granger,” he said with an unsympathetic head shake, sweeping past her and unlocking the door to leave.

She sat frozen on her knees, her shirt discarded and her breasts exposed, and all Hermione could think of was that he was a terrific liar and whatever had been said or done to him was greater than anything she, Harry, or Ron could do to help him.

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That evening at dinner, Hermione didn’t show. When Ron and Harry went looking for her, Ginny informed her that she was tucked away in her dorm room and had been crying silently with her curtain closed.

The next morning, when they came down to the common room to walk to breakfast, her eyes were red and swollen and she looked completely out of it.

“Hermione, you don’t have to go to breakfast… or lessons. We can tell McGonagall you’re sick.”

Hermione shook her head. “No, I have a test in Runes today. I’ll be fine.”

But Ron knew better. The quiet rage that had been sparked upon Draco’s very public rejection was now in full bloom, and looking at Hermione’s red eyes and Harry’s long face only fanned the flames coursing through him. Since Draco had returned, all Ron could think of was shaking the prat and punching him in that distinguished pointy nose of his.

As breakfast passed and then first and second lesson, Ron’s determination to break the Malfoy puzzle grew stronger. All of the years he had spent resenting the ferret seemed to be staring him in the face again, and he felt foolish for believing for even one minute he could ever care about such a despicable person. His mistrust was back stronger than it had ever been before. But at least before, when he didn’t know or like Draco, he knew where he stood with the boy. Now that there were feelings and secret alliances at stake, he wasn’t sure about anything. The only thing Ron was sure of was that he needed a clear answer from Draco, and he planned to get it.

After Quidditch practice, he approached Harry in the changing room.
“Harry, I need borrow the map.”

“What?”

“The map, I need it,” Ron demanded.

“For what, Ron?”

Remembering Harry never did take too well to coercion, Ron tried a softer approach. “Just give it to me, please…”

Harry gave Ron a sceptical look but reached into his bag and retrieved the map, handing it over slowly. “Don’t make me regret giving you this.”

“You won’t,” Ron said with relief, taking it and turning to walk down the hall.

He wolfed down dinner and then for the next two hours, while everyone else hung out and socialised; Ron isolated himself in the library. He pretended to read, keeping his nose buried in a book, with the map carefully splayed open within his Charms textbook, watching and waiting for Draco to be rid of his goons.

As he studied the map, Ron grew frustrated when it became apparent that Draco always seemed to be surrounded by Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott. He almost put the map away, when finally Draco’s name parted ways with the three, turning left to the dungeons adjacent to Slytherin. Ron felt his breath hitch as he thought about what he was about to do. It would be risky, but so was waiting around for Draco to reveal the truth.

Quickly, he closed his book and packed up to make a quick dash for the dungeons with the map in hand.

He took the alternate route down to the dungeons where Draco was headed, keeping his eyes on the map as he did. He wondered why Draco would be walking through the dungeons alone and then noticed that the boy was headed towards an old study hall that was often used for detention with Filch. When Draco rounded the corner, alone, with a book underneath his arm, Ron emerged from the opposite side, slightly out of breath. Draco looked absolutely shocked, and Ron took advantage, grabbing him by the arm and turning him around.

“What the—”

“Shut your gob and come with me,” Ron growled in a low tone, pushing Draco in the back.

Draco scowled, going in his robe for his wand, but Ron already had his wand at his back.

“Not so fast,” Ron warned.

“Weasley, this is ridiculous. What do you want?”

“Just walk,” Ron ordered.

Draco gave an exasperated sigh with a flip of his hair, walking slowly while Ron poked him in the back.

They went down two levels to the lowest dungeons, where Ron quickly ordered Draco to turn around and hand over his wand.

“No,” Draco said. “I don’t know what your intentions are.”
“Exactly,” Ron said, lowering his wand to point at Draco’s bits. “And if you don’t hand over your wand right now, they may change dramatically. Now give it to me.”

Draco scowled, giving Ron a hateful glare as he reached into his robe pocket.

“Easy does it, slowly… right, now drop it on the floor beside you.”

Draco shook his head at Ron but did as he was told, dropping his wand softly beside his feet. Which Ron swiftly kicked across the floor.

“Congratulations, Weasley. You just proved what a witless git you are. Eventually, I’m going to get my wand back, and when I do, you’re going to pay for this.”

Ron scoffed. “You don’t scare me, Malfoy. The only thing I care about right now is Hermione and Harry. What the hell did you say to them?”

“The same thing I told you before! I’m tired of repeating myself! I lied, alright? I never cared about the stupid little prophecy or being your friend. Get over it! Move on!”

Ron stepped back, staring at him, contemplating what he could do or say to get Draco to confess something, anything.

“Yeah, you keep saying that, but none of us believe you. What happened to you? And don’t give me that shit about you playing us all this time. I know you weren’t. Even you have your limits, Malfoy.”

Draco collected himself, straightening his shirt and running a hand through his hair so that it returned to its proper state.

“You have no idea what my limits are, Weasley,” Draco sneered.

Ron shook his head. “It just doesn’t make any sense. Why would you go through all of that to get nothing?”

“I’ve got plenty…”

Ron drew back in disbelief. “You… you told your dad about us… about everything?”

Draco swallowed, his eyes falling momentarily. “That’s none of your business. It’s out of your hands now.”

Ron shook his head once more, certain now more than ever that something was off in Draco’s confession. “You’re lying. I know you are. But what I can’t figure out is why. Did he threaten you? Hermione says you’re wearing a Glamour… Were you tortured?”

Draco balled up his fists, an angry scowl growing on his face. “My father would never do such a thing. I told you that. It’s not my fault you three were naïve enough to accept me as a friend. I’ve been giving all of you shit for years, and just like that, you let me in. I did what I had to do, and now that it’s over, I don’t have any need to be associated with you lot.”

Ron’s nostrils flared, his ears burning as he advanced on Draco, who moved back anxiously.

“You sodding little prick! I told you if you hurt her—”

“She’ll be fine, she has you and Harry. Between the two of you, I’m sure you’ll do a good job of making her forget all about me,” Draco said nastily.
“You never cared about her. You never cared about any of us…”

“It’s a wonder you made it to sixth year, Weasley, as slow as you are!”

Ron barely heard the end of what Draco said as the anger pounding at his temples pushed him forward, compelling him to grab Draco’s throat. “I’m going to kill you!”

Draco let out a dry laugh. “Really, Weasley? I don’t think you have it in you.”

“Try me,” Ron said, his grip tightening on Draco’s throat as he pushed the boy back against the stone wall.

Draco’s eyes were wild and darting, and his breath was coming in short and heavy. “No,” he choked out. “I don’t think you do. You’re too much of a ninny to go through with it.”

“Oh, yeah?” Ron challenged, feeling the soft skin of Draco’s neck caving in under the pressure of his fingers.

“Yeah!” Draco dared, “Go on! Choke me!”

Ron grimaced, his face contorting in disgust. “You’d probably get off on it, you pervert.”

“It’d be better than shagging you. That was absolutely dreadful!”

Draco’s words felt like an unexpected jab from a shard of glass, stabbing him near his heart. Ron felt his own breath grow thin and adrenaline rush through him. His arm shook with it as he pushed against Draco’s jugular. It didn’t matter that the boy within his grip was beginning to turn a deep shade of pink; all that mattered was that he felt betrayed, and that the traitor had just added insult to injury by belittling him once more.


Ron’s anger began to drown out all reason. He knew his grip had to be painful, but Draco’s face was stoic and defiant.

Draco’s pallor continued to darken from deep pink to light blue. Ron could almost imagine Draco gasping for his last breath, and then it would be over. He wouldn’t have to worry about whether the prick had betrayed him and his lovers; he wouldn’t have to feel any more anxiety about what was to come. The prophecy would end, things would go back to normal, and he would never, ever have to see Draco’s smug smirk again.

When Draco’s eyes rolled to the back of his head, the boy's last words echoed in Ron’s head.

“Kill me. I’d rather be dead, anyway.”

Ron blinked, the thought of it all ending, everything they had shared and planned, was like a sobering dose of Pepper-Up Potion. His hold on Draco’s throat weakened. The whites of Draco’s eyes rolled back, revealing his grey irises, and he took a deep gasp of air, coughing, and then jerked to wring himself out from Ron’s grip. But Ron held onto his throat and purposefully brushed against Draco. Instantly, he felt the stiff evidence of the other boy’s arousal through his robes, causing his own cock to move. Without thinking about what he was doing, he roughly pulled up Draco’s robes and shoving his hand down the boy’s trousers.

“What are you doing?” Draco asked apprehensively.
Ron collected his breath as Draco’s limp cock began to lengthen and harden in his hand. He leaned in, his nose brushing past soft blond hair as he whispered against Draco’s ear. “You can’t tell me this wasn’t real. I know it was… you enjoyed it just as much I did. And you still do.”

Ron squeezed on the hardening cock in his hand, his lust and anger warring.

“Are you going to fuck me or kill me, Weasley?” Draco asked with a dare in his voice.

Something in Draco’s tone raked on Ron’s nerves like grains of sand in shorts on a beach.

“Maybe both,” Ron whispered, tightening his grip, causing the boy to jerk, but his erection was not deterred. The feel of it in Ron’s hands was exciting, especially now that he had Draco under his control.

“Oh, yeah, you like it, don’t you?” Ron breathed, nipping Draco’s neck with a hard bite.

Draco groaned and his hips twisted as if urging Ron on.

Draco’s cock stiffened further at Ron’s touch, and Ron felt empowered by the reaction. He squeezed, gripping it tightly as he pulled and pushed his hand over it.

Draco tried to stifle a whine and moan as Ron continued his ministrations, but they both knew that he was turned on.

Ron watched his face closely, one hand alternating between squeezing and releasing the soft flesh of Draco’s neck, the other furiously working to produce evidence that he could not be refused.

“Oh. Oh, fuck,” Draco gasped.

Ron licked his lips, his nose brushing Draco’s as he pressed his hand harder into the boy’s throat.

“Weasley… Ron,” Draco choked.

“What?”

Draco shut his eyes, as if willing himself to hold his tongue, and when he did, Ron slowed his pace.

Draco whimpered, his hips pushing up insistently into Ron, urging for him to continue his previous pace.

“You want to come?”

Draco tried to turn his head, but Ron’s grip on his throat was too tight.

“Answer me. You want to come, don’t you?”

Draco struggled to swallow against the pressure on his throat, his body twisting frantically to find release in Ron’s teasing.

Ron tightened his grip on the hardness within his hand, slowing his pace down even more.

Draco groaned. Every sound, jerk, and spasm felt like an admission of guilt, and Ron couldn’t get enough. His eyes fastened to Draco’s face, drinking in all of the power he had over the boy.

“Please,” came a strangled whisper.
Ron narrowed his eyes, leaning in to put his ear next to Draco’s mouth as he loosened his hold on the boy’s throat. “What was that, Malfoy?”

Draco grunted in frustration, and Ron nearly stopped completely, eliciting a cry of desperation. “I said, please…”

Ron squeezed Draco’s cock harder as he pressed lips against Draco’s ear once more. “You’re a liar, aren’t you?”

Draco grunted, and Ron quickened his pace just enough to frustrate but not to bring relief.

“Aren’t you? Tell me how much you like this.”

“I hate you…” Draco growled.

Ron nearly stopped wanking, to which Draco responded by gasping desperately. “I like it. Alright? Finish me off!”

“And you’re a no good liar, aren’t you?” Ron asked, speeding up the hand job until Draco was bucking spasmodically against him. “Aren’t you?”

Draco’s mouth twisted and then his teeth clenched as Ron set a maddening pace. He knew the boy was close.

“Yes!” Draco moaned finally.

“Yes?”

“Yes, I’m a liar… I’m a bloody liar,” Draco gasped in exasperation.

Ron closed his eyes as wave of satisfaction and victory calmed him momentarily. He honoured his promise, jerking Draco’s cock until the he heard a low moan in his ear and felt a stream of hot come spilling onto his hand.

As Draco stilled, catching his breath. Ron stood frozen, one hand still on Draco’s throat, the other in his pants. The triumph of the forced admission was already fading, and all that was left in its wake was the dull ache of betrayal and confusion.

Slowly, Ron pulled back, dropping his hold and sliding his hand out of Draco’s pants. He looked down at his come-coated hand in disgust before pulling out his wand and doing a cleansing spell.

When he looked up, Draco was still in the same place, leaning against the wall, his eyes still and set on Ron in a deadpan stare.

“Did you miss me, Weasley?” he asked, looking down to the floor, searching for his wand. Ron followed his gaze and didn’t move as Draco bend down to retrieve it. Ron watched as he performed a cleansing spell on himself before adjusting his robes. When he was done, Ron’s wand rose in defence as if expecting an attack.

Draco smirked. “Want more?”

“Fuck you, Malfoy,” Ron spat, taking in the boy one last time with disgust.

“You wish,” Draco sneered. “Those days are over.”

Ron stepped back. “I wouldn’t shag you now if my life depended on it, Ferret.”
Draco’s laugh was hollow and cold. “Now who’s the liar?” He smirked, pushing himself off of the wall and moving forward with determination. As he moved past Ron, their shoulders collided with such force that Ron stumbled back. Ron fought back the urge to yank Draco’s arm and shake him silly, but he restrained himself.

“We don’t need you, anyway. We never did!” he called after Draco. “Stay away from us! Stay away from her!”

“Not a problem. Just promise you and your lot will do the same,” Draco called back before disappearing out of Ron’s sight, leaving him confused about what exactly had been accomplished.

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Draco focused on taking slow and measured breaths to calm himself as he strode with false confidence out of the dungeons to join his housemates in the common room. The encounter with Ron had shaken him, and he had almost broken under the redhead’s tactics, but he hadn’t, and that gave him some reassurance that he could persevere through the remainder of the year without any of them. When he entered Slytherin, his eyes scanned the common room. The same people were sitting in the same places, talking about the same things; nothing ever changed. At least on the outside. Inside, Draco knew better. Over the past few weeks, it felt as if the whole world had caved in on him.

There were rules, and he had to abide by them. He went to Quidditch practice like he was supposed to, caught the snitch like he was supposed to, ate with his housemates like he was supposed to, and most of all, he continued to ignore Hermione, Harry, and Ron, like he was supposed to.

He tried not to push the memory of Harry and his insistence to meet him later. The feeling of Harry’s lips covering his own, and the need Draco had felt in that moment to be held by Harry. He shuddered as he remembered the hurt and confusion in Harry’s eyes when he had rejected him in the hallway. Nott was talking now, holding the attention of everyone in their group. Draco tried focus on the git, but flashes of Ron’s desperate eyes as he struggled to choke the life out of him blinded his vision. He maintained a cool expression as he tried to forget that, for one fleeting moment, he had wished Ron would do it. Nott was done speaking, and soon the chatter resumed. Draco nodded in all the right places, trying to focus on anything that could drown out the sound of Hermione’s sobs filling his ears. The picture of her tear-stained face still haunted him and had kept him up for most of the night.

“Let us help you. Please.”

He laughed on cue when Crabbe recounted a story about how he and Goyle had forced Filch to sing and dance under the Imperius curse. But inside, he felt a gaping hole where happiness had dwelled only a month before. In a matter of weeks, he had lost everything. The only real friends he had ever known, his first and only girlfriend, and his freedom.

He wasn’t supposed to feel or long for things he could not have. And so Draco played his role like he was supposed to, laughing it up with Crabbe and Goyle, being cordial to Nott and Parkinson, despite his deep urge to cast the Killing Curse in both of their directions.

One hour, two hours, three hours passed before they all retired and went to bed. Draco let out a silent sigh of relief; under the veil of his bed curtain and duvet, he could draw himself into a tight ball and discard his mask of cool indifference.
The Carrows had taken turns beating him for almost half an hour. Using a cane, then a paddle. They reddened his bottom and legs. When they had tired of his back, Amycus began to deliver harsh blows to his face. The man seemed to take pleasure in marring Draco’s attractive features.

Draco could hear his mother crying, and before his left eye had swollen shut, he had seen the faintest signs of shame and displeasure on his father’s face.

Finally, Amycus stopped, and then the Dark Lord entered, circling Draco before standing in front of him, face to face.

“You know why you were punished, don’t you?”

Draco felt his lip quivering as he stared back at the monster. His head felt light, and he was sure that whatever he said would be the wrong answer, and so he said nothing.

“Ms. Parkinson and Mr. Nott tell me that you’ve become quite friendly with Harry Potter and his friends. Particularly the Mudblood,” the Dark Lord said, as if discussing something trivial.

“Yes, my Lord, I have, at your request,” Draco said enthusiastically, not trusting the other man’s laidback tone.

“Are you reminding me of my own orders, boy?” the Dark Lord asked sharply.

Draco shook his head quickly. “No, my Lord.”

The Dark Lord stared at Draco for a moment. “Why is it that I haven’t heard a report about your assignment in many months?”

Draco swallowed, glancing to Snape and his father, who both wore masks of cold speculation as they waited for him to answer. He was on his own now.

“My Lord, I was waiting to see what would come from their planning. I did not want to bother you prematurely before I had any concrete information.”

“And what are they planning?”

Draco tried to take measured breaths as he prepared to repeat the elaborate lie he had told Crabbe and Goyle.

“My Lord—”

“Hold that thought,” the Dark Lord hissed as he glided closer, his red eyes bearing down into Draco’s grey. A gasp escaped Draco’s throat as the Dark Lord penetrated his mind like a Healer doing the most invasive examination.

His godfather and aunt had taught him well. Well enough to know that his use of Occlumency had to be done with care, so as not to appear evasive or resistant to prying. As the Dark Lord sifted through his memories, Draco offered up all of the memories he could that would cast him in the most favourable light, all the while throwing up shields around the rest.

The Dark Lord’s red eyes narrowed with interest as he studied the party where Draco had discovered the Trio’s relationship, the first time he had given Hermione permission to come, all of their flirtatious sessions in the library, their fight in the library, his defence of the Trio in Potions class, his near kiss with Hermione in the forest, and their date in the greenhouse.
By the time the Dark Lord got to that particular memory he looked absolutely livid and jerked out of Draco’s mind with such sharpness that it left Draco dizzy.

There was a moment of relief that offering up so many memories of his relationship with Hermione had concealed that a significant portion of his mind was locked. But it was brief, apprehension was building, and he could feel his whole body struggling not to tense up and show fear. The Dark Lord’s wrath was often merciless. Would he allow Draco to explain, or punish him first and ask questions later?

“So it is true… you’ve fallen for her,” the Dark Lord said in a dangerously quiet voice.

Draco forced himself to look the fiend in the eye. “No, my Lord, I have not. I had… feelings for her… but I am sure they were only attached to brief and fleeting sexual attraction that has since passed.”

“Have you fucked her?”

Draco was startled by the Dark Lord’s crass and blunt question, but quickly recovered. “No, my Lord, I have not.”

“Do you want to?” the Dark Lord asked in a softer voice that belied the wicked dare in his eye.

Draco nodded. “Yes. She is a girl, and mildly attractive—sometimes it’s even easy to forget she’s a Mudblood.”

The Dark Lord gave Draco a slight smile. “Honesty. Not a trait I expected coming from you.”

“I have no reason to lie to you, my Lord. Whatever feelings I had for her are inconsequential in comparison to my loyalty to you.”

“And what about Harry Potter?”

“My Lord, I became very well acquainted with all of them. Potter believes me to be a friend, but he is not my friend. I serve only you.”

“Really? And do you know why I sent you to befriend them?”

Draco blinked, was this another test? He swallowed “To spy on them.”

The Dark Lord sighed wearily. “Yes, but why?”

“I had imagined to uncover if they were planning anything...”

“Yes, there is that, and something else,” the Dark Lord whispered, drawing closer.

Inside, Draco whimpered, but he kept it in, willing his impassive mask not to fall.

“In your time with them, have you observed anything unusual about their relationship?”

“Besides being involved in a threesome?”

The Dark Lord glare held a threat and Draco was quick to correct any appearance of insolence.

“No, my Lord, besides their unusual relationship, I haven’t noticed anything out of the ordinary.”

“And you have no reason to suspect them of doing anything particularly deviant or odd sexually?”
Draco swallowed. “Such as?”

“Don’t play coy with me, child…Crucio!”

Draco bowled over as the most excruciating pain he had ever felt ripped through his body. He fell to his knees immediately, no longer caring about earning the respect of his father or impressing his mother. He just wanted it to stop, and just began to roll over onto his side, screaming, it did.

“Now, answer the question,” the Dark Lord said, leaning over him.

Draco coughed as he tried to inhale air, the fading prickle of pain still in his bones.

“No, my Lord. I haven’t observed or heard of anything unusual. They do not speak about their sexual practices with me, but the Granger girl is very proper. I am certain that she would never allow such things.”

The Dark Lord drew back, his face contemplative. “Very well. Get up”

Draco tried to steady his hand against the floor as he balanced his weight upon it to rise. Once standing upright, he wiped his sweaty brow, trying to gain some composure. He didn’t dare look at his parents.

“Would you kill for me?”

Draco nodded without hesitation. “Yes, of course, my Lord.”

“Would you kill her for me?”

Somewhere in the recesses of his mind, where the Dark Lord could not reach, there was a voice that screamed ‘no’ even as he forced out, “It would be an honour, my Lord.”

For the next several moments, he and the Dark Lord were locked in a truth-telling gaze. It felt like an eternity. Draco concentrated on keeping his face impassive, his eyes cool and confident but not overly so, and the shield in his mind up, protecting everything that had become precious to him in the last nine months.

Finally, the Dark Lord drew back with a nasty grin. “I believe you.” But to be sure…” he added, withdrawing his wand.

Draco held his breath.

“Hold out your arm, boy.”

Draco exchanged a quick glance with his father, who raised his chin in quiet expectation. Behind Lucius, his mother trembled. Quickly, without another moment’s wait, Draco held out his left arm, taking one last look at the smooth, pale, unblemished flesh.

“Come, come, everyone… we welcome another into the fold tonight,” the Dark Lord commanded.

Draco watched as all of the Death Eaters in the room spaced out and moved around to form a circle around him and the Dark Lord. His father was in front of his line of sight, his mother to his father’s right, and Snape to the left.

Bellatrix was grinning like mad, while all of the others looked solemn. The air became dense, and a vague pattern of a skull with a snake in its mouth hung over the centre of the circle like mist. The Dark Lord firmly grasped Draco’s offered wrist, his scaly hand throbbing with coldness that
travelled up Draco’s arm like a current.

“Do you swear to do everything you can to carry out our mission to rid the wizarding world of Muggle-borns and Blood Traitors?”

“I do.”

“And do you, Draco Malfoy, promise to serve me without question for as long as you live?”

“Yes, my Lord,” Draco answered.

The tip of the Dark Lord’s wand pressed into Draco’s skin, tracing, bruising, and cutting patterns. The Dark Lord hissed in Parseltongue as he did it. There was a sickly green glow emanating from where it felt like the Dark Lord was cutting, and the pain of it was beginning to make Draco sway on his feet.

And then it was over.

Draco allowed his body to relax, grateful that the pain was gone. He looked down at it and then back up at his new Master.

“Make it complete,” the Dark Lord said, watching Draco with quiet gravity.

Draco immediately dropped to one knee before him, bowing his head. “Thank you, Master, for honouring me with your Mark.”

A peculiarly soft hand rested on his head before combing its way through his hair much like a lover would do. Draco looked up to see the Dark Lord smiling most wickedly.

“Do you think the Mudblood will want you when she sees you bearing this?”

“Yes, you are… because you’re mine. Now, tell me about this plan Potter is brewing.”

After telling the Dark Lord the lie he wanted to hear about Harry’s plan to form a massive counter attack, everyone was dismissed and the Dark Lord disappeared to another part of the Manor, with Bellatrix at his heels. His Mother and Father approached him, his mother hugging him with such ferocity he wondered if she were alright. When she pulled away, there were tears in her eyes and she quickly dismissed herself, leaving him with his father and Professor Snape. His father shook his hand, and offered congratulations, but there was no smile or pride in his words or eyes. Draco had expected more, like a hug, and once again, he felt like he had done something to disappoint the man. He waited for something more, but it seemed that his father had better things to do and, like his mother, he turned and walked away from Draco, leaving him alone with Snape.

They stared at each other for several minutes, until Draco looked down at his feet. The weight of what had just transpired and how irrevocably tired he felt as he considered Snape and his plight as a Marked spy made Draco’s knees feel weak. He continued to look down at the floor, waiting for his godfather to break the silence.

“Congratulations,” Snape said quietly.

Draco felt a lump in his throat. It was blocking his speech and threatening to deprive him of air. His former dizziness returned and he had to close his eyes to keep from being sick.
“I don’t know how you do this,” he mumbled. “How you’ve managed for so long.”

There were no words of advice or sympathetic reassurances, only silence.

When Draco looked up, Snape was still watching his face closely.

“How do you feel?” he asked.

Draco shook his head, trying to sort out the maelstrom of guilt, longing, and hopelessness that was eating him from the inside out. “Like… I no longer have control over anything. There’s no way out of this, is there? It’s permanent… I may as well be a slave.”

“Draco, I want you to remember something… Are you listening?”

Draco nodded numbly.

Snape put a hand on Draco’s shoulder and leaned in to stare him in the eye. “No one can own you, unless you give yourself to them.”

“But… I have,” Draco whispered.

“You only gave your arm, and your word. And we both know how good that is. But did you give him your heart… or your soul?”

Draco’s mouth went dry as he stared back into Snape’s dark, knowing eyes. “No.”

“Then you are just as free as I am.”

As the memory of that night faded, Draco tossed in his bed, trying to push away the doubt he felt about Snape’s words. Once more, as he had done several times each night since his initiation, Draco pulled up the sleeve of his nightshirt to trace his finger over the black snake-pierced skull marring his flesh.

Chapter End Notes

If you are re-reading this story, you probably noticed that I deleted a chunk of the original Draco/Hermione scene in this chapter. After reading this chapter for the 100th time, I decided Draco’s actions in the original scene went a bit too far and threatened the plausibility of any future reconciliation between him and Hermione. If you're interested in reading the original scene, feel free to email me and I'll be happy to send it to you.

Thanks for reading!
When Draco came down for breakfast the following morning, Crabbe and Goyle were on his heels. Pansy was chatting it up with Blaise and Nott, but she paused in her conversation when Draco reached the bottom stairs.

“Did you sleep well, Draco?” she asked with false sweetness. Draco glared at her briefly before giving Nott and Blaise a cordial head nod.

During breakfast, he tried to keep his eyes from wandering over to the Gryffindor table, despite the distinct feeling that both Harry and Hermione’s eyes were on him.

But it was Pansy’s stare from three seats over that he found most distracting. In his periphery, he could see her trying her damnedest to get his attention. He stabbed at his eggs and grunted a response to Goyle before quickly meeting her gaze. She had the same insipid smirk on her face as she picked up her glass of pumpkin juice and took a sip.

Draco didn’t know how much more of Pansy’s quiet smugness he could tolerate. It was bad enough that he could no longer regard Nott as an enemy but had to make nice with him and treat him as a comrade; it was very difficult pretending he didn’t care that the boy had been spying on him and had nearly cost him his life. Tolerating Pansy was another matter entirely. It was taking nearly all of his will power not to confront her about what she had done, and he wasn’t sure how much longer he could suffer her arrogant assumption that she had somehow won.

He narrowed his eyes, giving her a nasty glare before turning to glance at Hermione.

Hermione caught his eyes almost immediately, and her mouth opened as if she wanted to say something. Draco felt his heart ache from the silent question that lay in her eyes.

Are you ready to talk now?

He licked his dry lips and took a deep breath before returning to his meal and giving his full attention to the conversation around him.

He didn’t even have to look at Pansy to know she was angry.

The rest of the day crawled by like a slug on a log. In each of Draco’s lessons, he could scarcely
concentrate, his mind often drifting off to thoughts of how each of the trio was faring right now. Would they try to reason with him or even engage him in a row one last time? He held a small measure of hope that they would. It would mean they hadn’t given up on him, that they were all still thinking of him the way he was thinking of them.

There was a shuffle of feet and books closing, and Draco blinked and looked up to see that the students had been dismissed.

Pansy was walking towards him, and he rushed to put away his books and stand, but she stood before him with that same stupid smirk on her face.

Draco looked around. The others had nearly cleared out, except for the professor, who was occupied in conversation with a student.

Pansy crossed her arms in front of her. “You can’t avoid me forever.”

“Oh, yeah? Watch me,” Draco said, stepping to her right.

Pansy moved just as quickly to step in front of him again.

Draco sighed in exasperation. “Pansy, you have no idea how tired I am of people standing in my way. If you don’t move now…”

“I know, you’ll hex me, right? Or perhaps… whip me?” she said, letting her tongue dart out seductively.

Draco grimaced. “You wish.”

Pansy’s eyes hardened. “Careful how you speak to me, Draco. You’ve already seen what happens when you cross me.”

Draco jaw tightened, his previous anger with her reigniting. “No. Why don’t you tell me, Parkinson?”

Pansy only had to glance down at Draco’s left arm and raise an eyebrow to make her point, and Draco was ready to strangle her.

“Don’t ever underestimate me again, Draco. I’m the reason you were called home. And I know what happened when you got there.”

Draco felt his insides tighten as he looked at Pansy’s sickening triumphant smile. Taking her back to his dorm room and performing the Killing Curse would be so easy.

She looked past his shoulder to the front of the classroom, where the Professor was finishing his conversation.

She smiled brightly once more. “Now, I hope we can get over our past misunderstanding and get reacquainted… Don’t forget, I know what you like.” She reached out to touch his arm, and Draco jerked it back, looking at her with disgust.

“You’re barking! Do you actually think that I’d touch you after what you’ve done?”

Pansy scowled, but in her eyes, Draco could see confusion and doubt. Things were not going as she had planned.

He laughed. “You silly little tart. You have no idea what you’ve done, do you? Only one person has
any power over me now. Do you really think your threats compare to what he can do? He can wipe out your entire family on my word. If you really value your life, you'll stay away from me.”

Draco moved forward, and Pansy quickly stepped aside, her face reflecting shock and something else he had been dying to see ever since he had been Marked—genuine fear.

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During free period, Draco had a rare break from Crabbe and Goyle, who decided to take advantage of the break to scout out the Room of Requirement once more. He returned to the Common Room to sit down and read, without having to put on airs or pretend to care about the silly and despicable activities of his fellow comrades.

He was absorbed in Arithmancy when someone took a seat directly across from him. He had no doubt it was Nott coming to make threats on behalf of Parkinson, but when he looked up, he was surprised to see that it was Blaise.

His housemate had a purposeful look on his face as if he had something to discuss, and Draco was instantly on his guard. Most of his interactions with the boy, as of late, left him perplexed and suspicious.

He sighed, resuming his reading as if he couldn’t be bothered.

“I know this is late, but welcome back,” Blaise said simply.

“Thanks,” Draco murmured.

“You know, your absence created quite a buzz, especially since Nott was also absent.”

Ah, so there it was; Blaise was there to dig for information. Draco rolled his eyes. “I’m sure. It doesn’t take much to create a buzz around here.”

“Especially these days,” Blaise remarked, “with the recent attacks, disappearances, and then the Ministry going bad.”

Draco raised his eyebrows at that, curious to find out whether Blaise had solid sources or was just going on the same speculative gossip heard in the hallways. “Going bad? Who says?”

Blaise shrugged. “Everyone. There are all sorts of rumours about the Ministry, Death Eaters… you,” he said pointedly.

“Oh, yeah? And what are people saying about me now?” he asked nonchalantly returning his eyes to his book.

“They’re saying your home is being used as headquarters for him. They’re saying that there are illegal trials and tortures taking place there. And they’re saying you and Nott are Marked.”

“Oh? And what do you think?” Draco asked with a challenge in his voice, finally looking up to glare at the boy. He couldn’t help it—Blaise always pushed his buttons with his blunt and insinuating questioning.

Blaise kept his silence for a few moments, studying Draco. “I think you’re in trouble.”

A dry laugh escaped Draco. “And what about you, Zabini? I suppose you’re doing so much better, eh? By your own admission, your mum is on the run. You probably don’t even know where she is
right now, do you? But I’m sure there are only so many places she can hide. He’s taking over Europe.”

“And I suppose you’d know that better than anyone, wouldn’t you?” Blaise said with a sneer.

Draco gritted his teeth. “It’s so much easier to point fingers and judge when you’re too chicken shite to pick a side.”

Blaise straightened in a dignified pose. “Oh, I’ve picked a side. Mine. I’m not going to bow before some maniac just because he spouts pure-blood rhetoric. All of you are deaf, dumb, and blind. He doesn’t even act like a pure-blood.”

“That doesn’t matter, now, does it? He has power.”

“Right. Is that why you did it?”

Draco held his tongue, wanting to scream at Blaise to fuck off. Instead, he rose from his seat. “Excuse me. I have some reading to do.”

“Did you do it on your own, or did your dad force you into it?”

Draco paused and then took his seat again, leaning in to level a dangerous glare on Blaise. “Don’t you ever speak of my father, or of this, again. It’s none of your business. If you’re so bloody interested, why don’t you just owl the Dark Lord himself?”

“I’m not interested, Draco. What I am interested in is what you, Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott are up to. I know whatever the four of you are plotting is no good.”

“You don’t know shite,” Draco said.

“Oh, but I’m very observant. And if you’re planning to do anything that will bring the chaos out there, in here, then you’re just as stupid as the rest of them.”

“How dare you call me stupid!” Draco spat. “If this is your pathetic attempt to get me to confess to something, you failed, Zabini!” Draco said, rising once more.

“You know, I may have not have liked you hanging around Potter, Granger, and Weasley, but at least it didn’t require you shutting down your brain and selling your soul.”

Draco gave Blaise one last hateful glare, despising how much truth lay in that statement, and took to the stairs to close himself up in his room.

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Feeling heavy with despair and worry about Draco, and the effect of his recent behaviour on Harry and Ron, Hermione slipped away to her refuge, the library.

She thought of the way Draco had tried his hardest to humiliate and degrade her, and although his actions had hurt her deeply, in her heart, she hadn’t believed any of it. Although the idea that he could have been using them the way he said he had still nagged at her, she wanted to believe that he was being cruel in order to push them all away. The question was why?

She wondered what sort of threat Lucius Malfoy had levelled against him. She remembered Draco telling her that his father would never hurt him, but then Ron’s voice pointing out all of the awful things Lucius had done to them over the years kept playing in her head. Perhaps Draco had
underestimated his father’s cruelty. Who knew what sort of abuse Lucius had inflicted on his son, especially if the Malfoy reputation was at stake. Or perhaps it was even worse than Lucius Malfoy—perhaps Voldemort himself had gotten to Draco…perhaps he had been Marked…

Hermione closed her eyes briefly, trying to refocus her thoughts. She returned to reading her book, but after a few minutes, the words became more and more meaningless. The thought that Voldemort or one of his henchmen had possibly hurt or threatened Draco and the alienation and helplessness her lover probably felt tore at her heart. She had to discuss this with Harry and Ron.

She had been in the middle of contemplating a strategy when she heard quiet sniffling from just beyond the Restricted Section, towards the back of the library where there was only one table and two chairs available for study. No one ever actually studied over there. It was a place where couples went when they wanted some privacy to snog. Just on principle alone, Hermione detested that particular area of the library; the idea of a snogging area in the library seemed like blasphemy.

But her curiosity was piqued. Those weren’t snogging sounds; in fact, it sounded as if someone was crying. Quietly, Hermione rose and tiptoed past the Restricted Section and peeked around the last stack. What greeted her left her a little surprised and even more curious.

Sitting at the small square table with her head in hand was Pansy Parkinson. Her black hair and hand covered most of her face, but her jaw was visible, and Hermione could see copious tears running down the girl’s chin and gathering into a small puddle on the desk.

Pansy promptly dropped her hand when Hermione gasped, glaring daggers at her.

On some level, Hermione was baffled. She had always thought that the sight of Pansy in such a distressed state would bring some measure of satisfaction. But instead, Hermione was frozen in place, feeling caught between surprise and embarrassment for the girl.

Pansy’s face was twisting up more with each passing moment, until finally it was a distorted mess of tears and anger.

“What are you staring at, Granger?” she asked sharply, straightening, her hand reaching down to what Hermione assumed was her robe pocket for her wand.

Hermione opened her mouth, searching for the right words for such an awkward moment. “I, uh… I heard crying, and—”

“And you thought that meant you had to go sticking your know-it-all nose in someone else’s affairs, right?” Pansy spat out bitterly, her eyes still welling up with tears even as she scowled at Hermione.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to bother you,” Hermione said quickly, turning to leave.

“I hate you,” Pansy spat.

Hermione stopped in her tracks, slowly turning back around to face the girl. “I know.”

Pansy’s lip quivered and then her mouth tightened as new tears began to fall. “You’ve ruined everything.”

Hermione stood still, her eyes locked on Pansy’s as she tried to compose herself, wiping her face in vain as more tears fell.

“He was mine.”
Hermione felt a tug of pity followed by a quiet resolution to straighten this out once and for all. “No, he wasn’t, Pansy. He never was.”

“He was!” Pansy protested. “He promised me! He said—” She stopped herself, shaking her head as if suddenly cognisant of who she was talking to. “And then you ruined everything,” she finished bitterly.

Hermione sighed. There really was nothing else to be said. She did feel a small measure of sympathy for the girl, even if she didn’t believe the lies Pansy had told herself.

“I’m sorry, Pansy,” she said simply.

“No, you’re not,” Pansy bit out angrily. “I know you’re probably enjoying this. I bet you’re going to go back to your House and tell all the Gryff cows how you caught Pansy Parkinson bawling her eyes out over Draco Malfoy.”

Hermione shook her head vehemently “I promise I won’t.”

“And why wouldn’t you?” Pansy asked in disbelief. “I’ve never done anything nice for you.”

“Because it’s not right. That’s why.”

Pansy snorted, wiping her eyes. “You’re fucking unbelievable, Granger.”

Hermione took a breath, stepping closer towards a wary Pansy.

“If you think you’re going come over here and play Mind Healer on me, forget it. Go back to sucking up to some Professor or blowing Weasley and Potter. Just leave me alone.”

Hermione pursed her lips, her sympathy disappearing. She didn’t have to stand here and put up with Pansy’s insults. Let her cry over her fantasy boyfriend that never was.

She turned around once more to grant the girl her wish when Pansy spoke again.

“He doesn’t care about you, you know. He doesn’t care about anyone but himself.”

Hermione closed her eyes, willing her fears and doubts about Draco’s new disposition away. Pansy didn’t know Draco the way Hermione did. She was still holding onto the conviction that she and Draco were in love, something Pansy probably had never experienced with anyone.

“He used you. That’s what he does, Granger,” Pansy continued.

Hermione felt compelled to turn around and face Pansy to rebut on behalf of Draco. “You’re wrong. He’s not like that. You don’t really know him. You never did.”

“Yeah? Then tell me, why he’s not speaking to you anymore?” Pansy asked smugly.

Hermione stared at Pansy, momentarily speechless. It was the question she had been losing sleep over for the past few days and not being able to answer it for Pansy was more frustrating than anything. Before she could recover and think of a retort, Pansy was speaking again.

“Did you ever stop and wonder why I was willing to crawl on all fours and fetch that silly ball for him at that stupid party?”

Hermione wanted to turn around again and walk, no, run away, but she couldn’t make herself do it. She had to hear the rest.
“Because he told me that he had a hard time trusting anyone. He said that his heart had been broken too many times and that if I did whatever he wanted, it would prove that he could trust me. That I would make a good girlfriend. He promised me that. And as soon as the party was over, he cast me aside like I was nothing,” she said, her voice breaking on the last.

Hermione looked at Pansy with new eyes. Instead of the threatening, overly confident girl who had been bullying her for a better part of four years, she saw a vulnerable and insecure child whose heart had been broken. But Pansy was a Slytherin, and a bitter former lover as well, and Hermione didn’t know how much of what she had just said was the truth. Perhaps she was trying to create a permanent wedge between Hermione and Draco. It wouldn’t be the first time Pansy had tried.

She averted her eyes, looking around while trying to shake off the doubt Pansy’s confession had given her about her last interaction with Draco. He had said quite plainly that he had used her and he had made it clear he was done. Self-doubt and shame were edging out her former conviction and determination to believe the best about Draco. She forced herself to look at Pansy once more. Pansy had been naïve and desperate. Is that really how Draco saw her now, as well?

Pansy scowled at Hermione and stood up abruptly as if ready for a physical confrontation. “Don’t you dare look at me like that, Mudblood. I don’t need your pity. I know he did the same to you. You’re no better than I am.”

Hermione pursed her lips, holding in the urge to throw hex the girl for calling her a Mudblood. Pansy wiped her face and straightened out her robes before taking her seat once more and pulling out a rather large tome to read.

Hermione stood staring at the girl, not sure of what else to say.

“Why are you still here?” Pansy asked sharply.

Hermione huffed, turning around for the last time. As she walked away, she wondered once more just how much of what Pansy said was true. Even if Pansy had thrown herself pitifully at Draco, had he really used the girl the way she said he had? Ginny’s account of how Draco had manipulated her into giving him a blow job flittered across her mind, and then Hermione’s own memory of feeling used and discarded as she knelt on the floor with Draco’s seed drying on her face in the Potions classroom made her stomach turn.

She hastened her footsteps to find her anchors. Harry and Ron would probably be in their dorm room now, and if ever she needed reassurance and tenderness, it was now.

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A peaceful hour and half passed by with no interruptions, no false gestures of brotherhood, and best of all no accusatory questions or threats. Draco had begun to think that his bed was now his only place of solace when he heard footsteps approaching. He groaned and turned over, feigning sleep.

Several footsteps sounded and the door was shut, a Silencing Charm and Locking Charm placed on it. Inwardly, Draco knew Death Eater business was about to be discussed. He debated if he should turn over and join the conversation or continue to sleep to get information that perhaps he was not privy to. He chose sleep.

“Check on him,” he heard Nott say.

“Draco… Hey, Draco, you awake?” Goyle asked.
Draco heard footsteps approaching his bed and continued to breathe regularly, eyes shut.

“He’s out,” Goyle confirmed.

“Alright, good. Now tell me, what happened up there?” Nott asked.

“Nothing! As usual. I’m beginning to think this isn’t going to work!” Crabbe said.

“It has to!” Goyle said. “The shop owner at Borgin and Burkes said it would. We just have to keep trying. It’s sensitive to the slightest imperfection. The incantation and timing has to be just right.”

Draco wrinkled his brow, listening.

“Well, besides the fact that we can’t get the damned thing to actually send anything back alive, there’s the problem of Dumbledore,” Crabbe said in exasperation.

“You ran into him again?” Nott asked incredulously.

“Oh, yeah, and this time, he wanted to have a nice long chat about what courses I wanted to take my NEWTs in!” Goyle said.

“It’s weird. He caught me coming down the other day, wanting to talk my head off about the upcoming Quidditch championship,” Crabbe said.

“Do you think he suspects something?” Nott asked.

“No way,” Draco heard Goyle deny. “He may be powerful, but he’s no god.”

“Still, it’s creepy,” Crabbe countered. “He just pops up whenever we’re anywhere near the seventh floor.”

Draco had to contain a snigger. Oh, if they only knew!

There was silence. “But perhaps you’re right,” Crabbe conceded. “I suppose if he knew anything, he’d put a stop to it. Maybe he just thinks we’re up to no good.”

“Of course, because he hates Slytherins,” Nott said bitterly. “I wish he would just disappear the way he did earlier this year.”

“Yeah, that would have been perfect. But at least we don’t have to worry about Filch,” Crabbe said.

“True. I suppose we could try to keep an irregular schedule and try to do it when he’s occupied, like during meals or something,” Goyle said.

“And what about Malfoy?” Nott asked, his voice lowering to a whisper.

Draco held his breath, listening hard.

“What about him?” Crabbe whispered.

“Why wasn’t he assigned to help us with this?” Nott asked. His whisper was punctuated with resentment and suspicion.

“I don’t know, perhaps the Dark Lord doesn’t trust him. He did kiss a Mudblood,” Goyle said.

“But he was Marked anyway,” Nott said. “I don’t get it. It’s not fair, really. If any of us had pulled
that shite, we’d probably be dead.”

“Well, the Dark Lord did order him to get close to them. Perhaps that’s why he let it slide,” Crabbed offered.

“It’s disgusting! How do we know he’s not still friends with them?” Nott asked insistently.

“Because he’s not, Theo! He totally annihilated them right in front of us. We saw it with our own eyes. You should have seen the Granger girl, she looked like she was going to cry,” Goyle said with a chuckle.

“Yeah, that’s right,” Crabbe added. “Besides, you said it yourself, Theo, he’s Marked. If he was really their friend, they’d find out about it. There’s no way they’d still be friends with him, and they’d probably tell the whole school.”

“It feels like someone already did,” Nott said grumpily. “There are all sorts of rumours going around about all of us now.”

“Which is why we have to be discreet. Everyone is watching us. Even Zabini,” Crabbe said.

“Don’t get me started on Zabini,” Nott said with a sigh of resignation. “I don’t trust him anymore.”

“Whose side is he on, anyway?” Goyle asked.

“Who knows? His mum is on the run. He’d probably do anything to help her. Just keep your mouth shut whenever he’s around. He and Parkinson have no business in our affairs,” Nott said.

“But I thought you and Parkinson—” Crabbe started.

“She means nothing to me,” Nott said promptly. “She wanted to get back at Malfoy and I wanted to get Marked. We worked together to get what we wanted, and now I’m done with her.”

Draco wanted to shake his head once again at Pansy’s poor choices in friends. He almost felt bad for her. Almost.

“We’ll give another go tomorrow,” Nott continued. “Crabbe, you’re up.”

Crabbe groaned. “I suppose I can do it during breakfast. Dumbledore hardly ever misses breakfast.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Goyle said. “Hey, get him up—everyone will be coming back soon, and we can’t all stay tucked away up here. They’ll think we’re up to something.”

A minute later, Draco felt a gentle shake on his shoulder. He turned over and peeked through his eyelids to see Crabbe looking down at him.

“What?”

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When they all came down, the whole Common Room turned towards them, eyeing them with silent and fearful contemplation. Nott smirked, apparently enjoying the power that came with the assumption everyone had made.

It was clear to all of Slytherin that Death Eaters had infiltrated Hogwarts, and were concentrated in Slytherin House.
Nott confidently strode to the centre couches with Crabbe and Goyle closely behind, followed by a very detached Draco. The younger students immediately cleared away, not even making eye contact with the four.

Nott regarded their movement with an approving smirk, which made Draco groan. The boy had only just gotten Marked and he was acting as if he were the Dark Lord’s right hand man. Nott’s hunger for power and notoriety was despicable, but Draco could see shadows of himself only a year ago in the boy, and he wondered how Crabbe and Goyle had tolerated him for so many years. Then he looked at them and snorted. They’d follow anyone.

As they all took a seat, a few of the more daring and audacious tarts made their way over to speak to Nott and even Goyle. Crabbe never got any attention. Draco stifled a snigger as he considered how pathetic his so-called friend was that not even the Dark Mark could compel the most promiscuous of girls to look his way, and then he caught the eye of Pansy.

Just the sight of her reignited his anger. Her face was blotchy and red, and she looked tired. Millicent was staring daggers at him, as if on her behalf, and Draco sneered at her in return.

He didn’t care that Pansy looked as if she had been crying. Perhaps she was worried in light of his previous threat, or perhaps she just realised that her entire plan to trap him in her clingy web as her lover had backfired catastrophically. Either way, if she never smiled another day in her life, it would be just fine.

The idea that she had purposefully consorted with Nott to tattle on him infuriated Draco. He had always known she could be vengeful, but her conniving and her desire to assert her will over Draco had gone too far. He had the sudden urge to find Hermione and confess everything. But he managed to quell it with thoughts of his family and what that could mean for Hermione, Harry, and Ron.

Sporting the wickedest smirk, he glared past Millicent to meet Pansy’s black eyes. She couldn’t hold eye contact with him for very long before quickly excusing herself and running up to her dorms.

To Draco’s dismay, Pansy’s discomfort and sudden skittishness brought no real satisfaction. It only underscored what she believed him to be now. What he was: a Death Eater. He balled his fist in frustration and excused himself, to the surprise of Crabbe and Goyle. Nott gave him a distrustful glance, but Draco hardly noticed, his mind set on getting away from the oppressive air in the room and his present company.

Flying always cleared his head, and even though the sky was overcast and the field was wet from recent rain, being in the air was just what he needed to get away from everything. He quickly went upstairs to grab his broom and then came back down and left the Common Room without another word to anyone.

When he arrived at the Quidditch pitch, however, he found he wasn’t alone.

Draco groaned as he spotted Harry hovering just over the far goal post, doing complicated dives that Draco had always coveted.

If his broom were glass it would have broken from his grip. He cursed under his breath as he began to turn around and retreat back to the castle.

Behind him, the swish of a broom cut through the air, and then there was a heavy thud. Still, Draco refused to turn, keeping his eyes on his destination. Talking or even looking at Harry right now would weaken his resolve to keep proper distance from his former lover.
“Draco!” Harry called.

*Just keep walking.*

“Draco, please…” Harry said in an uncharacteristically desperate voice that made Draco frown. He hated how weak Harry sounded and wanted nothing more than to turn around to taunt him until the old Harry—the one who didn’t give a shit about Draco Malfoy—was hurling insults and threats once more.

Draco forced himself to pick up his pace, bordering on a near sprint, until he felt a hand touch his shoulder. That did it. He could tolerate the begging, the sad eyes, and the questions, but touching was too much. He had to put an end to it once and for all.

He spun around with lightning speed, grabbing Harry’s hand and twisting it painfully so that the other boy winced.

“You really don’t like your hand, do you?” he asked sharply.

Harry’s face reflected pain, but also determination. “I’m not going to let you just blow us off.”

“You don’t have a choice,” Draco said, twisting Harry’s hand harder, releasing all of his anger and frustration in his grip.

Harry’s mouth opened and his eyes gaped back at Draco in surprised hurt.

Draco scowled. “Do you realise the entire castle can see us if they want? Why are you set on making this as difficult for me as possible?”

“Because I care, you fucking prat,” Harry spat.

“Damn it, Potter…” Draco sighed, feeling all of his willpower escaping with his breath. Thoughts of home, the Dark Lord, and all of the eyes of the castle on him and what it would mean if he was suspected of reviving his old friendship with Harry all faded.

Just touching Harry’s hand felt like how coming home should feel.

He loosened his hold, which elicited a relieved sigh from Harry, and then just as quickly, Draco grabbed the front of Harry’s robes and shook him hard.

“You really are thick, you know that?” Draco said in a throaty growl that betrayed his need.

Harry smirked, his eyes reflecting relief and victory. “Still smarter than you, though.”

Draco let go of him, scowling, and then turned his back. No words needed to be said as Harry followed him to the boys’ changing room.

As he walked deeper into the changing room, the smell of used Quidditch gear and the faint musk of athletes filled Draco’s nose. It was darker than usual, because of the overcast sky, and the first real drops of rain that had been threatening to fall began to pelt the roof.

“Stop,” Harry ordered.

Draco paused, staring at the darkened rows of lockers and benches, gripping his broom. What the hell was he doing? This was a mistake. There was nothing to say to Harry.

He turned abruptly and shook his head. “I can’t do this,” he muttered, advancing towards Harry to
move past him.

But Harry’s eyes, even in the dark, were burning with determination and he met Draco, face-to-face in challenge.

“Yes, you can. Your father isn’t here right now, Draco. It’s just us.”

Draco looked up at the ceiling and then to the side of Harry’s piercing stare. “Right, it’s always just us, eh? No eyes and ears spying…right?”

Harry huffed. “Draco, even if Dumbledore is watching us, he’s not going to run and tell your dad you’ve been talking to me.”

“And what if someone else saw us come in here?” Draco asked.

Harry raised his hands to his sides flippantly. “You can tell them you brought me in here to duel in private.”

Draco barked out a laugh. “Which resulted in me kicking your arse?”

Harry shook his head. “Well, you are known to exaggerate. I’m sure your housemates would buy that load of rubbish, but I can’t guarantee anyone else will.”

Draco sighed, resigned against Harry’s will and unexpected dose of humour.

“Harry…” He paused. What could he say?

Harry seemed to sense that he was struggling for words and moved in closer, placing a gentle hand on the back of Draco’s neck. Draco shivered and closed his eyes. He had somehow convinced himself that he would never be touched like that again, not by them. He savoured the feeling of his boyfriend’s hand on his skin and exhaled. Then Harry’s forehead was tapping his own, softly sliding back and forth like strokes of a hand.

“It’s alright. I know something bad happened. And I know you didn’t mean what you said before about using us.”

Draco swallowed. “Harry, I have to tell you something.”

Harry’s forehead pressed harder into Draco’s, and for a moment, the only thing Draco could hear was Harry’s breathing. His own had stopped.

He clenched his eyes shut, afraid to see Harry’s reaction to his confession.

“It’s okay. You don’t have to be afraid.”

Draco groaned. “You don’t understand. You’re going to hate me. I know it.”

“I could never hate you, Draco. I used to… but now… no way.”

Draco licked his lips and slowly opened his eyes to stare into Harry’s. There was so much acceptance and warmth there; he felt his stomach tensing in knots.

He pulled away, shaking his head.

“What? What is it?” Harry asked, looking down at Draco’s left arm pointedly. “Are you… are you Marked?”
It felt as if time had frozen, and he could feel every nerve, every muscle in his body. He wanted so badly to tell the truth, but Harry’s eyes held the sort of trepidation and fearfulness that told him it would be a very bad idea.

He looked at Harry as if he was being absurd. “What?”

Harry threw up his hands. “Well if you’re not Marked, then what is it?”

Draco gulped, thinking. He’d have to confess eventually, but what would Harry say? Would he back away from him? Call him a liar? He could picture Hermione’s face and Ron’s anger from hearing it second-hand, and he wouldn’t be there to explain or allay their questions and suspicions. He owed them all an explanation, and an apology.

“I think it’d be better to tell all three of you… at the same time,” he said, trying to not to sound as nervous as he felt.

Harry gave him a perplexed look and then nodded slowly. “Alright. I can arrange for us to meet tonight. How’s that sound?”

Draco nodded his head slowly. “Sounds good.”

Harry smiled. “In the meantime, we have some catching up to do,” he said, licking his lips as he pulled Draco’s head back towards his own.

Draco allowed himself to be guided as Harry’s mouth possessed his hungrily, licking, sucking, gasping for more.

“Gods, I missed you. I knew you were full of it.”

“Yeah?” Draco smiled against Harry’s lips.

“Yeah,” Harry moaned, pushing Draco back against a locker. Their bodies ground together as Harry’s hands searched and explored like he had never touched Draco before.

Draco closed his eyes once more, basking in the feeling of such open adoration and need. With Harry touching him like this, it was easy to forget he was supposed to ignore him, to hate him. And it was damned near impossible. It felt special to be missed and wanted so much, and right here, in this moment, Harry was worth breaking the rules for.

He sucked on Harry’s neck as his hand pulled up Harry’s robe to find his lover’s erection. He groaned, squeezing it to feel it filling out against his hand. Harry began to push his hips forward suggestively, and suddenly the denims he wore seemed obtrusive and unnecessary. Draco quickly moved to the belt buckle and Harry assisted him until finally his very hard erection was jutting out between them. Draco’s hand closed around it, stroking it fondly like an old possession he’d thought he’d lost but had recently found.

Draco dropped to his knees, taking the head of Harry’s cock into his mouth. A loud groan above him was all that he needed to inhale as much as Harry’s length as possible. He heard himself moaning as a strong, familiar hand rested on top of his head and began to affectionately stroke his hair. Harry’s approving grunts and moans were like music to his ears, and Draco felt he was, in some part, finally serving atonement for everything he had done.

When Harry’s hand tightened in his hair and the cock in his mouth began to move in and out of his mouth with purpose, Draco put all of his concentration into getting Harry there. He concentrated on breathing through his nose as he relaxed his throat to give Harry more room. When the head of
Harry’s cock breached the top of Draco’s throat, Harry’s hips stilled and he let out a loud moan.

“Draco!”

Hot, bitter come filled Draco’s mouth, and he swallowed as much of it he could until, finally, Harry pulled out.

Draco licked his lips, his mouth sore from the unpractised vigour of sucking for so long.

“I love you,” Harry said, smiling down at him.

Draco smirked, rising slowly to his feet. “Of course you do—I just sucked you off.”

Harry snorted. “No, I really do. Let me return the favour,” he said, dropping to his knees before Draco.

Draco felt his knees weaken and his breath become short as Harry pushed up his robes and began to fondle his hardness through his trousers.

“I want to see you… all of you. You’re so damned beautiful,” Harry breathed, looking up with admiration into Draco’s face.

Draco felt his face become red and hot under Harry's stare. He had gotten hundreds of blows jobs before, but seeing Harry on his knees, looking at him like that, was still humbling.

“Take off your robes. Gonna lick you all over,” Harry whispered, kissing Draco’s trousers and then moving his mouth up over his belt buckle to his belly.

As Harry pulled his robes up higher, Draco almost became lost in his own fervent desire. That is, until he felt Harry’s hands pulling at his shirt and tugging it upwards to lift with his robes. Panic seized Draco, and without thinking he pushed Harry back with more force than was necessary.

Harry gaped at him in shock and confusion.

“Listen, I miss you too, alright?” Draco rushed to explain. “But let’s not get crazy. We’re still at school. We can’t just… shag right here!”

Harry’s sly smirk returned. “Sure we can,” he said, moving in once more.

“I said no!” Draco snapped.

There was a moment of tense silence and then Draco sighed, shaking his head and trying to search for the right words that would explain his actions without revealing the real reason for them.

Harry rose to his feet, taking Draco’s chin in his hand, forcing him to meet Harry’s eyes. “I didn’t mean to be so pushy,” Harry apologised. “I just missed you.”

Draco nodded. “I’ve missed you, too.”

Harry smiled and dropped his hand. “Want to fly a bit?”

Relieved that Harry wasn’t offended or suspicious, Draco brandished a playful smirk.

“Are you sure you’re up for it? Don’t want to wear you out before the big match this weekend.”

Harry scoffed. “You need all the practice you can get. I bet you forgot every single move I taught
Draco chuckled. “You didn’t teach me all of my moves, Potter. I have some you haven’t seen yet.”

“Right,” Harry said. “Show me.”

“Maybe a few, but not all of them,” Draco said, extending his arm out for Harry to go first. Harry shook his head, smiling in amusement. It was a smile Draco tried to memorise, because after tonight, he wasn’t sure if he’d ever see it again.

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For Harry, flying with Draco again felt taking a large dose of Calming Draught. The anxiety and confusion he had been feeling for the past few weeks dwindled down to practically nothing. Just the knowledge that Draco felt comfortable enough to take a risk in order to speak to him was enough to erase all of the heartache Harry had suffered since his lover’s return.

Now that he knew Draco was indeed putting on a façade and was expected to not interact with the Trio, Harry’s anger towards Lucius Malfoy increased tenfold. His imagination got the better of him as he began to think of all of the possible tortures and threats that had been levelled against Draco to keep him away from the Trio.

As much as he tried, Harry could not stop wishing that Draco’s father would meet some unfortunate fate, preferably at the end of Harry’s own wand.

When Harry returned to the Common Room, Hermione and Ron were huddled up in a corner, talking in hushed tones. Harry smiled, happy to tell them that he had made a breakthrough with Draco, and they would all reunite tonight. But when he took a seat directly across from them and cleared his throat, the look on both their faces made his blood run cold.

Hermione looked distraught. Her face was red and her eyes were swollen as if she had been crying, and her arms were crossed over her chest in a defensive pose. Ron, on the other hand, looked absolutely livid. Harry hadn’t seen his eyes look that wild and furious in a long, long time. He blinked and looked around before leaning in.

"Is everything alright?"

Hermione shook her head. “No… No, Harry, everything is not alright.”

“We’ve really been duped,” Ron said.

“What are you on about?” Harry asked.

“This,” Ron said, pushing a balled up note into Harry’s hand. Harry quickly straightened it out as much as he could before his mouth dropped open and his heart fell into his stomach.

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Since returning from his brief interlude and flight with Harry, Draco’s nerves had been on edge. Getting through dinner had been quite painful and he hardly ate a thing, torn between what he was about to confess to the Trio and what he knew he was supposed to be doing. What would be the point of confessing anything to them if they were going to reject him anyway? Although, no small part of him wanted to believe that they wouldn’t. They had shared something very special, a bond that was deeper than any sworn allegiance or friendship Draco had ever experienced. If Hermione, Harry, and even Ron felt half as strongly as he did about that bond, then it’d be worth the try.
As he waited for them to show for dinner, his housemates inquired where he had gone. He told them the truth: that he needed to practice for the upcoming match and had run into Harry.

That whetted their interest. When asked what they did, he simply told them that he engaged Harry in a bit of Seeker competition, from which he'd emerged as the winner. When it became apparent there were no more salacious details about an argument or Harry’s humiliation, they grew bored, and Nott began to tell a sadistic story of his torture of an unfortunate second-year Muggle-born during free period.

Draco rolled his eyes before scanning the Gryffindor table. Hermione, Harry, and Ron’s chairs were still curiously empty. He glanced up at the giant clock hanging over the Head Table. It was a quarter to seven and dinner was almost over. He briefly considered that they might be off somewhere having a shag, but it didn’t seem likely they would miss a meal for that.

The time between dinner and bedtime seemed to stretch out forever. Draco tried to read to occupy his thoughts and contain his nerves.

Draco watched as his housemates all prepared for bed, and one after one, they fell into sleep. He was especially observant of Zabini and Nott’s beds, but they both had the telltale signs of their slumber that he had learned over the years.

He breathed a sigh of relief and then slowly slid out of bed, grabbing his cloak and trainers and retrieving his wand before opening the door and slipping out of the Slytherin Common Room with talented stealth.

They were to meet on the Quidditch pitch. Why, he wasn’t sure. The dungeons seemed like a much more logical choice, but perhaps they wanted more privacy than the castle could provide. Still, the trip outside seemed to take an eternity. Draco could feel sweat coating the inside of his hands, and he wiped them on his cloak. He paused, suddenly remembering as he looked at his hands. If there was anyone he needed to apologise and make amends to the most right now, it was Hermione. He promptly pulled his wand from his pocket, removing the Glamour on his ring finger.

Hopefully, if the evening ended alright, he’d get a chance to use it. Once again, he allowed his hopes to climb as he thought of Harry’s kisses and reassurances from earlier that day.

He slipped out of the side door easily enough. The night was quiet except for the wind and distant sounds of animals in the forest. However, when Draco reached the pitch, the dark seemed to expand before him, and the air inside of the stadium was eerily quiet, amplifying all of his senses. He gulped, his previous anxiety returning when he came upon them.

From the looks of it, they had been there for more than a few minutes. Immediately, Draco noticed Ron’s angry face; even in the dark, he could see the redhead’s pinched features and the incensed blush on his cheeks. Draco’s eyes scanned to Hermione, only to find her with her arms crossed over her breasts and her mouth twisted into a scowl so full of contempt he had a flash of the moment right before she had slapped him in their third year. He quickly looked to Harry, but the boy’s eyes rested at Draco’s feet and his fists were clenched, one of them holding a wrinkled piece of parchment.

“Hi,” Draco said tentatively, looking between them all.

None of them replied. After several seconds had stretched out in unbelievably awkward silence, Harry finally spoke.

“You have something to tell us?” he said, a demand in his voice that nudged at Draco’s previous doubts.
“Yes… er,” Draco began tentatively. “When I was at home, recently, something happened. It’s why I’ve been distancing myself from the three of you. It’s why I’ve been acting like a git.”

His eyes flickered to Ron, expecting some sort of bitter insult, but the redhead remained silent, his jaw set as if he were trying hard to keep it shut. He looked to Hermione, who was still watching him closely, while Harry stared at his face expectantly.

Draco took a deep breath before continuing. “Before I tell you this, you have to understand something. All of the things I’ve said to you in the last week, all the things I’ve done…I thought I had to. I thought by pushing you away things would be easier. But when I saw Harry today, well… I knew I couldn’t keep it up. I never wanted to hurt any of you. This has been really hard. You’re all… special to me.”

There was a snort from Ron’s direction, and Draco forced himself not to look at the redhead as he forged on.

“Things at home are bad. Really bad. And there was little I could do…”

The ghost of a smirk was now apparent on Harry’s face, and Draco tilted his head, trying to discern what it could possibly mean.

“Go on,” Harry said.

“I’ve… I’ve been Marked,” Draco forced out, holding his breath for their reactions.

He expected an explosion, a chorus of gasps, perhaps curses and protests, but instead, there was only silence. Awkward, eerie silence.

He didn’t know what to make of it. Was it disbelief? Shock?

Slowly, Draco brought up his arm and pulled back the sleeve, revealing the ugly dark tattoo. As Harry’s eyes fell upon it, Ron grimaced, shaking his head in disgust. Hermione gasped, staring at it for a few moments before closing her eyes. Draco felt exposed and vulnerable. He might as well have been completely naked. The moon felt like some sort of divine spotlight that had been hung in the sky just for him. Its light illuminated his pale skin, emphasising the sin that had been burned permanently into his arm.

Draco searched Harry’s face. He wanted to tell him how much it hurt to have it etched into his skin. How sick it had made him feel. How often he had thought about cutting off his arm to be free of it. But Harry’s gaze was not on Draco; it was focused on the Mark, inspecting it as if it were puzzle to be solved.

“So I guess this is the real reason you didn’t want to have one off with me today. Another lie,” he murmured.

Draco opened his mouth to explain but Harry spoke again.

“You should be proud. It suits you,” he said, finally raising his eyes to meet Draco’s.

Draco examined them all in puzzlement, and they were all staring back at him with knowing eyes. In that moment, Draco felt all of his former panic and self-doubt overtaking the hope he had allowed himself to nurture. Their silence said more than any curse word or raised voice could ever communicate.

He gasped. “You knew?”
Hermione stepped forward. “Yes. We know everything, Draco.”

Draco’s brow wrinkled in confusion. “What do you mean, everything?”

Hermione huffed, shaking her head. “All this time… you’ve been lying to us. How could you? We trusted you.”

“Hermione, what are you talking about? This just happened a few weeks ago, when I went home! I wasn’t Marked before, you know that—you’ve seen my arm!”

Ron scoffed. “The Mark only makes it official. You were Death Eater scum long before you got it.”

Draco gaped back at Ron in surprise, his frustration with the redhead growing. He knew that Ron was still probably bitter after their last encounter, but his words stung like a fresh bite.

“Death Eater scum?” Draco repeated. “Tell me then, if I was always a Death Eater, why would I risk my hide and bind myself to you to perform the ritual?”

Harry scoffed. “Right, the ritual. And whose idea was that?”

Draco threw up his hands at Harry’s ridiculous question. “Snape’s!”

“And who does Snape take orders from?” Ron asked.

Draco’s eyes narrowed. Where were they going with this? “What do you mean? You said he was working for the Order.”

“No, he’s a Death Eater spy!” Harry said sharply.

Draco was almost stunned into speechlessness. How did Harry know?

“Who told you that?”

“It’s true, isn’t it?” Harry pressed.

Draco swallowed. “Yes, but that’s just a cover. He’s really a spy for—!”


Draco looked at her in confusion. “What are you talking about?”

“Snape hasn’t been seen or heard from in over a month. They don’t know where he is!” she exclaimed. Draco could hear the pain and shock of it in her voice. But something was off. Where were they getting all of this information?

“But you do, don’t you?” Harry asked.

Draco narrowed his eyes. “Who told you all of this?”

“Does it matter?” Ron asked. “It’s the truth, isn’t it?”

Draco didn’t like the accusatory tone in Ron’s voice. Instinct kicked in. He shrugged. “How would I —”

“Know?” Harry said. “Because you saw him when you went home, along with all the other Death Eaters. Your home is headquarters for them now! Or are you going to try and deny that, as well?”
Draco tried to catch his breath and remain calm. “Harry, I told you things were bad at home. I have no control over that!”

“And I suppose you’re going to tell us that you didn’t have any control over befriending us this year?” Harry asked with sarcastic amusement. “You never did answer my question the night we were magically bound.”

“And what question was that?” Draco asked, even though he already knew.

“Did Snape put you up to trying to be friends with us, or was it someone else?”

Draco’s tongue felt welded to the top of his mouth as he stared back at Harry. He was trapped between the truth and their perception of the truth. He wanted to control both, but things were spiralling out of control. If only he could slow time down.

Finally, he allowed himself to breathe. “Harry, I swear, I was going to tell you—”

“That you really were a spy for Voldemort?” Harry snapped. “And when exactly were you going to do that, Draco?”

“Why do you think I came out here tonight?” Draco asked in exasperation. “I’m not even supposed to be talking to you three right now! But I wanted to come clean and tell you everything!”

Ron shook his head. “Like we can trust anything you say! You don’t do anything unless it works to your advantage.”

Draco scowled, frustration and anger rising. He tried his best to keep it out of his voice. “This isn’t some fucking chess game, Ron! I’m trying to be honest.”

“Yeah? Then why weren’t you honest enough to tell me about you and Ginny?” he asked angrily.

Draco’s mouth dropped open and his eyes locked onto Hermione’s in disbelief.

“Don’t look at me,” she said defensively. “I didn’t tell him!”

Ron shifted his glare to Hermione. “You should have! I can’t believe you and Harry kept that from me!”

Ron’s glare turned back onto Draco. “I should wring your neck,” he growled.

“I didn’t force her, Ron,” Draco tried to reason. “It was consensual!”

“And that makes it alright?” Ron asked in a shrill voice. “She’s only fifteen, you slimy pervert!”

Draco stiffened, ready for a confrontation, but then Harry was advancing towards him, coming to stand between him and Ron. Draco wanted to shake both of them and scream. They were bombarding him with too many questions and framing them in ways that cast him in the worst light.

“Who the hell is feeding you all of this shite?” Draco asked. “Dumbledore? Did any of you even bother to wonder where all this information came from? And why someone would even care to tell you?”

“It doesn’t matter if it came from Dumbledore or some random stranger, Draco, if it’s the truth,” Harry insisted. “You willingly took on an assignment from Voldemort to spy on us!”

“Harry, I didn’t have a choice!”
Harry gave Draco a look of disappointment before backing away. “And what exactly did he want to know?”

Draco licked his lips, holding Harry’s gaze to show him he had nothing to hide. “He wanted more information about you three. He thought you might be planning something.”

“Like what?” Harry asked.

“I—I don’t know,” Draco said truthfully. “He didn’t tell me, really.”

Ron scoffed. “But I’m sure you had plenty to tell him!”

“I only told him what we all agreed upon,” Draco explained. “That Harry was reorganising Dumbledore’s Army and making contacts throughout Europe. That’s all. I swear!”

Ron folded his arms over his chest. “Yeah, just like you swore your allegiance to You-Know-Who.”

“And what was I supposed to do, Ron? Just let him kill me?” Draco asked.

“I would have rather died!” Ron exclaimed. “I would have died before swearing allegiance to that freak!”

Draco shook his head. “Well, I’m no bloody Gryffindor! Besides, you have no idea what you’d do! Not until he’s right there, in your face!”

“That only proves that you’d do anything to save yourself,” Ron said. “Even if it means lying! Anyway, you’ve already admitted that you’re a liar.”

“Alright, yes, I lied!” Draco nearly yelled at Ron. “But I’m not lying now. Not anymore.”

Hermione shrugged, dejected. “It doesn’t matter if you’re telling the truth now, Draco. You’ve had all year to tell us, but you didn’t.”

Draco ran his hands through his hair in frustration. “Actually, I did… sort of,” he said weakly.

Hermione laughed without mirth. “Oh that. Yes, I remember. You tried to play it off as a ruse that you used as a cover to tell your housemates. But you were really spying on us!”

“Hermione, you’re smart. Think,” Draco tried to reason. “Why would I risk my life to go to Snape’s and practice for that damned ritual? I skipped Hogsmeade to go to Knockturn, for Merlin’s sake! Why would I be trying to destroy the Dark Lord if I was on his side?”

“That’s just it, Draco,” Harry said. “We don’t know whose side you’re on! You may be playing him and us, biding your time to see which one wins!”

Draco scoffed as his eyes searched each of theirs desperately until he finally settled on Hermione’s, hoping for some understanding and leniency there. “Hermione —”

“Draco, you can swear up and down until your face turns blue. Your word means nothing. Did you really promise Pansy you’d make her your girlfriend if she did whatever you said at that party?”

“What?” Draco asked, gobsmacked that Hermione was asking him something about Pansy that seemed as ancient as Trelawney’s robes.

He shook his head, desperate to clear up any misinformation she had received. “Yes, but that was ages ago! And it has nothing to do with this!”
“No, Draco, you’re wrong,” Hermione persisted. “It shows how far you would go to get what you want. You don’t care who you hurt.”

“Hermione, that’s not true. And it’s different with Pansy. I would never do that to you.”

“You already did… last week, remember?”

Draco could feel his face flush with shame as he recalled what he had done to her. “Yes, and I’m sorry for that. I really am. I thought I had to be cruel to push you away. I didn’t want to.”

Hermione’s expression was hardened, her eyes merciless. “It’s too late, Draco. I don’t trust you. How can I?”

He closed his mouth, staring at her, and then Harry and Ron. Suddenly, he no longer felt like he was in the comfort of the Quidditch pitch among friends and lovers. Instead, it was as if he had been transported to a makeshift Wizengamot, surrounded by judge and jury, with a gavel hanging before him, seconds away from descending. They had already made a decision—what was the use in arguing?

“I knew it,” Draco said bitterly. “I knew the three of you would turn on me as soon as you found out I was Marked.”

Hermione walked closer to him. “You still don’t get it, do you? We already figured you were Marked. We thought your father had forced you into it. But you were a Death Eater long before you got it. And you’re a liar. That doesn’t make for a good friendship, or anything else. Not that it matters anyway. I’m just a Mudblood, right? We’d never work.”

Draco felt woozy. His words to Hermione just a week before came back to slap him and he didn’t know what to say to make it right.

Harry’s hand was extended, and Draco looked down at it, not comprehending what was being requested.

“Your ring,” Harry said.

Draco glanced up at Ron and then Hermione and saw the same resolution on all of their faces. His eyes rested on Hermione’s as he twisted his ring off and placed it gently into Harry’s hand.

“And the coin,” Harry insisted.

Draco reached in his pocket slowly, not wanting to let go of the last symbol tying them together.

Harry waved his hand. “You know what? Forget it. Keep it. It was only for your benefit anyway. The three of us don’t need it, since we’re in the same House.”

There was cold, mocking veneer to Harry’s words, but Draco could hardly feel it. The numbness within him was spreading, and he looked up to see them all staring at him.

“So that’s it, then?” he heard himself saying.

Harry gave him a curt nod. “Yeah, that’s it. We’re done.”

Draco gave him a slight nod, determined not to break in front of him despite the feeling that his knees had turned into jelly.
He glanced to Hermione, who pursed her lips. Her eyes were sad and tired. She quickly turned from his gaze back up to the castle. Ron gave him one last glower before putting his arm around Hermione, and then the Trio turned their backs on him to begin the long walk back up to the castle.

As they climbed the grassy knoll towards the castle, Draco stared out across the massive empty pitch, wanting nothing more than the endless sea of darkness to swallow him whole.
Empty Spaces

I don't mean to drag it on
But I can't seem to let you go
I don't wanna make you face this world alone

I've tried to go on like I never knew you
I'm awake but my world is half asleep
I've prayed for this heart to be unbroken
But without you what I'm going to be is, incomplete...

“Incomplete” by the Backstreet Boys

The following morning Hermione awoke to someone shaking her.

“Hermione… Hermione…”

She opened her eyes slowly, squinting against the light of the sun.

“Are you alright?” Parvati asked. “It’s not like you to oversleep.”

The horrible argument and break up with Draco the night before felt like a bad dream that had robbed her of sleep. Despite wanting nothing more than to roll over and hide under the covers, Hermione turned over to face her housemate.

“Yes, I’m fine,” she said, trying to muster an appeasing smile. “I’ll be right down.”

“Alright,” Parvati said before leaving her alone.

Hermione remained in bed another ten minutes, replaying the confrontation from the night before—and Draco’s questions.

Did any of you even bother to wonder where all this information came from? And why someone would even care to tell you?”

They were the same questions Hermione had asked Ron and Harry before they’d met with Draco, and she was still unsure of the answers.

When she finally went down, there was only Harry and Ron in the common room, standing idly by the couches as they waited for her.

“Why aren’t you two at breakfast?” she asked.

“Why are you just coming down for breakfast?” Ron countered.

Hermione sighed in answer, the unspoken reason hanging over them like thick, velvet drapes, invisible folds trapping them in silence.

“I’m really not hungry,” Harry said quietly. “Think I’ll skip breakfast.”

“Harry, we skipped dinner last night,” Hermione reminded him. “You must be a little hungry?”
Harry looked sideways at Ron, and a guilty glance was exchanged.

“You ate?” Hermoine asked in surprise.

Ron shrugged. “Sorta,” he admitted. “The elves always save the leftover treacle tart. No use in throwing it out if someone wants it. I keep a stash near the bed for emergencies. I would have offered you some if we shared a dorm.”

Hermione scowled. “Ronald, treacle tart is not dinner! Besides, we can’t just hide. I’m sure others noticed our absence last night. If we don’t make an appearance, McGonagall will probably send a prefect to look for us, which may result in more deductions. We’ve already lost Gryffindor hundreds of points this year.”

“Not for missing breakfast,” Ron hissed through gritted teeth.

Hermione recoiled, startled by the anger in his voice and the flash of warning in his eyes. Ron seemed to remember himself and quickly glanced away.

“I’m just concerned,” she said in a much gentler tone. “She has it in for me now. And the entire school already thinks we shag like bunnies. If we don’t show, it’ll just give them more reason to gossip. We have to go to breakfast.”

“Hermione, we don’t have to do anything,” Ron insisted, still defiant. “Breakfast isn’t required, and if you really want something to eat, I can arrange for it.”

Hermione studied him in puzzlement. “Just how much time have you been spending with the kitchen elves, Ron?”

“I’d thought you’d be pleased, Miss Elf Liberation,” Ron sneered. “Besides, I’m not in the mood to see Malfoy’s face right now.”

It was a sentiment they all shared. Just the thought of seeing Draco made Hermione’s chest hurt, and everything about Ron and Harry’s demeanours said they were still put out about it. It was enough to end any further protest.

“Alright,” she said. “I’d like an apple and crumpet with butter, if you can manage.”

“Harry?” Ron asked.

Harry shook his head to decline, and Ron gave Hermoine a concerned glance before heading out.

While he was gone, Hermoine and Harry waited in silence. She could see he was brooding, and she began to think of ways to draw him out of it. But Harry wouldn’t even make eye contact with her, and while the start of many conversations sat on the tip of her tongue, she maintained her silence.

Once Ron returned, they all shuffled up to the boys’ dormitory, discarding their robes to sit down in a comfortable line on Harry’s bed. Ron and Hermoine ate quietly, while Harry stared off, seemingly in his own world. When she was done, Hermoine reclined back on the bed to stare up at the ceiling, the boys resting on either side of her. She stayed like that for several minutes until she began to drift off.

“We have to go to class,” Hermoine said, forcing her mind to stay focused, despite the lethargy weighing her down.

“We will,” Ron said. “First lesson doesn’t start for another half an hour.”
Silence ensued once more, dense with sadness and regret.

Hermione turned her head to assess how Harry was doing, but he was gazing at his wardrobe, eyes stormy and distant. As she stared her mind began to wander. Draco’s desperate pleas to be heard continued to echo in her head. There was no mistaking the raw sincerity in his voice. She placed one hand over her chest, feeling a great sob welling up inside of her. She had to think of something else, anything else. The patterned circles on the ceiling suddenly became very interesting, and she began to count them.

One… fifteen… twenty-two… twenty four...

*Who the hell is feeding you all of this shite? Dumbledore?*

“Twenty-four,” she whispered. Or was it twenty-five? It was hard to keep count with Draco’s voice in her head.

“What?” Ron asked, looking at her strangely.

Hermione darted a glance at him, embarrassed she’d been caught counting out loud, but then quickly looked in the other direction. Her eyes scanned past the patterns to a small black hole in the corner of the ceiling, drawn to its seemingly innocuous presence. She sat up and withdrew her wand, proceeding to cast a number of concealment spells along the perimeter of the ceiling.

The boys watched her curiously, and after she was done, she turned to Ron. “Can you activate that trick alarm of yours?”

Ron nodded, fishing around for his own wand before casting an activation spell on the inconspicuous dot.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

Hermione braced herself for a row. “I can’t help it. I keep thinking about Draco.”

As expected, Ron scowled at her before falling back on the bed and closing his eyes. “Drop it, Hermione. We discussed this to death last night.”

“Yes, but we were angry. And rash. I fear we haven’t considered everything. Perhaps we should have thought it through more before we met with him.”

“Why?” Ron asked. “To give him time to come up with a better lie?”

Hermione started, but before she could continue, Harry jumped in. “Hermione, don’t do this. We already went over every question he threw at us.”

“And we still can’t answer any of them with complete confidence.”

“I’m pretty confident,” Harry said bitterly. “Confident that he’s a liar.”

Hermione opened her mouth to rebut, but Harry’s piercing glare gave her pause. His jaw was tight and there was simmering anger in his eyes. But he said nothing as he waited for her to continue, like they both knew she would.

“Harry,” she started tentatively. “If Dumbledore cared so much about warning us, why wouldn’t he just call us into his office? Why use an anonymous note? And why now?”

Harry took a long breath in through his nose as if trying to contain his annoyance. “Because he’s the
Headmaster, Hermione,” he exhaled with impatience. “He can’t just go around finger pointing at students and former professors.”

“What if he’s just trying to sabotage Draco and the prophecy?” Hermione blurted out. Both Harry and Ron stared at her like she was a stranger that had just Apparated into their midst. She began to finger her wand nervously. “I mean, he did lie about Snape giving me the locket.”

Harry’s glower became almost unbearable; she could feel his anger coming off in waves and began to regret speaking out at all.

“You’re defending them now?” Harry barked accusingly. “What has Malfoy or Snape ever done for us? They both swore allegiance to someone who’s been trying to kill us for the better part of six years! At least we know Dumbledore cares. He helped save us from Voldemort last year. He’s always been there when we needed him.”

Hermione felt her resolve weakening as she considered the practicality of Harry’s words. There was no denying it. Her mind switched to arguments in Draco’s defence, but as she took in Harry and Ron’s angry and frustrated faces, weariness set in once more.

She was tired of debating, tired of trying to defend someone who had lied to her and hurt her. It was much easier to just crawl back onto Harry’s bed and rest between the two than to argue. She reached out to put a comforting hand on Harry’s shoulder, but Harry turned on his side, his back to her, and his body stiff under her touch.

“I’m sorry, Harry,” she tried to console. “I know how much this hurt you.”

Harry remained unresponsive, but behind her, Ron scooted closer.

“What are we going to do now?” she asked.

“We go back to the way things were,” Ron said with determination.

Hermione turned her head, arching an eyebrow up at him.

“Don’t look at me like that,” Ron protested. “It won’t be that hard. Just… stop thinking about him.”

“How am I supposed to do that, Ron? How are any of us supposed to do that when we see him at lessons and meals?”

Ron’s lips pressed tightly together as his gaze wandered over her body.

“I have a few ideas,” he said slyly, reaching down to grab her left leg and pulling her towards him. Hermione snapped her head towards Harry, but he still had his back to them, while Ron’s hand began to roam higher and higher up Hermione’s thigh towards her knickers.

“Get up,” he ordered.

Hermione sat up quickly as his eyes fell on her necktie and shirt. “Take your shirt off, now,” he ordered impatiently.

The edge in Ron’s voice suggested to her that he needed a distraction, so she nodded without protest, quickly undoing her necktie. When she began to unbutton her shirt, Ron grabbed the front of it with both hands and pulled it apart, sending buttons flying in all directions.

She gaped back at him in shock, her heart racing just a little bit faster now. She wanted to be
distracted, too—to have both of their minds off the horribleness of the day before. She wondered if
he would comment on the fact that she had forgotten to put on the undergarments they had
commanded her to wear, but it didn’t seem to matter. Ron’s eyes were feasting on her breasts, and
Hermione quickly pulled down her bra to give him the full entree. He cupped the right breast, his
thumb grazing over her piercing, causing her to move towards him for more. But Ron had other
intentions. He leaned to take the nipple into his mouth, his tongue toying with the ring as he sucked.
Light shaky breaths escaped Hermione as he did, and Ron’s hands latched onto her hips
possessively, pulling her against his hard, clothed erection.

As they began to grind into each other, Hermione felt some of the worry and tension that had been
consuming her melt—but it wasn’t enough. She grabbed a handful of Ron’s hair, pulling him up.
Their lips crashed, sloppy and desperate and Hermione tugged at his shirt, urging to take it even
further. Ron reached down between them, fumbling with his trousers, when Harry cleared his throat
loudly.

Both Hermione and Ron looked up at him, dazed.

“What?” Ron asked irritably.

Harry glared at Ron. “You two are just going to shag? Right here, in front of me?”

“Yeah…” Ron said, bemused.

Harry narrowed his eyes at Ron. “That’s rude.”

Ron rolled his eyes, then moved to taste Hermione’s lips once more, only this time Hermione kept
her eyes open to gaze up at Harry. He was staring down at them, at her, his green eyes as dark as a
thick forest.

“You can join us, if you like,” she offered with a small smile, as Ron began to poke against her
dampened knickers with his newly freed cock.

Harry frowned. “Did you forget?”

Hermione scrunched up her face in question.

“I don’t need your permission. I own you.”

Everything else in the room may as well have disappeared. Despite Ron’s vigorous grinding, it was
Harry’s stare, the certainty of ownership in his words, and the tone of his voice that pushed all of the
air out of Hermione’s lungs. She struggled to gasp for more as she stared back at him. His eyes held
the same intensity and darkness she remembered right before their session at Snape’s. Whatever
anger was lurking there, she wanted to help him release it. Perhaps it would free her as well.

“Yes, Master, you do,” she said breathlessly. She shivered as she felt a tiny shock in her cunt. One
shock became many, and they all vibrated along her clit, making her keenly aware of her nether
piercing.

Ron’s hard cock rubbing against it only increased the intensity of the sensation, and Hermione
couldn’t help but move against him to seek relief. But there was no relief. It just continued, relentless.
It was both immensely pleasing and frustrating to feel herself growing wetter while a deep ache
began to blossom in her cunt.

“Master,” she half pleaded and whimpered, reaching out for Harry’s arm to hold on to.
“Yes?” Harry asked, moving closer to hold his hand over her face. Hermione watched as he showed her how he was manipulating the platinum ring to tease and torment her.

“Ohh,” she crooned as he began to trace along its edges counter-clockwise, creating a new tingling sensation.

Finally, Ron seemed to become aware that Hermione was responding to something other than him. He stopped his grinding and pulled back to look curiously between her and Harry.

Hermione’s eyes remained on Harry’s, and on his thumb, watching as it traced the circumference of the ring. It felt like light magical fingers were drawing circles around her clit, sometimes tapping gently, but mostly teasing. Her hips began to make circles of their own until the light tap dance became both too much and not enough. She cried out.

“Do you like that, Hermione?” Harry asked, his eyes demanding an answer.

“Yes… yes, Master,” she said, digging her fingers into his arm as the vibration continued. The ring was merciless, tickling her clit with just enough pressure, just enough stimulation to make her wanton for much more. She reached down to pull down her knickers, but then her hands were slapped away.

“No,” Ron said, grabbing her by the wrists and pulling them up to cross over her head. He moved from out between her legs to her left side to get in a better position to watch her. “I want to see how long you can take it.”

Hermione whimpered in frustration, but froze when she heard a growl. She looked up just in time to see Harry reaching out to seize Ron by the back of the neck.

“Harry, what are you doing?” Ron cried.

“Taking over,” Harry replied. “You want to fuck her?”

Ron stared back at him in confusion.

“Huh?”

“Uh, yeah,” Ron said unsurely.

“Then do it,” Harry ordered. “But you have to do it my way. Got it?”

Hermione watched as Harry’s fingers sunk in deeper around the pale freckled skin of Ron’s neck.

“Harry, you’re hurting me,” Ron whined.

“Then why is your dick still hard?” Harry jeered.

Hermione stared up between the two, enraptured by the spark of dangerous excitement in the air. This was foreign territory. She had never seen Harry quite like this, especially with Ron. It was exciting—almost as exciting as the moment she’d watched Draco and Ron take Harry. The burst of anticipation waned a little at the thought of Draco, and she tried to push him out of her head as she looked up at Ron.

She half expected him to explode in a defensive outburst, but in a matter of seconds he was leaning as if to kiss Harry. His breath was short, coming in pants, and his cock was hard as ever. She leaned in and stuck out her tongue to taste the pre-come that had gathered on the head. Ron groaned in approval and then shifted to settle between her legs. There was movement to her right, and she
looked up to see Harry getting out of the bed. He just stood there, watching them.

That didn’t appear to bother Ron in the least. He positioned his cock at her entrance, sliding it along her slick wetness and then moving forward as if to penetrate. There was a loud smack in the room, and Ron froze, a pained whine escaping him.

“Ow!”

“Did you hear me?” Harry asked sternly. “I said my way. Just like I tell you.”

“Alright,” Ron agreed quickly, sitting up on his knees, waiting for Harry to make his first order.

Hermione stared at him in surprise. She wanted to memorize the moment.

But instead of giving Ron a command, Harry resumed to taunt Hermione with the movement of his thumb. Hermione began to grind her hips once more, trying to create some friction against the ring and the material of her underpants, the tingling in her pussy becoming unbearable. She half cried, half moaned, “Master, please, no more teasing. I need to be filled. I need it bad… I need you… both of you. Please,” she said, looking to Harry and then to her left at Ron.

“Your begging has improved,” Harry said.

“I’ll say,” Ron agreed.

“Alright, Ron. Let’s see you put that tongue to use. Eat her out.”

Hermione gave Harry an appreciative smile, but Harry eyes remained focused on Ron, waiting for his compliance.

Ron didn’t waste any time moving down, pulling down her knickers as he did. Hermione’s eyes followed him in anticipation as his face inched closer to her pussy. She spread herself wider, making room for him. When his warm wet tongue darted out to taste her, she sighed in bliss. His tongue began to trace every inch of her cunt until reaching the ring hanging over her clit. Hermione froze, almost fearful, but Ron was careful, flicking his tongue over her piercing with care. She reached down to sink her hands into his hair, pushing his face into her. Ron made hungry appreciative sounds as he continued to lap at her.

She ground herself against his mouth with abandon and was caught off guard when Harry’s mouth descended onto hers. Harry broke the kiss and pulled back, his cock jutting out at her. He reached out and pulled her hand away from Ron’s head to guide it towards his cock. Hermione quickly grabbed hold of it, squeezing hard enough to elicit a
pleased groan.

“That’s enough, Ron,” Harry said. To Hermione’s disappointment, Ron stopped licking her immediately. He drew up to sit on his knees, waiting for Harry’s next command.

“Get in position,” Harry ordered.

Once again, Ron complied without complaint, moving up to position himself between Hermione’s legs. He held himself over her with both hands on either side of her, waiting.

“Kiss her.”

Ron’s mouth descended immediately. The taste of her own pussy on his lips was strangely intoxicating and she began to lick and suck with eagerness, her movements over Harry’s cock quickening. Harry was thrusting slow and steady into her grip, as he watched the two of them go at it.

Ron’s kiss deepened as his cock poked and slipped along Hermione’s wetness before moving to her neck. Hermione felt his teeth graze the sensitive skin there, and she tilted her head to the side, inviting him to do it. Ron hesitated only for a moment before biting her there. The pain felt good, almost clouding all of Hermione’s thoughts.

But in order to block out everything, she still needed more. Her nails sank deeply into one of his biceps, and Ron growled against her neck. She did it again, enjoying this animalistic side of him. He was barely restraining himself now; his cock was pushing against her, the head slipping in, without any further regard for Harry’s permission.

“No!” Harry scolded as another hard slap resounded through the room. Ron pulled back with a gasp, looking at his boyfriend with a pained expression.

“When I say and not a minute before, understand?” Harry said sternly.

“Yeah,” Ron muttered.

“What’s that?”

“I said yes,” Ron nearly snarled.

Sensing rising tension, and the potential disintegration of her temporary distraction, Hermione drew both boys’ attention back to her, rubbing herself against Ron and tightening her squeeze on Harry’s cock.

Ron groaned. "Don’t tease, Hermione... please…"

She gave him a sympathetic smirk and stopped, running a soothing hand over the marks she’d made in his arm.

Harry backed away, pulling his cock out of her grip and beyond her reach. Hermione looked over to see what he was up to, but he had already climbed onto the bed, behind Ron.

Ron’s eyes widened in apprehension, but then there was whispering, and his jaw went slack while his eyes closed. Hermione could hear slick sounds and instantly understood that Harry was preparing Ron. The bed shifted as he moved closer to Ron, and Hermione could feel both of them between her legs.
She watched as hands appeared over Ron’s shoulders, and then Harry’s face came into view. His lips kissed Ron’s ear and then he whispered something.

Ron visibly shuddered and then nodded in response, opening his eyes and falling forward to brace himself, both arms on either side of Hermione, his nose almost touching hers.

“Now, Ron,” Harry said in a soft but firm voice. Hermione could feel Harry pushing, and Ron made a strange sound, halfway between gasping and choking as he moved forward to bury himself inside her in one stroke.

He withdrew slightly, letting out a strangled whimper when Harry pushed into him again, forcing Ron to sink inside her once more. Hermione reached up to hold Ron’s arms, enjoying the feeling of being filled. She closed her thighs a little to grip Ron tighter, hooking her feet just a little behind Harry’s arse. Using her legs, she squeezed and pulled, urging them both forward.

“Harder,” she begged. Harry stilled for a moment and then shook the bed as he delivered hard, quick thrusts, using Ron’s body as an instrument to get them all off.

“How’s that, Ron?” he asked in a gruff voice.

“Go-good, Harry,” Ron choked out. “Really good—oh!”

Hermione stared up at Ron’s open mouth and clenched eyes. He looked caught between pain and pleasure, but there was something else there. He had the desperate focus of a man trying to remember something… or forget it. She moved her head to peer past Ron’s body to find Harry. His eyes were also shut. His jaw was stiff and his brow furrowed.

Hermione kept her eyes on them; it was sexy seeing them both like that. Because while it felt good to have Ron inside of her and feel the swell of Harry’s arse against her feet as she urged him to fuck the two of them harder, it wasn’t enough. She still couldn’t forget that something was **missing**. And the deeper Ron went, the more she twisted and pushed back with urgency, desperate to quell the emptiness that threatened to extinguish her orgasm before it could even begin.

“More, Master. Harder,” she sobbed, confused at the tears gathering in her eyes.

Ron’s head fell as Harry began to pound into him harder and faster, shaking all three of them. And it felt good, but the pleasure seemed to pale in comparison to the unmistakable void in her gut.

Finally, she felt it. A familiar pressure building inside of her—only instead of an approaching tidal wave, this orgasm felt like distant thunder. She pushed and pulled but the fight to erase the emptiness and pain of the night before seemed futile. By the time Harry finally groaned his release, with Ron following shortly after; Hermione’s own orgasm had come and gone as quietly as a whisper.

Ron fell against her, trying to catch his breath, while Harry rested against his back. Silent tears slid down Hermione’s face as she looked up to meet Harry’s concerned eyes, surprised to see the same sadness clouding them. She closed her own as Ron reached up to caress a runaway tear.

“Sorry, Hermione,” he whispered, his voice thick with regret.

Harry exhaled loudly in frustration, rubbing his wet brow against Ron.

Hermione brushed back a lock of sweaty hair from Ron’s brow, her other hand reaching around him to caress Harry.

“It’s alright,” she whispered. “It’ll just take some time… for all of us.”
Two days later found the Trio outside in the middle of the low field on the castle grounds. Hermione had enlarged a blanket so that they could all stretch out comfortably.

It was finally spring and despite the increasing attacks occurring all over Europe, Hogwarts was full of renewed energy. The fine weather proved to be just the thing to get the stress of the looming war off of everyone’s minds for a little while; students and professors alike were taking advantage of it. Whenever possible, classes were being held outside, and in between them, or during free periods, students would lounge, study, and play games on the grassy fields.

But while everyone else’s spirits had been temporarily lifted, the three of them remained sombre. For Hermione, the days since their break up with Draco were unfolding like a never-ending scene in a poorly produced play. Even though she knew she was supposed to feel justified about what they had done, everything felt wrong. Draco’s questions continued to nag at her, but there had been stiff reluctance from both Harry and Ron to talk about him at all. Still, despite their stubbornness, they appeared weighed down by melancholy.

She stretched out her legs until the grass tickled her toes as she tried to focus on the large tome in her lap. Ron fidgeted on the blanket for at least the fifth time in the last few minutes.

“I can’t get comfortable!” he whined, huffing as rolled onto his back, covering his eyes with his hand to shield them from the sun. Beside him, Harry sat propped up on his elbows, staring out at the field ahead of them. His silence and sleep-worn eyes said everything.

Hermione sighed, re-reading the same sentence once more. She had been on the same page for the last few minutes.

“I should have brought a pillow,” Ron complained.

“Honestly, Ronald, I’m becoming quite concerned about your proficiency in Transfiguration. Creating a pillow doesn’t require a complex spell—you can make one out of a quill, like so,” Hermione said, flicking her wand at the quill by her side. In a matter of seconds, it transformed into a pillow.

Ron rolled his eyes, grabbing it to place under his head. “Show-off.”

Hermione smirked. “I’m not showing off. If Draco were here, he’d remind you that we learned Inflating charms in fifth year.”

Ron grunted. “Who cares what Malfoy would say?”

“You did,” Harry said. “He always knew just how to get a rise out of you.”

“Me?” Ron said, sitting up. “He only had to look at you to get you in tizzy.”

Harry gave Ron dismissive shake of the head. “I think you’ve got that backwards.”

Hermione studied Harry’s profile, remembering how wound up both Harry and Draco got, whether they were fighting or shagging.

“I think you were just as affected by Draco as he was by you, Harry,” she commented.

“Oh? And what about you?” Harry asked.
“What about me?” Hermione said, holding her chin up.

Ron snorted. “Oh, sure, act all high and mighty now, but as I recall, he had you on your knees in no less than five minutes. Or don’t you remember that first day at Snape’s?”

Harry laughed. “That was insane.”

Ron sniggered. “I was going to rip his head off; that is, until we found out Ms. Perfect here wasn’t so perfect after all.”

Hermione pursed her lips. “I never said I was perfect, Ron.”

“No, you just like to pretend you are,” Ron said. “Draco really brought you down a peg,” he added with a whimsical smirk.

“As I recall, Ronald, he brought you down a few pegs… or don’t you remember your punishment?”

Ron’s ears turned pink and he cast his eyes down shamefully. “Why are we even talking about Malfoy?”

Hermione smirked, glancing between Ron, and Harry, whose face had returned to its subdued state.

“I don’t get it…” Harry said, his eyes still focused on the rolling hills below them.

Hermione followed his gaze, contemplating everything she had been wrestling with over the past few days.

“He said he didn’t have a choice, Harry,” she said softly.

“I just don’t buy that,” Ron said. “You always have a choice.”

“Ron, what would you do if you had to choose between taking an assignment from Voldemort and your life? Or taking the Mark and saving your family?”

Ron pursed his lips. “Hermione, we don’t even know if that’s true.”

“Of course we do,” she insisted. “Draco said he was doing this for his family.”

“That’s what he told us at Snape’s, but we already know he’s a liar,” Ron argued.

“But about that, Ron,” Hermione said. “You saw him. You saw how upset he got when Snape confessed he didn’t know what the ritual was. He had his heart set on it. He was risking everything.”

Ron stared at her but didn’t retort; instead, he settled on his back again, covering his eyes once more. Hermione glanced to her right at Harry to see if he had anything to say, but Harry continued to stare off as the air around them became thick with the meaning behind Hermione’s words.

Several minutes went by until, finally, Harry spoke. “Even if he was trying to help his family, he still should have told us the truth.”

“When should he have done that, Harry?” Hermione asked.

Harry turned his head sharply to look at her. “What do you mean, when? As soon as it was possible.”

“Can you honestly say that you would have trusted him if he had told you Voldemort had sent him to
Harry swallowed, averting his eyes. “I dunno. Maybe.”

Hermione shook her head knowingly. “And what about you, Ron?”

Ron sighed. “Probably not,” he said quietly.

“Exactly,” Hermione said. “I wouldn’t have trusted him either. Let’s face it, no matter when Draco might have confessed, it would have gone over badly. In fact, we probably wouldn’t have even gotten this far.”

Harry didn’t reply, instead, he began pulling at the grass by his side, avoiding Hermione’s stare.

“It doesn’t matter,” Ron said stubbornly. “He’s still a shady character. I mean, just look at what he did to Ginny!”

“Ron, Harry and I are just as guilty of hiding the Ginny incident as he is. Besides, he didn’t do anything to Ginny. She isn’t a twelve-year-old. She’s only a year younger than he is.”

“So?” Ron exclaimed, rising on his elbows once more. “She’s still impressionable. Next you’re going to tell me that she was gagging for it!”

Hermione raised her eyebrow, conscious that she had to be delicate so as not to send Ron into a rant. “I know you don’t want to hear this, Ron, but I don’t think Ginny found the experience completely unpleasant.”

Ron’s mouth dropped open. “Hermione!”

“What? If you’re that concerned about it, then perhaps you should discuss it with her,” she said, trying to control her smirk.

Ron scowled, his eyes narrowed to tiny slits. “I’m not going to ask my sister if she enjoyed polishing Malfoy’s knob, so just drop it, alright? I don’t want to talk about him or this anymore!” he said gruffly, turning over once more to rest on his forearms.

“Well, I miss him,” Hermione admitted.

“Well, I don’t,” Ron insisted. “I mean, what’s so special about him anyway? So what, he plays a fair game of chess, and sometimes he’s good for a laugh… but most times he’s a real prick.”

“You can be one, too,” Harry said, looking down at his boyfriend.

Ron scowled but kept silent.

“Perhaps we were a little harsh,” Harry said cautiously.

“A little?” Hermione said. “Harry, we attacked him.”

“He lied to us!” Ron protested.

“Yes, and he admitted that,” Hermione said. “But we didn’t give him a chance to really explain before we jumped down his throat.”

No one said anything to that. Hermione began to twiddle with the quill in hand, nervous and excited that perhaps she was making progress with the boys. Still, they remained in contemplative silence for
several more minutes before anyone spoke.

“I suppose he did take a considerable risk, coming out to see us,” Harry finally conceded. “Being Marked and everything.”

“That’s right,” Hermione said quickly. “He didn’t have to meet us at all. And he seemed really sincere about his regret over the assignment, and about taking the Mark.”

Harry clapped his hands to rid them of dirt, but didn’t reply. Hermione sensed the last vestiges of resistance at work and pressed once more.

“Harry, he’s put just as much effort into making the prophecy work as we have.”

Harry turned to look at her plainly, his eyes weary and resigned.

“You still believe in the prophecy?”

“Yes. I do,” she said resolutely. “And you know how I feel about prophecies…”

Harry smirked in spite of himself, and Hermione smiled back. She had finally worn him down. Perhaps there was still hope for reconciliation. She bit back her smile with the awareness there was still a fair amount of work to be done before that could occur.

“What do you want us to do, Hermione? We can’t go back to the way things were. Too much has been said,” Harry said.

“I’m not sure if that’s true. Draco is a part of us now,” Hermione insisted. “We all felt it the last time we were together. It feels like something is missing … We need him.”

Beneath her, Ron huffed. “I dunno, Hermione. Need is a strong word.”

“Yes, but it’s true, Ron,” she said.

Ron groaned, hitting his head against the blanket in frustration. “Does this mean we have to apologise? Because I’m not sure I can do that.”

“Perhaps you won’t have to. Let’s just give him another chance to explain.”

Ron sat up to look her eye to eye. “And what if he’s already decided he doesn’t want anything else to do with us? What then?”

Hermione’s fingers tightened around quill between her fingers as she stared out at where the sky and ground both met and ended.

“Then I suppose there’s nothing we can do.”
Bound by Love

Did I disappoint you?
Or leave a bad taste in your mouth?
You act like you never had love,
And you want me to go without.
Well it's too late tonight
To drag the past out into the light.
We're one, but we're not the same.
We get to carry each other,
Carry each other,
One.

“One” by U2

As more students began to leave off and return indoors with the setting of the sun, Draco’s mood began to sink as well. Since the night of the break up with the Trio, he had gone through many emotions: anger, resentment, frustration, guilt, and regret. But one feeling remained constant: loneliness.

Draco had always felt a sense of loneliness at Hogwarts, even among his many housemates who had always given him attention and respect. Their friendships felt obligatory and seemed borne out of necessity and fear more than genuine fondness. But to have earned the trust, respect and affection from three people who had every reason to distrust and dislike him, and then lose it all overnight, hurt more than he could have ever imagined. The feeling of being alone was more acute now and his chest ached enough to make him wonder if he was having a drawn out heart attack.

He spent a lot of energy trying to push away that pain, but sometimes it still threatened to bubble up and seep through his carefully crafted mask of indifference. It took a great deal of willpower and fortitude to not break or snap in the presence of his so-called comrades who enjoyed making fun of the Trio. The charade with his housemates was starting to wear on him mentally. But what Draco found most trying was passing any of the three in the hallways and acting as if they had never had a bond. He sometimes wondered what Hermione would do if he just pulled her aside and made her listen without the influence of Harry or Ron. Concentrating in class had become difficult, as his thoughts vacillated between the three of them.

But it didn’t matter. That was over now; he had to move on, persevere, and he would—he always did. It was the one thing his father had instilled in him: determination.

As his hand absently brushed over his left arm once more, Draco thought of the man who had set this path before him. As angry as he was with his father’s recent actions, Draco knew, without a doubt, that he would give his life for the man, and he was certain his father would do the same for him, no matter how disappointed the man may have been in him.

At one point, he thought he would have done the same for the Trio. But now all that he was certain of was the dull pain of understanding that their attachment to him was obviously considerably less than his was to them.

He allowed himself one more moment of self-pity before collecting himself. As he looked out at the setting sun and over the rolling hills of the lower lawns, the thought that they might be sitting near the
lake right now nudged at him. He shook it away, taking a glance back at the castle. Crabbe and Goyle would be looking for him soon—it was almost dinnertime. He forced himself to stand for the walk back, when a small flash of warmth flared against his thigh. Pushing back his robes, he rubbed the circular area where heat grew more intense.

He froze and then quickly withdrew the charmed coin from his pocket. It was signalling for them to meet immediately, by the lake.

Draco squeezed it, pushing away hope before it could take root. Hope was the reason why he had kept the coin on him, but cynicism was more logical, and safe. Why would they be calling to meet with him again? Perhaps they wanted to have another round with him, to tell him what an awful person he was once more. Or maybe they wanted to pick his brain for information with a threat to expose him if he didn’t.

Only he doubted they’d ever sink that low. Perhaps they had simply changed their minds and wanted him to return the charmed coin. Besides the memories they had made together, it really was the last real tie connecting them.

“Let’s get this over with,” he muttered, walking down the hill towards the lake.

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No matter what type of accusations, insults, and prying questions they had, Draco was determined to remain calm and detached. He would simply hand over the coin and walk away.

However, when Draco arrived, Hermione, Harry, and Ron didn’t appear angry; on the contrary, their faces were openly apprehensive.

He stopped just short of the rocks, in front of them. The few feet separating them might as well have been a mile. They stared at each other in tense silence, and once again, Draco was reminded of how alone he was now. Being in front of them like this, in complete silence, was almost unbearable. He had to wrap up whatever business they had left so he could escape.

“I assume you changed your mind and want your coin back,” he said, holding it out. “Here.”

None of them moved, which made Draco feel even more self-conscious. “Fine, I’ll toss it,” he sighed, gearing back his arm to throw it into the lake.

“No!” Hermione, Harry, and Ron shouted.

Draco paused, dropping his arm to turn and measure their intent.

“Draco,” Hermione started hesitantly. “We signalled you here because we want to talk.”

Draco raised one eyebrow curiously.

Hermione clasped her hands in front of her nervously. “Before… you were trying to tell us something, and we were so upset about what we thought we knew that it made it hard for us to really listen to you.”

Draco eyes shifted to Harry and Ron, trying to discern if they were in agreement with Hermione, or if she had somehow strong-armed them into calling this meeting.

But Ron appeared genuinely perplexed, and he had his hands stuffed in his pockets, and while Harry’s mouth was drawn in a tight thin line, his eyes looked confused. Maybe they really were open
to talking.

Still, Draco’s pride kept his mouth firmly shut. He held his chin up, waiting for one of them to speak.

But no one did. Hermione looked to her right at Harry and Ron, but they appeared just as resistant to speaking first as Draco. She pursed her lips and glared at them as if trying to will them to say something but when they refused to look at her, she turned back to Draco. There was a desperate plea in her eyes.

“Well?” she started.

“Well what?” Draco asked curtly. “What do you want me to say? It sounds as if you three already know everything.”

“Well that’s not exactly true,” Hermione said in a diplomatic tone. “We want to hear it from your perspective, and then maybe you can listen to ours.”

Draco shrugged. “I don’t need to hear yours. You’ve already made it very clear how you feel. I know you’re angry with me because I lied.”

Harry nodded. “That’s right.”

That wasn’t the response Draco expected, or wanted to hear. The hard edge in Harry’s voice agitated lingering resentment from their last encounter. But Draco refused to stand trial again, and he couldn’t help the sneer forming on his lips as he spoke the words he’d been dying to deliver for the past three days.

“Have you three even tried to put yourselves in my position? I doubt any of you could imagine what I’ve been through.”

Harry opened his mouth, but Hermione spoke first. “We have, Draco, and we know it can’t be easy —”

“Oh, bollocks!” Harry interrupted. “Have you put yourself in ours?”

Draco ground his teeth. “Of course I have! Harry, I know how much you hate the Dark Lord.”

“Hate? You think that’s what this is about?” Harry exclaimed. “Some grudge? You have no idea what I’ve been through, do you?”

Draco felt irritation flare once more. Harry’s story was common knowledge—why did he insist on rubbing it in Draco’s face as if he were an idiot? “Of course I do, Harry,” Draco said wearily. “Everyone knows what you’ve been through. He killed your parents, and he tried to kill you.”

“Right, but do you understand that he’s been trying to kill me since I’ve arrived here?”

Draco shifted, looking down at the rocks uncomfortably. He’d heard many stories about Harry throughout their years at Hogwarts. They had always seemed like exaggerations, bordering on fairy tales. Tales designed to inflate Harry’s legend. Draco used to think Harry had played a large role in weaving those tales, but now that he knew the boy much better, he just assumed that his housemates and groupies had been responsible for the lies.

“I suppose,” Draco muttered.

“What’s that?” Harry demanded.
Draco sighed. “I said, I suppose.”

“What do you mean, you suppose?” Harry asked. “You think it’s a bunch of rubbish, don’t you?”

Draco swallowed. “I didn’t say that, Harry. But there are so many stories out there about you. I just… I don’t know what’s true and what’s not.”

When he looked up, Harry was staring at him with a sour expression. “You’re right, Draco. You don’t know the half of it.”

Draco tried not to grind his teeth as his patience began to wane considerably. If Harry was trying to make him feel even worse than he already felt, it was working, but there was no need in drawing it out.

“Why don’t you tell me, then,” he challenged.

Harry’s face transformed, shifting from frustration to a guarded hesitancy as he exchanged a look with Hermione and Ron, who both nodded in support.

“Better sit down.”

Harry, Hermione, and Ron took a seat, trying to get comfortable on the small patch of sand that ended just before the rocks. Draco walked over slowly to stand in among them. He looked down at the sand and back at the rocks. The former was hardly a suitable sitting place, but weighing the importance of this conversation, he decided to take a careful seat in between Hermione and Ron, facing Harry.

“You remember our first year? The night we served detention together in the forest?” Harry asked.

Draco glanced to either side of him, embarrassed by the memory of fleeing the forest as he and Harry had came upon a dark creature feeding off of a unicorn.

“Yes.”

“That was Voldemort.”

Draco stared back at him in disbelief. “Here, in the forest?”

“Yes, Draco. But that was nothing.” Harry continued. “Second year, after releasing the Basilisk and nearly killing four people, including Hermione, he set it loose on me, in the Chamber of Secrets.”

Ron cracked his knuckles. “And don’t forget he possessed Ginny to do most of that. She almost died down there.”

Draco wrinkled his forehead in puzzlement, looking between all of them. “That’s not what I heard.”

“That’s because no one knows about that, Draco,” Hermione explained. “No one was ready to hear that story. They still aren’t.”

He glanced at each of them, understanding that perhaps he didn’t know as much about them as he thought he did. He felt a small wave of hope as he realized he was being given something he thought he’d lost: trust. He suppressed the budding excitement before it could become too prominent. There was no use in getting his hopes up; they had let him down before.

“And you already know what happened fourth year,” Harry said. “When Voldemort returned.”
Nostalgic sadness set in as Draco recalled Cedric’s death. It had been like a splash of ice-cold water on the consciousness of the school, teaching them all a grim lesson on the unfair and fragile nature of life and death.

“But you don’t know the whole story,” Harry said before explaining Voldemort’s ploy of using Barty Crouch to lure Harry to the graveyard to serve as an ingredient in his reincarnation. As Harry explained in detail how Cedric had died, how Draco’s father had been there to witness Harry’s torture and attempted murder, his stomach began to turn.

By the time Harry was finished, Draco could hardly veil his outrage. He couldn’t believe that so much effort and murderous intent had been directed at someone so young, and worst still, his own father had been a witness to it.

“Last year was the worst,” Hermione said, drawing him out of his thoughts. “After Cedric, and Voldemort’s return, we knew we had to protect ourselves. So we formed Dumbledore’s Army. But we had to deal with Umbridge and the Inquisitorial Squad…”

Draco could feel his cheeks heating up at the memory of his persecution.

“And then that freak set a snake on my dad,” Ron said. “He lost so much blood, it almost killed him. He’s still taking Blood Replenishing potions for that.”

“Why did he attack your dad?” Draco asked.

“For guarding Harry’s prophecy…”

As uncomfortable as it made him feel, Draco met Ron’s gaze directly. He was relieved to find that there was no anger there, just a need to be heard. In that moment, Draco understood two things: not only was Harry a target, but anyone who counted him a friend was one as well; and Harry had many friends, people who would willingly put themselves in harm’s way for him.

“And he kept messing with Harry,” Ron continued. “He was in his head, all the time.”

Draco frowned, looking at Harry in concern.

Harry sighed. “Most of the time it was unintentional because of that weird connection we have… had… but sometimes he’d show me things.”

Draco was afraid to ask but knew it was important for Harry to share. “Like what?”

“Like the torture of my godfather, Sirius. He used that to trick me, to lure me to the Ministry so I could retrieve my prophecy.”

Draco blinked, trying to remember what he had read about the infamous battle at the Ministry. His father still wouldn’t discuss with it him. But Draco knew that whatever had occurred in the Ministry that night had led to his father’s arrest, and for a very long time, Draco had blamed Harry for fabricating most of it to generate more press for himself.

“Hermione, Ron, Luna, and Neville joined me. When we got there, we had to fight your father and the rest. He threatened to kill us if I didn’t give him my prophecy.”

“They probably would have killed us anyway,” Ron added. “If the Order hadn’t shown up.”

“And then Bellatrix killed Sirius,” Harry said bitterly. “She laughed about it. I chased her down, but then he showed up again, to kill me. Dumbledore arrived just in time; he saved my life.”
Draco had always hated his aunt, but he still felt a natural protectiveness for his father. However, he could tell Harry wasn’t lying. Shame for what his family had done battled with his natural inclination towards defensive pride. But as he gazed back into Harry’s eyes, it became clear that there was only one thing he could say.

“I’m sorry… I didn’t know.”

Hermione gave him a sympathetic smile. “How could you have known? It’s not as if we go around telling everyone how Voldemort tries to kill us every year. But maybe now you understand why we were so upset. We trusted you, and then we find out that you were working for that monster.”

“I get it,” Draco said. “But if you think he’s a monster, then you must understand why it was impossible for me to say no to him?”

Harry narrowed his eyes, but Draco was not deterred. He’d make the boy see his point of view, even if it was the last time they ever spoke again.

“I’ve seen things you probably can’t imagine. Things you don’t want to imagine,” he said, his voice revealing more anxiety than he would have liked.

They sat in silence, waiting for him to continue. Draco could feel a slight tremor in his hand as his nerves began to get the best of him. He sat up straighter, poised to hide it. He hadn’t ever discussed this with anyone. He wasn’t supposed to…

He picked up a pebble, gripping it like a good luck charm. “For as long as I can remember, the Dark Lord has been…around. Even when I was much younger, before Hogwarts, when things were better, he was there, in the background.”

“What do you mean?” Ron asked.

“Well, like… there were certain rooms I wasn’t allowed to go in. Sometimes strange people would show up at late at night, to meet with my father, creepy people I know he wouldn’t be seen out in public with. There were secret meetings, and afterwards, father was always… different. He never spoke of it, but I knew it had something to do with the Dark Lord. The year Cedric died, things got worse. My father really changed. And then last summer, when the Dark Lord moved in, everything went to shite…”

Draco tried not to reveal the horror and fear he’d felt as the vision of the last torture he had witnessed sprang before his eyes like a Boggart.

Harry, Hermione, and Ron were leaning forward, listening with rapt attention, and that gave him enough reassurance to continue.

“I’ve had to sit and watch people get tortured and murdered in my own home. Some of them our age or younger.”

There was heavy silence as the atrocities of what Draco had witnessed hovered over them like a storm cloud.

Hermione bit her lip, her eyes troubled. “Did he…did he torture you?”

Draco nodded slowly, watching as they exchanged regretful glances. If he didn’t care so much about them, he might have felt some vindication. But he did care, and he was more than vindicated—he was grateful to see that they still cared about him as well.
Ron’s gaze fell to the patch of earth in front of Draco. But Harry’s stare was still intensely focused on Draco as he pressed for more information.

“Cruciatus?” he asked.

“Yes,” Draco replied. “Among other things.”

Harry’s brow furrowed. “What other things?”

Draco swallowed, recalling Amycus’ cruel face taunting him. “He had me beaten.”

Instead of expressing understanding and sympathy, Harry scowled, his eyes livid. “You should have told us, Draco! You don’t think I would have understood?”

“No, Harry!” Draco said in exasperation. The betrayal he had been feeling erupted, colouring his words. There was no use in holding it back now. “I don’t think you would have. You’ve already proven that. I tried to tell you this the other night, and all you could do was stand there and call me a liar. You know how horrible he is, and yet you expected me to stand up to him alone?”

“We expected you to tell us the truth!” Harry countered.

Draco frowned. “Right, I forgot, you’re the great and noble Harry Potter. I guess that gives you the authority to be self-righteous and sit in judgement, like you’ve never made a mistake. Or perhaps it’s just easier for you. You’ve got Hermione and Ron, Dumbledore’s Army, and the entire bloody Order to protect you. I don’t!”

Harry’s eyes softened and then dropped to the sand while Ron and Hermione watched the two in silent reflection.

“You had us,” Harry said finally.

“No. I never did. Not if you can break it off, just like that. Like we didn’t have a bond. I tried to apologise. I don’t know how many ways I can say I’m sorry, but it doesn’t matter— you three abandoned me.”

Harry clenched his fist. “It’s not about apologies, Draco. You think we abandoned you? You never let us in! You’re right; we had a bond, a pact based on trust. But you couldn’t trust us enough to tell us what was really going on. How are we supposed to be able to trust you if you can’t trust us?”

Once more, Draco felt like snapping, but he didn’t know what to say. Harry had a point, but was he even listening to Draco’s?

“Why didn’t you just tell us at Snape’s?” Ron asked in a surprisingly delicate voice. Draco took a moment to collect himself before he spoke, quelling some of his frustration with Harry.

“I almost did,” he confessed. “But then something Harry said made me think that it would jeopardise the entire prophecy. I thought if you knew, you wouldn’t want to have anything to do with me, or Snape.”

Ron and Hermione both looked to Harry quizzically.

“What exactly did I say?” Harry asked.

“You said, ‘I wouldn’t trust anyone who’d spy by posing as a Death Eater.’”

Harry sighed. “Right.”
“And then Ron said that a Death Eater spy would probably have to do something horrible to earn the Dark Lord’s trust, which would make them just as bad as a real Death Eater.”

Ron winced. “I did say that, didn’t I?”

“Yeah, you did,” Draco said. "After that, I figured it’d be stupid to tell you guys that the Dark Lord himself sent me to spy on you.”

Harry’s hard stare softened and he took a visible swallow. “I suppose that did put you in a bit of a bind, eh?”

Draco nodded, giving Harry a humourless tight-lipped smile.

“Perhaps we all sort of mucked this up,” Harry said quietly.

“Yeah,” Draco agreed.

“But especially you,” Ron said to Draco with the tiniest of smirks.

Draco narrowed his eyes, but with no real malice; he was relieved that Ron felt comfortable enough to attempt humour.

But Hermione wasn’t smiling. “Draco, we made a lot of assumptions, but you hurt us, especially when you came back.”

Familiar shame reared its ugly head, and once more, Draco felt inadequate to make proper amends. But there was a strong and sudden urge to purge himself. He wanted them to understand the full weight of what he had been through.

“I know, Hermione. I was a real prick, to all of you. And I’m sorry, but I really thought I had no choice. That’s not an excuse, but it’s an explanation. You don’t know what it’s been like, holding this huge secret, and not being able to really talk about it with anyone. Having to deal with everyone in my House, and then lying to you three was hard. I’ve tried to be as honest as possible, but I didn’t think I could tell you everything without compromising the assignment and the prophecy.”

“I think we understand better now,” Hermione said.

Ron shook his head. “No wonder you freaked out at Snape’s house. You’ve probably been on edge all year.”

“Uh, yeah, about that,” Draco started hesitantly. “I wasn’t being completely honest with you.”

“What do you mean?” Ron asked.

Draco tensed, pushing out the truth. “While we were at Spinner’s End, I saw Peter.”

“What?” they all repeated in shock.

“Peter Pettigrew?” Harry asked.

“Yes,” Draco said. “He was outside of Snape’s home the night you ran outside.”

Harry’s eyes were wide and disbelieving, while Ron paled considerably.

“That means he knows about us!” Ron exclaimed.
“No, that can’t be,” Hermione said. “If Peter knows, he would have told Voldemort by now, and Draco would be… dead. Right?”

Draco nodded. “That’s right, but something happened to him before he could rat us out. I don’t know the details, but from what I understand, Peter was… eaten.”

They all gaped at him in horror.

“Eaten?” Hermione repeated in disbelief. “By what?”

Draco shrugged. “Not sure, but Hagrid found his silver hand and gave it over to the Ministry.”

“Hagrid found his hand here? In the forest?” Ron croaked. “And you wonder why I hate going in there!”

“Why would Peter be hanging around the Forbidden Forest?” Harry asked.

“Perhaps he was trying to spy on us some more,” Hermione offered.

The uncertainty of Peter’s intentions was frightening. For Draco, not only was the idea that they had been followed and perhaps stalked by the deceased rat disturbing, but so was the rat's sudden demise. Could it have been an accident? Or was there a bigger predator out there, waiting for them?

Hermione gasped. “Never mind Peter, what about Professor Snape? What if he’s really missing?”

Draco waved his hand. “No, Snape is alive.”

“Then it’s true—he is a traitor,” Harry said tersely.

“But not to the Order, Harry; he’s a traitor to the Dark Lord. I guarantee you that.”

Harry frowned, staring past Draco in contemplation. “But that doesn’t make any sense. If Snape is really a traitor to Voldemort, then why would Dumbledore try to cast him in such a bad light?”

“I don’t know,” Draco said angrily. “Why would Dumbledore try to cast me in such a bad light?”

They all looked around, but the answer to either one of those questions remained as elusive as their other questions about Dumbledore.

Draco shook his head, trying to push aside his resentment towards the Headmaster for the moment. “All I know is that Snape was in bad shape the last I saw him. I’m pretty sure he got punished for getting fired.”

There was a heavy reflective silence as they all thought of Snape.

“How long have you known about him?” Ron asked.

“I just found out this year,” Draco said. “I always thought he was just a Death Eater.”

“What a miserable existence,” Hermione said with sadness. “It’s not fair.”

“It’s definitely not easy, but I’m sure he’ll come out alright,” Draco said, wishing he felt as confident about Snape as he sounded.

“Draco, we want you to know that we understand how much you’re risking, how hard this must be for you,” Hermione said. “We’ll do whatever we can to support you.”
Relief and guilt warred as Draco met her eyes. Above all of them, Hermione’s forgiveness and understanding meant the most, but even now, he found it difficult to rejoice in their forgiveness when he had treated her so poorly.

“Thank you,” he said.

“You could have given us a sign or something, you know,” Ron grumbled.

“That would have defeated the purpose, Ron. I was trying to sever ties with you. For your sake and mine. But you three are so bloody stubborn and reckless. You made it very difficult.”

“That’s because we had a bond, Draco,” Harry said. “We still do. We made a promise to look after each other.”

“Even if I’m a Death Eater spy?”

“Even if you’re a Death Eater spy,” Harry said, leaning over to pull at Draco’s left arm. Draco almost protested and drew back, but when Harry pushed up his sleeve to reveal the dark tattoo once more, he felt immobilised. They were all staring at it.

Harry’s grip loosened as his fingers slowly travelled up Draco’s arm, leaving fresh goose bumps in their wake. Draco held his breath as Harry’s fingertips reached the bottom of the serpent dangling from the large skull. When Harry began to trace the symbol, gently caressing its outline as if it were a fresh scar, Draco exhaled.

“Does it hurt?” Harry asked.

“No. Only when he summons you, I’ve heard. But that hasn’t happened to me yet.”

Ron rose to his knees, leaning over to peer at it, stunning Draco momentarily when he reached in to touch and inspect the surface of the tattoo as well.

“What about when you got it, did that hurt?” Ron asked.

Draco let out a dry laugh in spite of himself. “Well, that… that was painful,” he admitted.

It felt good that Harry and Ron felt comfortable enough to get this close, to touch it. Glancing to his left, he could see Hermione watching all of them with an unreadable expression. He gave her a small smile in an effort to encourage her to reach in and touch him as well. Only then would it feel like true absolution—but that was something that Draco knew he couldn’t ask for. She had to give it on her own.

Hermione slowly rose on her knees to scoot closer, her eyes focused on his. Draco held his arm tense, fearful that she would change her mind at the last minute and pull away from the offensive symbol. But instead, Hermione gave him a small smile, and finally looked at it, really looked at it, before reaching in to place a finger along the edge of the skull.

“Can he use it to track you?” she asked, studying it more closely.

“I suppose. Yes. But it’s not like he can monitor my every move with it,” Draco replied.

“It’s ugly,” Ron said, giving Draco a playful smirk.

“But Draco isn’t,” Hermione said quickly in his defence. “So it cancels out.”

Relieved and strangely flattered, Draco chuckled. It was liberating. He felt like someone had reached
into his chest and massaged away the pain he’d been carrying for the past few days.

“I really don’t know what to say to that,” he said at last.

“Say you won’t push us away again,” Hermione said, her face growing serious. “That you’ll accept our help, our friendship… and love.”

There was a lump in Draco’s throat but he managed to speak in spite of it. “I will.”

Ron gave him a half smile. “I’m still going to have to kick your arse for messing with my sister.”

“Ron!” Harry and Hermione both exclaimed.

“What? I’m not happy about what happened between you two,” Ron said seriously.

“I know,” Draco sang.

“Good. Just as long as you know,” Ron said.

It felt like some sort of truce on the Ginny matter, which was more than Draco expected. His gaze shifted to Harry, who was watching him intensely. They stared at each other for a few moments before Harry reached in to pull Draco into a firm embrace. And even though Draco was painfully aware that they were outdoors and were already taking a great risk by holding such a lengthy conversation, for a moment, he forgot about the castle on the hill. He closed his eyes, enjoying the feeling of acceptance in Harry’s embrace, when another set of arms enveloped him. Bushy curls tickled his ears as he took in the familiar scent of Hermione's strawberry shampoo. When a larger body pressed into his right side, Draco dropped all pretences and smiled. He was being squeezed from three sides, and it felt damned good.

Witnesses and time became meaningless as they continued their embrace. There were more whispers, promises of loyalty and love, and he found his eyes growing misty. Determined not to let them any of them see him cry, Draco buried his head against Harry’s shoulder. When the feeling finally subsided, he sighed heavily, pulling back and glancing up at the castle.

“I probably should head back. I’m already pushing it, being down here with you three. Who knows how long we’ve been here.”

Hermione looked to the horizon where the sun had almost disappeared. “Approximately an hour. Do you really have to go back now?”

“Hermione, I think it would be rather obvious if the four of us failed to show for dinner.”

“That’s a shame,” she said. “I wanted to make up with you properly.”

Draco stared at her, his longing and his rational side battling. He glanced back up at the castle, suddenly aware of how late it had become and how much time had elapsed since he came strolling down the hill in plain sight of the entire castle.

“If Crabbe, Goyle, or Nott, or even Parkinson saw us all together, I don’t know what would happen.”

“Draco, you’re a Slytherin!” Hermione said in exasperation. “Surely you can think of something.”

Draco looked at her in amusement. “Hermione, are you suggesting that I continue to lie?”

Hermione smiled slyly. “Sure. It is one of your natural talents; you should put it to proper use.”
“That’s right,” Ron said. “As long as you aren’t lying to us, I don’t see any harm in it.”

Harry’s face grew dark. “But what if he’s caught? It’s too risky.”

Draco looked between them, considering Harry’s point. It was incredibly risky but they were worth it. He didn’t know how long he could keep up the charade, but if he fooled the Dark Lord once, he felt some measure of confidence he could do it again.

He clapped his hands to his mouth, thinking. “Mmm, let’s see… I think Hermione may have a point. It’s common knowledge that you three are notoriously rebellious, and from the looks of it, I’d say you’re up to something new. As a trusted servant of the Dark Lord, it would be irresponsible for me not to continue spying on you.”

They gave him apprehensive smiles in spite of their concern, and then Harry leaned closer. “That means you’ll have to stick around to spy on all of our pervy activities. I want you to give Voldemort a detailed report on how big my cock is.”

There was laughter, but Harry’s joke had sparked an unexpected memory, that until now, Draco hadn’t really paid any attention to. “Oh!”

“What is it?” Hermione asked.

“I was in so much pain… That’s mostly what I remember about being questioned. But while he was torturing me, he asked about how you three engaged in sex.”

“No shit!” Ron said, disgusted.

“I’m not shitting you,” Draco said. “He asked if the three of you were having unusual or freaky sex.”

Hermione put one finger to her mouth, thinking. “That can only mean one thing: he knows about the prophecy.”

“Sounds like it, doesn’t it?” Draco said.

“That means it’s a real threat,” Harry said.

“Of course it is, Harry,” Hermione said. “Why else would Snape have shown it to us? Or Dumbledore even bothered to try and talk you out of it?”

“Because it’s dark and freaky magic,” Ron said.

“Well, whatever it is, it’s important enough to get the attention of the Dark Lord.”

“Do you think that’s the real reason he sent you to spy on us?” Hermione asked.

Draco was temporarily dumbfounded by the idea. It seemed preposterous that the Dark Lord would even ever believe in such a thing. “I’m not sure,” Draco said. “but that would be really ironic.”

“Very,” Hermione said with smile.

“I think we need to practice more,” Harry said with a saucy smile.

“You are pervy,” Draco said.

“You sound surprised,” Harry said with a wink. “Oh, and here.” Reaching into his robe pocket, Harry pulled out Draco’s white gold ring and held it up.
Both Draco and Hermione reached out for it. Harry paused before slowly handing it over to Hermione. Draco kept his eyes focused on her, despite the small feeling of dread resting in his belly.

But then she smiled and asked him to hold out his hand. “Draco Malfoy, do you still wish to own me?”

“Yes, I do,” he said. “Do you still want me to be your Master?”

“Definitely,” she said, sliding the ring onto his right ring finger. Draco twisted it in place, and as soon as he did, Hermione unconsciously covered her right breast.

“Draco! A warning would be nice.”

Draco smirked. “What’s the fun in that?” he said, twisting it purposefully once more.

Hermione groaned, giving him a fake scowl as she grabbed a hold of his hand to bring it to her lips. He felt a great deal of honour watching her kiss his hand, but more than that, he felt his trousers tighten.

Hermione raised her head, leaning forward to kiss him fully on the lips.

“What about dinner?” he asked with a husky voice he barely recognised as his own.

“We still have plenty of time. Relax,” she said as her mouth brushed against his. Draco closed his eyes, enjoying the sweet taste of her lips. He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her back, when he remembered they weren’t alone. He looked up to see both Harry and Ron watching them with interest.

“We’re outside, in plain sight,” Ron warned.

“Now you’re worried?” Draco asked.

“Well, it is a bit reckless,” Hermione said.

They looked around and up at the castle. “This is nuts,” Draco said. “But it is getting dark…”

“Let’s just cast a Disillusionment charm and get on with it,” Harry said impatiently, his eyes full of lust, just the way Draco preferred them.

With no added complaints, Hermione pulled at Draco’s robes, helping him to lift them over his head. He returned the favour, assisting her in discarding hers. They resumed kissing, Hermione climbing into his lap to straddle him. Her arms encircling him tightly Draco felt bewitched under her affections, but knew if she continued, he’d lose complete control and it would be over before it began. He grabbed her arms and folded them behind her back as he pushed his hardness against her centre.

Hermione moaned, turned on by his show of control, and threw back her head in surrender. He stared up at her, captivated. He couldn’t believe he’d almost lost her. Squaring his weight and holding her arms behind her, he rose, lifting her with him so that he could lay her down on her back.

He expected her to complain because of the dirt, but she was smiling. He took a mental picture before diving in to resume kissing her. Above him he heard heavy impatient sighs. He paused, glancing up at Harry and Ron.

“Sorry, guys,” he said. “But right now, Hermione’s getting my full attention.”

“Oh, no,” Harry said, shaking his head before reaching down to grab a handful of Draco’s hair.
Draco was speechless as he stared up at Harry.

“Hermione got plenty of attention this morning. Now it’s your turn,” Harry said, grinning down at him. Ron raised one mischievous eyebrow while Hermione sat up. Harry released his grip on Draco and then pushed him back forcefully.

Draco stared back at the boy, bewildered. Did Harry honestly expect for Draco to lie back in the sand? While Draco was excited to be reunited with them, he still had his standards.

“Harry,” he started, but before he could get in another word, Harry sat down in Draco’s lap, pushing him back even further until Draco’s entire back hit the sand. Draco tried to push Harry off of him, and when he couldn’t, he began to struggle in protest, but it was useless. Harry was squaring his entire weight on Draco’s middle, locking him down as he fought to restrain Draco’s arms.

“Need some help here…” Harry called back.

Draco expected Ron to come to Harry’s aid, but it was Hermione who was climbing on the other side of him, trying to assist Harry in pinning Draco’s arms.

He laughed. “You’re not going to be able to hold me down, Hermione.”

“Oh, yeah?” she said, licking her lips as she grabbed his necktie. He gulped as she began to undo it. When she started to unbutton his shirt, his struggling turned half-hearted. His breath hitched when she leaned in to place a soft wet kiss to his chest. She continued to do so after each button was undone. At some point, Draco stopped struggling completely, enjoying the feeling of her mouth on his skin. Perhaps a getting a little dirty was alright. It certainly wouldn’t kill him.

Hermione continued to kiss down his chest until his shirt was completely open. She was about to start on his trousers when Harry reached down to block her.

“Allow me,” he said, glancing up seductively. “I still owe you one.” He licked his lips. He looked absolutely greedy, and Draco wanted nothing more than to see that greedy mouth covering his cock. Hermione moved aside, dragging her wonderful little tongue along his chest until she reached his left nipple. When her lips circled it and began to suck, Draco hissed, the sensation sending a jolt straight to his cock.

As Harry tugged at his trousers and pants, a wild recklessness took hold. Any shred of self-consciousness vanished. Draco wanted them to shower him with every bit of affection they could give, whatever form it took. He wiggled his hips to help Harry undress him, while sinking his hand into Hermione’s thick curls. After sucking on his left nipple, she moved to his right, proving once again she had a very talented tongue. Draco hummed in contentment and then gasped as Harry’s tight, hot mouth took in the head of his cock.

His hips jerked involuntarily as Harry’s mouth sunk lower, sucking him in.

“Damn, Harry, I love you,” he breathed, as Hermione’s lips began making new trails from his nipple to his neck, over his chin to find his lips.

“I love you, too, Hermione,” he said, looking up at her.

She smiled. “I love you, too, Draco.”

Draco moaned as Harry did some sort incredible manoeuvre with his mouth and tongue. Hermione muffled him with a slip of her tongue. Draco closed his eyes, enjoying the taste of her. Her mouth was as delectable as any fine chocolate or honey—he couldn’t get enough. His hands began to
wander, running down her back until he found her arse. He groped it obscenely, invigorated by
Harry’s spirited attention to his prick.

As good as it felt, somewhere in midst of the pleasure he was receiving from Harry’s mouth and
Hermione’s kiss, Draco realised something was missing. He peeked one eye open and saw the soft
twinkle of Ron’s eyes in the dim light of dusk as the boy stood by, watching them in awkward
fascination. A ravenous craving seized him. He wanted all of their affections. Not just one of them,
or two—he needed to be needed by each and every one of them. As he continued to kiss Hermione,
Draco signalled for Ron to approach with a simple curl of his finger. When Ron finally dropped to
his knees beside him, Draco felt more than a small sense of satisfaction.

Draco smirked up at Ron, snapping his fingers and pointing down towards Harry with a silent
command. Ron snorted and then settled down beside Draco, leaning over so close that he came close
to joining Hermione in her kiss. A shiver ran through Draco as Ron’s lips touched his ear.

“I’m not going to help Harry suck your cock, prat,” Ron whispered, flicking his tongue out to swipe
Draco’s earlobe.

Draco broke his kiss with Hermione. “Your loss,” he said, grinning.

Ron rolled his eyes, and Hermione shook her head at both of them and then down at Harry.

“Harry, you’re going to make him come.”

“Ah, that is the goal,” Draco moaned.

“He has to share,” she said, tapping Harry on the head. “Harry!”

Finally, Harry paused and looked up at her, his mouth full of cock.

Hermione pouted. “You have to share,” she insisted, running her hands up her thighs in a
surprisingly persuasive show of flesh. Harry’s eyebrows rose considerably and he released Draco’s
cock with a loud pop.

Draco groaned at the loss.

“No, I don’t,” Harry said with a meaningful stare.

Hermione tried to quickly correct herself. “Of course. It’s just that I was hoping—”

“That I’d let you get stuffed with more cock. You can’t get enough, can you? We really have created
a monster.”

Hermione gave him a small smile, and Harry shook his head.

“Go on, then,” he said, motioning towards Draco, who was at his wit’s end for their conversation to
wrap up. He didn’t care who took care of his cock at this point; he just needed it taken care of.

Hermione quickly slid her knickers off and climbed onto him. Draco reached up to hold back her
hair so he could watch her face as she impaled herself on him. They locked eyes as she sank over
him. Draco’s eyelids fluttered as her hot sweet tightness squeezed and engulfed his full length. He
could hardly close his mouth as she began to move up and down, taking him in over and over again.

He hardly noticed Harry dropping down behind her, until when she froze, staring down at him with
wide fearful eyes. Draco’s grip in hair tightened, and he placed one hand on her hip to steady and
reassure her for what was about to come. Slowly, Hermione relaxed, leaning over him so that her breasts pressed against his chest. She made a low keening noise as Harry began to move behind her, and then closed her eyes. Draco noticed Ron’s hand gently caressing her thigh, as he looked up at her in concern.

“You alright, Hermione?”

She nodded, straightening up slowly, placing her hands on Draco’s chest to balance herself between him and Harry. Draco dropped his hand from her hair as Harry took over, pulling it back to work himself into her. Watching her take in both of them never ceased to amaze him. He didn’t even need to move to come like this. Besides, Harry was moving enough for all of them, pushing and rolling Hermione over his cock in the most delicious way. When the hand that had been on Hermione’s thigh dropped down to caress his side, he turned his head to stare at the owner. Ron was gazing back at him with open interest. Draco licked his lips with anxious excitement, wondering what Ron had in mind. He gasped in surprise when Ron moved in to seize his lips in a hard kiss.

The kiss was rough and combative, just the way Draco liked it with him. The feel of the boy’s hungry mouth trying to both dominate and express affection intensified everything Hermione and Harry were already doing to him. As Ron’s tongue probed, his teeth gnashed, and his mouth tried to overpower, Draco felt his own aggressive nature rise and began to kiss back just as roughly until Ron pulled back, breathless. Draco stared back at the redhead, noting the rare affectionate smile growing on his lover’s face.

Ron’s smile was infectious as always, and Draco couldn’t stop from giving him a small smile back, as a strange warmth full of unspoken feelings and thoughts blossomed between them. It was both odd and natural all at once. What was he feeling right now? Surely he couldn’t be feeling love… This was Ron Weasley.

Ron licked his lips and sighed. “I hope you’re not waiting for me to say I love you or something mad like that.”

Draco swallowed and shook his head. “No… I don’t ever expect you’d say something so ridiculous.”

“Right,” Ron said, pushing his hand into Draco’s hair as he leaned in close once more. “Because that… that would be mental,” he whispered.

“Right… mental,” Draco repeated before opening his mouth fully to accept Ron’s mouth once more. He could feel his climax approaching as Harry continued to fuck Hermione over his cock, and Ron’s kiss became unexpectedly sweet and tender. Beyond arousal, Draco felt a powerful wave of affection like he had never known wash over him. At home and within Slytherin House, he had always been the centre of attention, but Draco had never felt known, not like this. Their affection wasn’t being given to receive something in return. They were showering him with attention simply because they wanted to. And even though his left arm bore the mark of their most hated enemy, he knew for certain that he belonged here, with them.

He didn’t want it to end, but his body was tensing, preparing for climax. One hand squeezed Hermione’s side, the other clawed at Ron’s chest as he tried to anchor himself for the tidal wave about to overtake him. With the sweet and steady rocking of Hermione’s pussy, the bristle of Harry’s legs against his own as he pounded into her from behind, and the soft mouth giving him unexpected affection, Draco finally succumbed, losing the battle to hold off his climax.

He heard Harry shout something, and then he groaned into Ron’s mouth as Hermione’s cunt
squeezed and trembled around his cock. Ron pulled back, staring down at him.

“Salazar,” Draco whispered, gasping for breath, his hand still against Ron’s chest. Dull euphoria and exhaustion settled on him.

Ron smirked, and Draco looked up to see Hermione smiling up at him, entirely too impressed with herself. She looked behind her, where apparently Harry had decided to take a rest in the sand.

She slowly dismounted Draco, looking for her wand.

“Are you alright?” Draco asked.

She nodded, smiling. “I’m great. How about you?”

“It feels like you three just sucked all of the energy out of me,” Draco said.

“Really?” Hermione said. “And here I was thinking that you were insatiable.”

Draco scoffed, sitting up slowly, shaking out his hair. “I really hate sand.”

Ron chuckled, wiping himself off as well. After Hermione performed cleaning spells on herself, Draco and Ron, she looked down at Harry, who was still laid out in the sand.

“Harry… you really should get up. You need to clean up.”

Harry didn’t respond, his eyes remaining shut. He looked content. Hermione shook her head but didn’t push. Instead, she moved to take a seat in between Draco and Ron on the rocks, resting her head on Draco’s shoulder.

Far past sunset, the moon was visible, giving off its own light in the distance. As they stared out across the lake, Draco tried to enjoy every last minute of the secure and peaceful silence that had ensued. He wished to bottle it up and take it back to the castle with him. But like all great moments, it had to come to an end. He sighed. Dinner, and their classmates, awaited them.

“We should argue more often,” Hermione said. “I really enjoy the make-up sex.”

Draco smiled at her. “Yeah, it was pretty damned good.”

“That’s because you got all of the attention,” Ron said.

“Jealous, Weasley?”

Ron scoffed. “Of course not.”

Draco smirked, turning to see what Harry was up to. But Harry wasn’t up to anything. He was still lying in the sand, completely still.

“Harry! Get up, you lazy sod.”

Hermione and Ron looked back, but when Harry didn’t respond or move, they looked at each other. Draco narrowed his eyes, trying to peer into the dark. “Harry? Come on, you can’t be asleep already.”

When Harry remained still, Draco stood and leapt over his rock towards Harry, with Ron and Hermione on his heels. Harry was sprawled out over the sand just as they had left him, his eyes
closed as if he were in a deep sleep.

“Harry!” Ron barked, shaking him to no avail.

“Harry! Wake up! Oh, no!” Hermione exclaimed, staring down at him in growing horror.

As Draco stared down at his lover’s sleeping face, the memory of their time at the brothel came back and he wondered if the instances were related.

Hermione knelt down, waving a wand in his face. “Rennervate!”

There was no response at first, and they stared at each other with wide eyes before looking down at Harry in panic.

“Hermione, do something!” Ron urged.

“I’m trying,” she said frantically. “Rennervate!” Hermione said louder, her eyes intensely focused on Harry as she flicked her wand.

Finally, Harry stirred: his eyelids began to blink and his head moved. Ron was quick to pull Harry up to cradle him and brush his hair aside, while Hermione and Draco stayed on their knees waiting for Harry to fully come back.

When Harry’s eyes opened, they were groggy and there was confusion there, as if for a moment, he wasn’t sure of where he was.

“Harry?” Hermione said.

“Hermione?” Harry croaked.

“Yes, it’s me,” she said, her eyes full of concern. “Are you alright? What happened?”

Harry closed his eyes again before opening them to look up at Draco. “I—I don’t know. I just remember hearing Draco say that he needed to sit down, and then I started feeling loopy and decided to lie down…”

“Do you remember anything else?” Ron asked.

Harry shrugged. “Not really, just a weird sensation… It felt like I was floating away.”

“What?” Ron asked in confusion.

“I mean, it felt like I was leaving my body or something.”

Draco frowned, glancing up at Ron and Hermione, who were both staring at Harry in alarm.

Hermione shook her head. “This has something to do with the ritual.”

“I told you we shouldn’t have done it!” Ron said fiercely.

“Well, how were we supposed to know it would end up affecting Harry like this?” Hermione argued.

“It’s too late for should-haves,” Draco said. “There’s nothing we can do about it now. We’ll just have to make sure it doesn’t happen again.”
“How? By abstaining from sex?” Ron asked.

“At least not all of us at the same time,” Hermione said.

They all stared down at Harry, not sure what to say to that. He tried to smile up at them weakly, but seemed to register that none of them found anything remotely amusing, and his smile quickly faded.

“Guys, I’m fine. Really. I’m just feeling a little weak. It’s no big deal. I probably just got lightheaded from all of the stimulation. That was pretty hot,” he said, smiling up at them.

But Draco couldn’t return his smile; he was still worried.

“I think we should take Harry in to see Madam Pomfrey, just in case,” Ron said.

“No!” Harry insisted. “I’m fine, Ron. She’ll just fuss over me. She might even keep me and tell me not to play in Saturday’s game. I can’t risk that.”

“You might as well,” Draco said. “Gryffindor is going to lose anyway.”

Both Ron and Harry gave him a dismissive eye roll.

“It would be a dream come true for your lot if I got grounded for the game,” Harry taunted. “That’s the only way you’d have a chance of catching the snitch.”

“We’ll just see about that,” Draco said.

“Yes, we will,” Harry replied.

Draco chuckled. If Harry’s humour and challenge was anything to go by, perhaps he was alright, after all. Seeing him passed out like that had given Draco a fright.

“Well, you look much better than you did a few minutes before,” Draco said. “We probably should get back to the castle anyway. It must be near dinnertime.”

Draco and Ron both wrapped one of Harry’s arms around their shoulders, lifting him up on his feet.

“I can carry you if you’d like,” Ron offered.

Harry shook his head. “No, Ron, I’m fine. Really.”

Draco, Ron, and Hermione all looked at Harry sceptically but remained quiet as he gained his footing and pulled away from Draco and Ron stubbornly to lead them all back up to the castle.

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That Saturday was a perfect spring day, especially for Quidditch. There wasn’t a cloud in the sky and despite the increased appearance of Banshees on school grounds, with the help of Firenze, Hagrid had managed to lure the ghastly creatures away from the Quidditch pitch for the day.

Draco felt the excitement of the approaching Gryffindor-Slytherin match all around him. Crabbe and Goyle had easily accepted that he still had spy work to do on the trio, while Nott seemed cautiously watchful. It didn’t matter, though; if his recent stressed-out behaviour was any indication, Nott had his hands full with his own assignment and was probably too busy to be minding whether Draco was telling the truth or not.

For all of their rivalry, Gryffindor and Slytherin didn’t play each other as often as either team would
have liked. Playing Gryffindor also posed a special challenge for the Slytherins, who enjoyed their matches if for no other reason than to be openly aggressive with the other team. Draco always felt a special spark of excitement the day of a match against Gryffindor because it was a personal challenge to beat Harry.

And now more than ever he had the desire to best his lover and prove to him that he was a worthy opponent and capable of performing the same skilled manoeuvres to beat him at his own game.

In the few days that had past since their reunion, Draco had watched Harry from afar for any signs that he was still suffering from the effects of whatever had knocked him out that evening, but during meals, Harry appeared to be his usual self. In class, Draco noticed that Harry did appear sleepy, his eyes heavy with weariness, but he never actually fell asleep during a lesson. And whenever Hermione or Ron would ask or fuss over him, Draco saw that it aggravated Harry. Finally, Ron and Hermione just stopped asking and gave him space.

However, today, both of them were watching Harry with concern as he ate his breakfast in the dining hall. Draco, too, found it hard not to sneak glances at Harry as he ate, despite the very animated vitriol being spewed all around him.

“Gryffindor is going down today. Don’t be surprised if I accidentally bat a Bludger Potter’s way,” Goyle boasted.

Crabbe chuckled. “That would be wicked. He wouldn’t know what hit him.”

“Oh, yeah, he will, because I’m going to be right there, in his face, when they cart him off the field,” Goyle said.

“We don’t need to worry about Potter, because we have Draco and Urquhart. There’s no way Weasley will be able to keep up with him, isn’t that right, Draco?” Crabbe asked.

Draco smirked right on cue. “That’s right, and, uh, you boys might want to keep an eye out today. I have a few new moves that will leave the Gryffindors speechless.”

There were several approving head nods and pats on the back given to Draco before a chant began to rise from their table.

“Da locum melioribus! Da locum melioribus!”

Draco glanced over to the Gryffindor table and saw that Harry was watching them all with narrowed eyes. He made eye contact with him, while Ron turned his head, his brow furrowed in question.

“What?” Harry mouthed.

Draco simply smirked and shook his head, returning his attention to his own table to join his housemates in the chant.

After breakfast, the teams met in their respective locker rooms, changed, and then had a pep talk before taking the field. As soon as Luna Lovegood announced the start of the game, Draco made sure to stay within ten feet of Harry, watching his every move. Harry was expert at locating the snitch, something Draco had never mastered, but after it was discovered, as far as Draco was concerned, it was anyone’s game.

They watched as Goyle swatted off several successive attempts by Bludgers to hit not only Crabbe but at least three other Slytherins.
“Those damned Bludgers are rigged,” Draco muttered.

Positioned only a few feet away from him, Harry turned his head, grinning. “Don’t go blaming the Bludgers just because your team sucks.”

“We’ll see who sucks when this is over, Potter,” Draco called back.

Harry opened his mouth to respond, and Draco saw his lips moving, but didn’t hear a word as Goyle batted a huge Bludger in Harry’s direction.

Draco’s eyes went wide and his tongue felt stuck to the roof of his mouth. Harry must have registered that something was wrong because he quickly looked behind him and then ducked just in time. The Bludger missed Harry’s head by a mere centimetre, and Draco had to quickly swerve to avoid being hit.

“Nasty bugger,” Draco cursed in irritation.

“You could have warned me, you know,” Harry said.

Draco gave Harry a bemused look.

Harry gave him a small smile. “Right. What was I thinking?”

“You weren’t… as usual,” Draco said, scanning the field for any sign of the fast golden ball. If only just this once he could spot it before Harry, it would put him at a definite advantage.

Harry followed his eye movement and then gave him a quick smirk before taking off at top speed across the field. Draco followed him without hesitation.

He felt his heart speed up as the rush of trying to catch up to Harry coursed through him. All he could really see was Harry’s burgundy Quidditch robes flying back against the wind. Draco gripped his broom tighter, trying to speed up. Just once, he wanted to be in front of Harry. He wanted to be the one being chased, instead of the other way around, but the other boy was simply too fast. Harry did a signature flip and sideways roll before halting completely, facing Draco.

Draco eyed his lover with concern. Harry was clearly out of breath and looked tired, as if he had flown ten laps around the pitch instead of one. His eyes were half shut and he seemed to be struggling to get his balance on his broom.

Draco looked on in shock as Harry’s body slid sideways, tilting his broom unintentionally. Harry’s face also reflected shock and a brief flash of fear at the sudden lapse, and then he shook his head as if to clear it.

“Are you alright?” Draco asked in concern.

Harry was still winded and he was taking slow, deep breaths as he nodded in response. “I—I’m fine. Just a little lightheaded, is all.”

Draco studied him, his apprehension growing. The thought that they should have taken Harry to Pomfrey’s nagged at him. But Harry had finally caught his breath, and he looked fine once more. It was then that Draco suddenly remembered why he had chased Harry down the field. He scanned the area around Harry and below him. The crowd was on their feet, all eyes from below and in the air were set on both of them, but the snitch was nowhere to be found.

“Where is it?” Draco asked.
Harry grinned back at Draco cheerfully. “Where is what?”

Draco scowled. “Stop playing games, Potter! The bloody snitch! That’s the reason you took off at breakneck speed down the pitch, isn’t it?”

Still grinning, Harry shook his head slowly. “Nope. I just wanted to see if you were keeping an eye on the pitch… or me.”

Draco narrowed his eyes. “Think that’s funny, do you? You won’t be laughing when the snitch makes an appearance. I guarantee you that.”

Harry rolled his eyes. Irritated, Draco turned his broom to hover over the field parallel to him, only a few feet away.

They both looked out across the field, watching as Urquhart made several attempts to get the Quaffle inside the goal. Ron caught three of them but missed one, which earned a snort from Draco.

“Don’t look so happy,” Harry said. “Ron’s just getting started, and we all know Urquhart plays his best game within the first twenty minutes.”

“What-ever,” Draco said, waving off Harry. “Oooh,” he crooned just as Crabbe batted a Bludger away from Amanda, sending it straight towards Ginny. It struck her right arm hard, eliciting an audible gasp from crowd below.

“That’s got to hurt,” Draco said, wincing.

“She’ll be alright,” Harry said. “She’s a tough one.” As soon as he said it, Ginny shook her arm out and then got back into position. She glanced up at him, and he gave her a supportive thumbs-up. She smiled back at him before flying after Amanda and the Quaffle.

Draco and Harry watched their teammates play while flying around each other, keeping an eye out for the snitch. But after almost thirty minutes had passed with no sign of it, Draco found himself yawning.

“Don’t tell me you’re getting bored all ready, Malfoy. Waiting for it is the best part,” Harry shouted as the wind whipped around them. “Hey…what was that rubbish you and your lot were chanting in the Great Hall? Da locum meli something…”

“Basic Latin, Potter,” Draco shouted back. “Da locum melioribus —’give way to your betters.’”

Harry looked extremely amused. “You’re all delusional… We got you beat in just about…”

Stopping mid-sentence, Harry’s face grew sober as he turned his broom so that it was pointed directly towards Draco. His eyes were intensely focused on Draco as if he were looking through him.

Draco wrinkled his forehead, leaning in close to hear what barb Harry was going to hurl. Instead, Harry gave him a sly smirk, which frustrated Draco to no end.

“You’re not fooling me again, Potter.”

Harry glanced up at him, and before Draco could process what was happening, Harry was diving straight under Draco, his hand reaching out for something. Draco stayed in position, determined not to be fooled by the same trick twice. Still, he kept his eyes on Harry. A small gasp escaped him when he spotted a tiny gold glint just out of reach of Harry’s grasp. Draco turned his broom and dived
down to catch up to Harry and the snitch.

Harry looked back over his shoulder, giving Draco a daring smile before returning his attention back to the object of his pursuit. Determination and adrenaline spurred Draco on as he flew like the wind towards Harry. They were neck and neck, and Draco could feel the competitive energy flowing off and between both of them like the start of an explosion. He looked at Harry once more, but the other boy was focused, his arms still reaching out. Draco smirked, remembering the dive move Harry had taught him months before. It wasn't quite made for a situation like this, but he could improvise. Seeing a chance for victory, Draco decided to go for it, but not before rubbing Harry’s signature move right in his face.

“Potter!” Draco yelled, seizing Harry's attention for one brief second. It was all the distraction Draco needed.

He relaxed and let go, leaning forward to tip his broom forward so that he could fall with it as it dipped slightly lower than Harry’s before doing a lateral rollover that pushed Harry’s broom all the way over. There was a gasp from the crowd, and Draco looked to his side but to his surprise Harry wasn’t there. The snitch was right within his reach, and Draco wasted no time in closing his hand around it.

It felt glorious—the only thing that would have made the moment even better was seeing Harry’s face. He held up the golden prize triumphantly, scanning the field for Harry. But Harry was nowhere to be found, at least not in the air. The triumphant feeling in Draco’s chest was quickly dying, replaced by a sinking one.

The bleachers were bleeding out, and there were dozens of people gathering towards one point on the field, right below Draco. His mouth went dry and suddenly the snitch in his hand seemed worthless. He let go of it immediately, gripping his broom to dive down and see what was the matter, hoping against hope that it was not Harry down below drawing such a large crowd.

When he landed, someone pushed him. He glanced back to see Seamus' angry face. "What did you do to him, Malfoy?” the boy growled.

Draco pushed Seamus back and then felt someone shove him from the side. It was Dean, and when Draco elbowed the darker boy, a younger Gryffindor went for Draco. But before the boy could even reach him, two fourth-year Slytherins clobbered him. In a matter of seconds, a full-on fight between Gryffindor and Slytherin erupted, and Draco still didn’t know what had happened to Harry. He covered his head and crouched low, looking for any sign of him.

There were plenty of legs and feet shuffling and kicking, two of which collided with Draco’s torso as he continued to make his way over to the centre where the crowd had originally been gathered.

Through the chaos of burgundy, green, and black robes, Draco spotted a light blue robe he recognised as Dumbledore’s. He pushed through the mayhem to see what the Headmaster was doing. The older wizard was standing next to a floating figure, draped in burgundy Gryffindor Quidditch robes. But the body was floating horizontally, its feet facing Draco. His eyes were drawn immediately to those standing around Harry’s floating form.

Madam Pomfrey, Hagrid, Ron, Hermione, and Dumbledore had formed a protective circle around Harry, and Draco felt his feet moving instantly to see just how serious Harry’s injuries were. Before he could approach any further, Dumbledore turned around to stare down at him. The man’s icy blue stare stopped Draco in his tracks like a Stunning Spell. There was weariness and accusation stamped in that glare. But then it was gone, and Dumbledore had turned his back to Draco. The protective circle began to move together, leading a slow procession across the field up towards the castle. It
reminded Draco of his grandfather’s funeral. A shudder ran down his spine.

He wanted to run after them but it would make a spectacle, to break away from everyone, chasing after them. Draco looked back to survey the melee but McGonagall, Filch, and Firenze had squelched it. Students and professors, regardless of their house affiliation, now seemed more interested in the retreating procession surrounding Harry than anything else.

Crabbe, who bore a long scratch mark down the right side of his face, and Goyle whose hair was mussed ridiculously, immediately approached Draco.

“What happened?” Goyle asked.

“I’m not sure,” Draco said truthfully, staring up into the distance towards the castle. The procession was just a circle of tiny specks now and would disappear inside within seconds. Draco would have preferred be amongst them than fielding questions for which he had no answers.

“Finnegan is telling everyone that you knocked Potter off his broom,” Crabbe said.

“Well, he’s lying,” Draco said. "I shoved Ha—Potter, but not harder than necessary. I’ve done it before, and this has never happened.”

Crabbe and Goyle looked back at him sceptically, and then the shadow of a long pointy hat darkened the grass in front of Draco. He turned towards the figure who cast it, seeing McGonagall’s long face staring gravely at him.

“Draco Malfoy, follow me,” she said, pursing her lips.

There was a hush on the field, and the crowd watched Draco as he turned away to walk behind her up to the castle. He expected an inquisition or to be soundly punished for hearsay, not expecting the old Gryffindor cow to be fair, but as soon as they reached the inside corridor of the front hall, the door closed behind them and she turned around abruptly.

“Mr. Malfoy, tell me exactly what happened up there.”

Draco shook his head slowly. “I don’t know, Professor. I did a tricky dive move to position myself in line for the snitch. I had to get Harry out of the way, so I shoved him a little but not much, not enough to do that.”

McGonagall nodded, her eyes much softer than usual. “I see. Just as I suspected. I believe you, Mr. Malfoy. From what I observed, Potter’s descent to the ground was… inexplicable.”

“Is he going to be alright?” Draco asked, his voice sounding strangely foreign and small even to his own ears.

McGonagall sighed. “I don’t know. The Headmaster did what he could to lessen the impact of the fall, but Potter still hit the ground pretty hard.”

Draco felt his stomach tighten, and his eyes darted down the hall in the direction that would lead him to the infirmary.

“Professor—”

A sharp look of suspicion briefly crossed McGonagall’s face, but it quickly faded. She gave Draco a curt nod. “Yes, go on. They’re probably waiting for you.”
For the first time ever, Draco wanted to shake the woman’s hand. Instead, he gave her an appreciative head bow.

“Thank you,” he said, before racing down the corridor towards the infirmary.
The Emperor’s Machinations

You take a mortal man;
And put him in control;
Watch him become a god;
Watch peoples heads a’roll;
A’roll…

“Symphony of Destruction” by Megadeth

Two faced,
I feel you crawling under my skin,
Sickened by your face.
By the way,
To think that you’re so fucking kind?
You ain’t!

-“Greed” by Godsmack.

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When Draco arrived at the opening of the short corridor leading down to the infirmary, his eyes immediately found Ron and Hermione waiting outside. They were huddled together, sitting on a bench; Hagrid was standing right beside the bench, sniffling.

Draco sprinted to where they were sitting, and when he approached, Ron and Hermione finally looked up. Hermione was clearly crying, and Ron’s face was nearly white, his eyes very troubled.


Hermione stood up to hug Draco. Draco wrapped his arms around her and looked over her shoulder to Ron, who had also stood and was looking on helplessly. Hagrid shifted on his feet as he watched the three interact with awkward curiosity.

“She won’t let anyone else in to see him right now,” Hermione said resentfully.

“Well, who’s in there now?” Draco asked.

“Dumbledore and another Healer she firecalled from St. Mungo’s.”

“St. Mungo’s?” Draco exclaimed. “Is it that bad?” He tried to peer past Hagrid into the glass of the infirmary’s door, but the glass was heavily frosted and dimpled so that only the outline of shadows could be seen. Draco gritted his teeth.

Hermione looked back at Ron, who stuffed his hands in his trouser pockets and shrugged. “It looks pretty bad. Harry was still out when she pushed us out. He wouldn’t come to, even when Dumbledore did several spells.”

It suddenly felt like the air had grown much thinner and everything in Draco’s immediate space much closer. He backed away, shaking his head.

“What have we done?” he whispered. Ron and Hermione glanced anxiously between him and Hagrid.
Hagrid’s eyes were narrowed as he studied the three of the youths like he was working out the solution to a riddle.

“What do you mean, we?” he bellowed. “You’re the one who knocked Harry off his broom!”

Draco gaped back at the half-giant, stunned. Why would he even be here if he had intentionally knocked Harry off his broom? He almost said as much, but the expression on Hermione’s face told him now was not the time and to choose his words wisely.

He gathered his composure and straightened before addressing the man. “No, I didn’t, Hagrid.”

Hagrid grimaced, giving Draco a distasteful once over before returning his attention back to Ron and Hermione. “I s’pose Dumbledore and Pomfrey will have him patched up soon enough. She’s the best around, and Dumbledore is the greatest wizard of all time. There’s nothing those two can’t do to set Harry right… you’ll see.”

Hermione gave Hagrid a grateful smile, her eyes glimmering with new tears. “I hope you’re right, Hagrid.”

“I’d wager everything on it, and to prove it, I’ll wait right here until he gets up. I’m sure it won’t be long.”

“Er…” Ron started, glancing to Hermione and Draco.

Instantly understanding what Ron wanted to convey, Hermione placed a hand on Hagrid’s hand. “Hagrid, you don’t have to do that. Harry may be here for a while, and, well…we’d like to talk to him in private when he wakes up. There are so many things to be said…” she said, her face flushing appropriately.

Hagrid’s own face crumpled as a new tear fell from his eye. He sniffed again and withdrew a large, dirty rag to blow his nose.

Draco focused on the half-giant’s calves in an effort not to turn up his nose at the sight.

He heard the man sniff again and then stifle a sob before muttering that he wouldn’t be far away. Ron and Hermione both reassured him that they would definitely let him know as soon as they heard something and that they appreciated him being there.

“Alright, I s’pose I’ll see you later, then. Remember, if there’s any change, even if he just blinks… send for me.”

“We will, Hagrid,” Hermione said.

Hagrid gave Draco one last bothered glance before trudging his way up the hallway and around the corner.

Once he was out of sight, Draco looked to Hermione and Ron in exasperation. “This is bad… very bad.”

“Yeah, no shite!” Ron said.

“Has he been acting strange, since that night out in the forest?”

Ron nodded. “Yeah, he’s been over-sleeping… and stumbling more.”

“Stumbling?” Draco repeated.
Ron nodded. “Yeah, sometimes. It’s like he loses his balance or something.”

“It has to be the ritual,” Hermione said.

Draco shook his head “No. I was just thinking about that... Harry was acting loopy at Snape’s house before we found the ritual… right after…”

“We all slept together the first night,” Hermione finished.

“I don’t understand, though. It doesn’t make sense. He’s been fine ever since then, until now. He’s never been out like this,” Ron said

“Perhaps the ritual made it worse,” Hermione reasoned, her face contemplative.

“I don’t know…” Ron said. “But whatever it is, we have to make it stop. We have to find a way to —”

“Oh, no, his vitals! Albus…” they heard Pomfrey exclaim.

“Harry! Harry!” they heard Dumbledore shout from inside Pomfrey’s office.

Draco, Hermione, and Ron all looked at each other in frozen panic and then Ron grasped the handle, opening the door without any regard for Pomfrey’s restriction.

What they saw when they entered compelled Draco to move forward, despite Dumbledore’s extended arm to block his advance, despite Pomfrey’s angry scowl and declaration that they should leave or risk being expelled, despite the cold dread sitting in his gut.

Harry was ghostly white, his eyes shut, and his mouth, nose, and chest showing no sign of breathing.

“Do something!” Ron cried, looking at Pomfrey.

“Mr. Weasley, please give us room, we are doing all we can…”

“Well, that’s not enough, is it?” Draco said, snarling looking from Pomfrey to Dumbledore. “You’re supposed to be powerful… help him!”

Dumbledore sighed, his sad eyes moving from Draco to Hermione and Ron. “We’ve done all that we’ve can for now. We just have to wait.”

“Wait? What do you mean? Wait for him to die?” Ron yelled.

“Mr. Weasley, if you do not lower your voice, I will cast a Silencing Spell so strong you will not be able to use it for the rest of the week,” Pomfrey threatened.

Ron seemed to be biting back a retort as he glanced at Hermione who staring at Harry in disbelief.

“Professor,” she said softly to Dumbledore.

“Yes, Miss Granger?”

“What’s wrong with him?”

Dumbledore narrowed his eyes at Hermione and straightened, which caused them all to pause and stare at him.
“I was hoping that perhaps you could tell me that, Miss Granger.”

Pomfrey looked from Hermione to Dumbledore in confusion. “Albus, Hermione Granger may be the brightest witch of her age, but she’s just a student. Surely you don’t think she would know such a thing!”

Dumbledore held up his hand to silence Pomfrey, and she balked, straightening in wait for Hermione’s answer. Hermione glanced at Draco and then Ron, who both stood, staring at her in tense anticipation. Draco shook his head slightly to let her know his position. Hermione’s raised an eyebrow at once as she looked back at Dumbledore.

“I have no idea what’s wrong with Harry, Professor, and I’m not sure why you think I would,” she replied.

Dumbledore sighed and nodded. “Very well. It couldn’t hurt to ask, you are quite bright. I just wanted to make sure,” he said with a curious small smile.

Draco studied the man more closely, suddenly feeling very uneasy.

The Healer from St. Mungo’s stepped forward, studying Harry’s face. “We’ll keep trying the spell. In the meantime, I’m sending for my best Mind Healer. She has an excellent record of using Legilimens to wake the unconscious.”

“No,” Dumbledore said. “If anyone is going to cast Legilimens on Harry, it will be me and only me.”

“But this is highly unorthodox. You’re not a Healer.”

“On the contrary, I am many things. Headmaster is only one of them. Harry is like a son to me. I will do the Legilimens. Do you really think it will work, Poppy?”

“At this point, Albus, it can’t hurt to try. I’m afraid there’s not much else we can do for him.”

Hermione hands flew to her mouth as she choked back a sob. Pomfrey looked up sharply, shaking her head. “I’m sorry, but I’m going to have to ask you three to leave now. You may wait outside if you like, but I wouldn’t suggest it. He might be here for a long time.”

“We’re not going anywhere,” Ron said, putting a comforting arm around Hermione.

A tense and awkward moment held them all in their respective places, staring at each other.

Pomfrey’s face was tight with barely constrained impatience but it was Dumbledore who moved closer to face Ron. “I know how worried you are, Mr. Weasley. You’re a good friend. I know you all care about Harry very much,” he said, looking from Ron to Hermione, and then finally even to Draco. “Please, let Poppy and the Healer do their jobs. We will send for you when he is ready.”

“There’s still hope then?” Hermione asked.

Dumbledore gave her a small, sad smile. “There is always hope, Miss Granger.”

Hermione glanced to Draco and Ron and stepped forward to look at Harry one last time. She placed her hand upon his wrist and squeezed. “Wake up soon, Harry, we’re waiting for you.”

Draco gave Harry one last glance before turning away, walking beside Hermione and Ron towards the door.
Faintly, Harry could recall the sensation of being pulled. It was as if something had reached inside his body with invisible hands and pulled out his soul. Only, he was no longer hovering over his body the way he had in the forest after their reunion with Draco. This time, he was floating much higher beyond whatever room held his body. In fact, he couldn’t even see or feel himself right now. There was nothing around him but white light and sound. But he wasn’t alone. There was something, or someone here with him, holding onto him tightly, clinging like a frightened child afraid to let go of its father’s hand.

Before, the sensation of being pulled outside of himself and floating away had frightened Harry. He had no idea where the invisible hand was leading him. This time though, it felt different. The thing he couldn’t see, still clinging to his soul, was desperate but weak. He could feel its nervous energy as it held on for dear life. Its clinging gave him a strange sense of power. He felt in control and was content to just float and soak it all in. It felt better than flying on a broom. He was riding the air into a new stratosphere beyond space and sight.

“We’ll be right back, Albus,” he heard the voice of Madam Pomfrey say.

“No rush,” Dumbledore said. “In fact, I would like to request that you give us privacy while I perform the Legilimens. I’ll come and get you when I’m done.”

There were several moments of silence and then he could hear curtains being drawn. And then there was a strange noise, like a choked and ragged breath drawn from someone grieving.

“Don’t worry, Harry. I’m not about to invade your mind. You’ve been violated enough. And I am partially to blame for that. You deserve more than my apologies, though. You deserve the truth. I’m going to tell you something, Harry… something I couldn’t tell you before. Something I still can’t tell you, because if I do, it will ruin everything. There is too much at stake. If there is any true magic in the world, I hope you will at least, respond to my voice and come back. You have to come back, Harry, because if you don’t… everything I’ve done to protect the wizarding world will have been in vain. And I simply cannot live with that…”

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It had gone too far now. As soon as Draco had returned to school, Lucius knew exactly what he had to do. His son was now Marked, and his classmates had been given an assignment to which neither he nor Draco had been made privy. Whatever it was, Lucius was sure it had something to do with Hogwarts.

If anyone knew what Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott were up to, it would be their fathers and perhaps Snape. And since Lucius didn’t trust the former three in the least, so that left only one person he could seek out.

At the moment, the Manor was deathly silent. The only people present were Narcissa, who had taken to sleeping late for the past several weeks, and Severus, who after being granted the brief privilege of witnessing Draco initiation, was returned to isolation in the drawing room.

Lucius entered the room, his eyes immediately drawn to the man lying on a thick blanket in the middle of the floor. He felt a strange tingling sensation and a tiny shock as he stepped closer. He froze, trying to perceive what magic had been cast in the room.

“It’s a ward,” Snape informed.

“A ward?” Lucius repeated slowly in surprise. “How odd. The Dark Lord trusts you enough to spy for him but he doesn’t trust you not to escape?”
“Are you questioning his judgment?”

Lucius tried not to sneer. “No. I’m not. I’m just… noting a strange inconsistency.”

“Lucius, you should know by now he trusts no one. And the ward is not to keep me from escaping—it’s to humiliate me. Until I am released from its barrier, I am to be kept like a child, or…”

“A dog,” Lucius finished.

Snape set his jaw, glaring up at Lucius before turning his head so that his hair shielded his face from view.

Suddenly distrustful of everything in his sight, Lucius surveyed his ceiling before glancing around the drawing room at each wall. “To your knowledge, did he cast any other spells in this room?”

Snape looked up at Lucius as if trying to decipher his meaning before looking around the room. “No, I’m sure he believes me to be sufficiently subdued.”

Lucius felt himself relax a little. “Good. I have Winky on notice to keep watch and come to me immediately if anyone approaches or enters.”

Snape looked up at Lucius expectantly, his face guarded.

“Do you know—” Lucius started.

“Where they are?” Snape finished. “Of course not. As if they would tell me. I’m sure if you follow the mayhem and catastrophe, you will find them. I am aware that the Dark Lord split them up before leaving with McNair and Bellatrix. The LeStranges are paired up with the Carrows and Dolohov. Nott, Crabbe, Goyle, and Greyback are on another assignment.”

“I see,” Lucius said, hating the disappointment and competitive irritation he felt upon hearing that, once again, he had been excluded from the Dark Lord’s plans. He clicked his teeth, looking down at Snape in disdain.

“I’m surprised he didn’t take his pet with him.”

Snape threw Lucius a glare and then chuckled sardonically. “Really, Lucius, you’re becoming quite transparent in your old age. What’s the matter? Upset about being replaced by Bellatrix as the Dark Lord’s favourite lackey?”

Lucius’ upper lip twitched, but he found himself unable to reply without the risk of raising his voice and revealing just how close to the truth that taunt was. Instead, he placed his hands behind his back and began to walk around Snape slowly.

As he studied the fading cuts on Snape’s back, and his position on the floor, Lucius’ focus shifted from his own personal ambitions to the condition of the one man he had entrusted his son to.

“How that Draco is Marked, things have changed considerably,” Lucius said, keeping fear and concern out of his voice.

It was a question, but he dared not ask it in the form of one. He would not surrender what little power he had right now to Snape, who had virtually none at all.

“Not really,” Snape replied. “There is still time… and hope.”

Lucius scoffed. “Hope? Surely you jest. You really have been around that old fool for far too long.
Take a look around, Severus, and tell me just how far hope has taken you.”

“I’ve been the Headmaster at this school for so long, Harry, that sometimes it’s easier to forget the past,” he heard Dumbledore say. Harry tried to look around, but he had no eyes. And despite the fact that the voice surrounded him, it sounded far away.

“As you can imagine, I’ve seen many things during my time here, and… I’ve done many things. Some of them I am not particularly proud of, but everything I’ve done was absolutely necessary for the good of this school and its students. I know you can’t really hear me, Harry, but it feels good to finally be able to talk to you frankly. And perhaps because you are not awake to hear me, it makes telling the truth much easier.”

But Harry could hear. He could hear every word that came out of Dumbledore’s mouth; he just couldn’t see. It was strange being suspended in nowhere, listening to a familiar voice echoing around him like an Quidditch announcer’s Sonorous spell. He wanted to see Dumbledore’s face to measure the sincerity of his words, but Harry also knew that wherever he was right now, it was probably the best place to be to hear such a confession.

“I have no doubt that Professor Snape has already informed you that there were two prophecies connected to you. There was, of course your prophecy, the most important one… and then the other prophecy. That other prophecy is much older than it seems, because it has been retold several times but never fulfilled. Do you know why, Harry? Because someone has always interfered with its fruition. I have been responsible for that task twice now… Your prophecy is the only one that can prevail. Oh, Harry, if you only knew how special you are…”

A small sneer began to form on Snape’s upper lip. “Hope, and reason, have kept me alive, Lucius. It’s certainly done much more for me than whatever dim-witted luck you’ve been trying to get by on. By the way, how have you been sleeping lately? Any nightmares?”

Lucius held a thin scowl in frustration. Snape always knew just what to say to get under his skin. “I sleep just fine, Severus. Better than you, I imagine. I still own a bed, after all.”

Snape rolled his eyes at the insult.

“And as one of the Dark Lord’s favoured servants—” Lucius continued.

“Favoured?” Snape interrupted. “Since when? When’s the last time you’ve been invited to take part in a raid?”

Lucius raised his nose in the air proudly. “For your information, Severus, I don’t do raids because I am a prominent and visible member of the wizarding community. I also have the honour and privilege of providing my home as headquarters.”

“Oh, spare me, Lucius,” Snape said. “I’m not some naive Ministry employee or a daft dunderhead like Crabbe or Goyle. You’re not prominent; you were just in Azkaban less than nine months ago. As for your ‘honour’, it’s quite clear you’re being punished for your mishandling of the prophecy last year. He doesn’t trust you so you have no choice but to stay here and wait for him to come back to receive news from the others.” There was no malice or derision in Snape’s words—he was matter-of-fact, and if Lucius wasn’t mistaken, the man sounded weary.

Noting that Snape had grown bored of trading insults and that precious minutes were passing them
by, Lucius repressed the urge to deliver another taunt. Instead, he turned his back to Snape, taking in a discreet breath.

“You still have hope in this prophecy?” he said so softly he wondered if Snape had heard him.

“Yes,” came a simple reply.

Lucius closed his eyes, fighting with himself once more for entertaining the idea. “Why?” he demanded.

“Why?” Snape repeated as if he couldn’t understand Lucius’ scepticism.

“Yes, Severus, give me one logical reason why you have so much faith in something so preposterous!”

“Funny, you didn’t think it absurd when you went along with Draco’s alibi for the Christmas holidays or when assisting me in keeping its development hidden,” Snape chided.

Lucius remained silent. He had absolutely no defence against that.

Snape sighed with the bored tone of a professor explaining an obvious and oft-repeated fact. “If you must have a reason, Lucius, then remember this. It’s a prophecy. It doesn’t just go away because something unexpected occurs. What you consider a mistake or obstacle may very well be crucial to its eventual fruition.”

Lucius inhaled deeply as if sniffing unpleasant. It was imperative to keep focus on reason and logic, not feelings—and certainly not hope. Hope was for the less fortunate. Success only came to those who made plans and worked to see them through.

“Alright, Severus. If indeed this prophecy is inevitable, then we must do what we can to see it through to completion. But there can be no more mistakes, or I will be forced to withdraw my support. I did not agree to help you talk Draco into doing this for him to end up Marked.”

“Ah, but you knew that was a risk, Lucius. It’s always been a risk, ever since you answered his call.”

Lucius turned to stare down at Severus, his eyes ablaze with indignation. “How dare you blame this on me! I had no choice but to answer,” he said fiercely. “He would have found me. Do I have to remind you that he can find any of us, if he so chooses? It was unavoidable.”

“Perhaps,” Snape said quietly. “Or perhaps it is easier to say there was no choice than to make the difficult one.”

Lucius raised an eyebrow, appraising the man on the floor with whip marks on his back.

“You’re right, Severus. There’s always a choice,” Lucius said with a nasty sneer. “I’m sure that is why you are sitting on my drawing room floor surrounded by wards. It’s obvious you have chosen to become a pathetic example of what happens when you anger the Dark Lord. Just like I’m sure you can choose to leave any time you like. Correct?”

Severus sighed. “Touché.”

Lucius gave a triumphant grunt. “Now, if you’re done playing philosopher, tell me what can be done to increase their odds of fulfilling the prophecy. And do it quickly. We don’t know how much time we have left.”
“So you see, Harry, the map was not created by your father and his friends at all. A sixth year student, regardless of magical ability, would never be able to craft such a complex magical object. It is one of my favourite inventions. I have many, many others that I am very proud of. Some of them would not be so highly regarded by the general public…”

“After the first reading of the sexual prophecy, I used it to reveal the true nature of Lily and Severus’ relationship to James. I knew once James found out, it would be put to an end. But I needed Severus to accept the end to it as well. That is why on the night of his very public humiliation, I suggested to Slughorn, that for his detention, Severus be sent to the forest to collect potions ingredients. I needed him to discover what sort of witch your mother really was…”

If his eyes could see, Harry would have been squinting, trying to figure out who was the owner of this voice. It sounded like Dumbledore, but the longer the voice spoke, the more doubtful Harry became that he knew this man at all. The only thing certain right now was Harry’s anger. If only he were in his body, he’d reach out and grab the old man and show him just angry he was…

“This isn’t to say your mother was promiscuous. She was a sweet soul, but she did make some very poor choices, as Severus soon discovered. What I hadn’t counted on was Peter following them. That was most unfortunate. Although he continued to follow your father and friends around after that night, it was clear, he felt excluded. But everything works in favour of fate. Peter’s resentment and bitterness ultimately worked in the favour of your prophecy… But fate is a funny thing, Harry. It will allow you to assist it, but sometimes, it uses you towards its own end, instead of the other way around.”

The thing clinging to Harry was now tugging at him, trying to pull him back down towards his body, but its efforts were feeble against Harry’s strength. He was certain that if he chose to return, he could, but he didn’t want to, not just yet. He felt free up here… out here, wherever he was, and Dumbledore was telling him things. Things that only a man talking to an unconscious or dead body would reveal. If he returned, Harry knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he would awaken immediately and the confession would end. So he ignored the insistent tug of the small entity and remained outside of himself, listening closely as the man he had once trusted explained every lie and connivance he had carried out for the past twenty years.

“So it’s true; they really are trying to break into the school?” Lucius asked, Summoning a chair from the corner to sit a few feet away from Severus.

“Certainly. Surely, Draco confided as much to you,” Snape said with a curious expression.

Lucius frowned, hating that Draco had hardly said more than a few words to him during his visit. It was almost as if his son was scared of him. If only he had been allowed to reach out and reassure the boy. If only he could have just once taken him aside to confide in him all that he knew and all that he hoped for. But it had been too risky, and the Dark Lord had seemed particularly attentive to everything Draco did and said.

“I do not believe Draco was made aware of this particular assignment. He has enough on his plate,” Lucius said defensively.

Snape raised an eyebrow. “Perhaps you are right.”

“I’m sure I am,” Lucius said haughtily. “Besides, while he was here, Draco did not have time to
engage in gossip with me. You saw how taken the Dark Lord was with him.”

Snape frowned. “I suppose you could say that.”

Lucius raised his chin. “He’s always favoured Draco. He sees great potential in him.”

“And you’re still proud of that,” Snape said wearily.

“To have a great son?” Lucius asked as if Snape were dim. “Yes. No matter how this turns out, Draco will play a significant role. He is a natural leader.”

Snape briefly squeezed the bridge of his nose in apparent frustration before changing the subject. “Back to the matter at hand, Lucius. If you really want the prophecy to be fulfilled, you’ll have to trust me.”

“And what exactly would that require?”

“When the time comes, you have to be willing to take my lead and do anything I say,” Snape said, his face sombre.

Lucius drew back, appraising the man on the floor. “You expect for me to sit around and wait for orders from you!”

“Yes, and you will do it… for Draco.”

Lucius opened his mouth but Snape continued without pausing. “Something extraordinary is about to occur, Lucius, and it may involve the attack on the school. If that happens, we have to be ready for anything… anything.”

Lucius felt bile rising into his throat, whether it was from the idea of taking orders from Severus like a lowly servant or if it was from the imminent threat of a confrontation at Hogwarts, he wasn’t entirely sure. Perhaps it was both.

“In the meantime,” Snape said. “Keep watch on everyone here, and send word to me about any sudden developments.”

“And just where do you think you’re going?”

Snape sighed with resignation. “I must return to the Order’s headquarters. I’m sure Albus is taking advantage of my absence, poisoning the rest against me.”

Lucius studied Severus in curious contemplation for a few moments. “Why would Dumbledore need to slander you? He already fired you.”

“He will try to eliminate me as a threat. I assure you, Albus Dumbledore has his own agenda,” Snape said. “Never underestimate him.”

Lucius gave Snape an amused smirk. “It’s good to see your head hasn’t turned as soft as your heart. I’ve been telling you that for years. In fact, as far as Dumbledore is concerned—”

The house-elf popped into the room, her eyes frantic. “Master Lucius, they’s back! In the foyer!”

Lucius abruptly shut his mouth, cursing to himself as he looked down at Snape, who had turned around to lie on his side as if he were in the room completely alone.

Lucius returned the chair, leaving the room the way it was before he entered and left the drawing
room quickly, making his way to the smaller study just across the hall. He picked out a familiar book and sat down at his desk. There was rowdy laughter echoing from down the corridor. From the sounds of it, Greyback, Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott were in high spirits, and for some reason that both irritated and worried Lucius.

He listened more closely as their footsteps neared, his eyes fixed upon a page he had no intentions of reading. A muffled cry reached his ears.

“Now that was a raid, lads! Did you see the way we had them screaming and running! We had nearly half of London in a panic with that one!” Goyle said gleefully.

“Muggles and wizards alike!” Nott said.

“Yes, yes, great work, everyone. Now it’s time to enjoy the spoils...” Greyback said in a low, gruff voice that never failed to make Lucius’ hairs stand on end.

There was more laughter and then the muffled cry grew louder and more desperate.

“She’s a real dish, eh?” Crabbe said.

“Yes, real nice. And she looks like a fighter, too. Can’t wait to see her struggle,” Nott said.

“She better not struggle too much, or she won’t live to enjoy a proper shagging,” Greyback growled.

“She’s not yours to kill, Greyback! And since when is being alive necessary for you to shag ‘em?” Nott said.

“I didn’t say she had to be alive for me to shag her! I said if she wants to live to enjoy it she better settle down,” he said, an amused leer in his voice.

The muffled cry went silent, and Lucius could feel the grimace on his face.

He heard a loud pop of Apparition just outside of his study and turned his head sharply to stare at the door.

“Did you miss me, Severusss?” the Dark Lord hissed, followed by an irritating giggle from Bellatrix.

There was no response. Lucius remained perfectly still, listening for any hint of anger.

“I think I’ve kept you long enough,” Lucius heard the Dark Lord say. “We understand each other better now, yes?”

“Yes, my Lord,” Snape answered demurely.

“Now tell me, what will you do?”

Snape only took a moment to pause before answering. “My Lord, I will go back to the Order’s Headquarters, where I will remain until you send for me. While I wait, I will take careful note of what the Order plans to do in preparation for the next attack.”

“And you will also inform me if you hear any additional news about Peter’s death, understand?” Voldemort demanded.

“Yes, my Lord, of course.”

“Good. Then off you go. Wait for my call. We are planning something very big. Something that will
Lucius didn’t realize he was leaning practically all the way over his mahogany desk, his mouth wide open as he listened until he heard the crackling of wards being taken down. He drew back, regaining his composure and returning his focus on the book in his hand as he tried to think of how he could get back into his Master’s good graces so that he too could be included in whatever plans the Dark Lord had in store.

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Even though he was not inside a body, Harry’s spirit felt heavy and sick with disappointment and anger as Dumbledore continued to speak. He wondered what he would really say when he returned to himself and awoke. How would he confront the man he had long regarded as a father figure and mentor? It would be much easier to just stay up here, but he knew he wouldn’t be able to forever.

“And though you may find it disheartening, it is because of my inventions that I am able to see so much of what occurs inside and outside of the castle. In addition to the map, I am also responsible for perfecting the Magical Eye, enchanted portraits, and the Sneak-o-Scope. It was how I was able to discover the true nature of your relationship with Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley. I must say, Harry, it gave me quite a shock to see the three of you engaged in such activities.”

The sick feeling in Harry’s gut became more acute as he was, once again, reminded of all the times earlier in the year he had been with Hermione and Ron unaware of the watchful eye of their Headmaster.

“I’m not judging you, Harry, because I made a similar mistake a long, long time ago. No matter how good it makes you feel, polyamory is quite unnatural. There will always be doubt, jealousies, resentment and secrets when a third or fourth person is introduced into a relationship, particularly as far as women are concerned. They may be our equals intellectually, but they are prone to weakness in emotional matters. They have an innate inclination towards possessiveness and jealousy that can ruin the best intentions. But even when a woman is not involved, a love affair involving more than two people is simply doomed to fail. Someone will always end up being excluded. I’ve seen it firsthand. Love, real love, comes from commitment and trust between two people, Harry. It is the natural order of the universe.”

The thought of Dumbledore as a sexual being was jarring. Harry tried to recall the image of a much younger version of the man that he had seen in Tom Riddle’s diary. And then he tried to picture that same man in a relationship, a triad. He couldn’t.

“Monogamy offers a foundation that allows wizards and witches immunity from the hedonistic and destructive behaviour that has ruined many Muggle societies. And then there are the children to think about from such a union. How would one keep account of their bloodline, not to mention the values it would impart on them.”

Disbelief began to mount as Harry listened. The rational manner in which Dumbledore spoke about blood superiority was worse than all of the vitriol he had ever heard from any bigoted pure-blood. All together, it seemed unfathomable that this great wizard, this kind old man would believe in such rubbish.

“I’ve never hated Muggle-borns, or even Muggles for that matter. Quite the contrary—I pity them. Muggle-borns, of course, are fortunate to be gifted with magic and when we discover them, their fortune is doubled by the opportunity to learn and live as the rest of us. And let me be clear - Miss Granger, like your mother - is an exceptionally bright. Not many know this, but Muggle-borns can be naturally very gifted in particularly areas.”
Harry wanted to respond; he wanted to ask Dumbledore why no one ever talked about the power of Muggle-borns. Why hardly anyone knew of it. But he couldn’t talk, not in this place. He could only listen.

“But whether they are the exception because they are Muggle-born or in spite of it is really of no consequence to me. I have always respected them. And I think that Miss Granger has been a very good friend to you. She is, however, no saviour… a Muggle-born witch could never be that. I imagine if you were awake, you’d challenge me on that point.”

Harry refused to follow the insistent hand that was now begging him to return. Of course he would challenge such a bigoted and sexist idea. If anyone was worthy to fill the role of a saviour, it would be Hermione Granger. She was the most exceptional of them all, Muggle-born or pure-blood, witch or wizard alike.

“You see, Harry, despite their potential for great intellect and power, Muggle-borns are the most unfortunate beings in our world. Not because of their blood, but because of their ties. They have no choice but to be loyal and supportive to Muggles and Muggle society. Understandably, they will not deny their own family. And while they may be powerful, Muggles are certainly not. In fact, Harry, you do not know this, because we teach tolerance here, but it is really common knowledge among the most powerful wizards that Muggles can be quite dangerous. Ima use the term dangerous because even they do not know how vulnerable they make us.”

Harry wanted to snort. Dangerous? Like a delusional madman with too much power?, he wanted to shout.

“So the five million-Galleon question is: if Muggle-borns are dangerous, then why not purge them from the wizarding world? Why isn’t Riddle right? That answer is more complicated…”

Hermione walked up the corridor leading from Madam Pomfrey’s in numb shock. It seemed surreal to have seen Harry lying so still, barely breathing, his complexion ghostly white. She had almost forgotten Ron and Draco, who stood on either side of her. They may as well have been down the hall, yards away from her. She was still reeling from seeing Harry like that and felt detached from everything around her.

She thought of all the times over the last six years they had faced danger. There had always been the possibility of death, but every time, Harry had somehow managed to prevail. And so, as foolish as it seemed now, Hermione realized that she had actually begun to think that Harry was immune to death. Her footsteps slowed and she came to a complete stop, staring at the mouth of the corridor’s entrance and beyond. Where was she going? There was nowhere to go without Harry. She could faintly feel the eyes of Draco and Ron watching her in concern.

“Hermione?” Draco said hesitantly.

Hermione kept her eyes on the portraits hanging high across the expansive middle hall that held most of the stairs leading to every part of the castle. Even the portraits were whispering, staring down at them curiously. Soon the castle would be full of students doing the same. There would be questions about Harry and his condition, what had happened, and if he would be alright. And for once, she didn’t know the answers, and she hated it.

“What if he dies?” she whispered.

“Don’t say that. He won’t,” Ron said sternly.
“He’s not going to die, Hermione,” Draco said firmly.

“How can you be so sure?” she asked Draco, hoping he had some shred of hope to offer. Now was not the time for false reassurances and pretty white lies; she needed solid facts, logic, to ground her.

But Draco seemed to be at a loss for how to respond and gave Ron an imploring gaze that demanded assistance.

Ron put his hand on her shoulder and looked at her with conviction. “Because he’s Harry, ‘Mione. He’ll survive—he always does.”

Draco nodded. “That’s right, he’s a stubborn bastard. He doesn’t give up for anything.”

Hermione took in a deep breath. That sounded good. It was reasonable to expect Harry to pull through, based on all of his previous experiences with death. And she knew better than anyone how determined Harry could be when he put his mind to something.

As they heard voices coming from outside, she looked to either side of her with weariness. “I can’t deal with this right now.”

Draco glanced to Ron. “Let’s get out of here.”

“Where?” Ron asked.

“Follow me,” Draco said quickly, moving past them to disappear around the corner. Hermione didn’t think twice about following him.

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“You see, Harry, hate never produces anything good. It is at the very heart of darkness. Wizards like you and I are of the light. Just because we are better than Muggles doesn’t mean we should lower ourselves to hold onto such dark emotions as hate and resentment. This is the lesson Tom has yet to learn and this is the reason why he is doomed to fail…”

If Harry had a mouth, he knew it would be hanging open. Dumbledore was using his own twisted logic to justify his prejudice, and some of it actually sounded rational. But Harry knew in his gut that something was very wrong. But there was no time for real reflection; he was trying to absorb every word and commit it to memory. It had to be repeated…

“We must take a more compassionate view of our inferiors. Muggles are too ignorant to rise to the capability of true witches and wizards, so it is understandable why they are prone to jealousy, anger, and fear of what they cannot possess. It is our responsibility to protect them from themselves, and others. This is why Muggle-borns are to be tolerated but not exalted or put in positions of great power. So you see, not only does the other prophecy draw upon inherent dark magic, the immorality of polyamory, but it also places incredible power in the hands of a Muggle-born witch. So you see, I had to take on the responsibility of disrupting it.”

It felt strange, hearing Dumbledore admit to such deceit. As Harry tried to take it all in, he found himself fighting with the invisible hand clinging and pulling on him several times, not to return to his body. There was only one question, really.

**Why?**

Why would someone so wise and powerful believe in such things and go to such devious lengths without regard for the lives they destroyed and changed forever?
Harry had to know. Finally, he submitted to the thing that had been tugging at his spirit, allowing it to drag him down. He was falling again, through the white haze, into the room until he saw himself lying still, corpse-like. His eyes searched and immediately found his wand. It was sitting on the tiny stand used to deliver medicinal potions, very close to his head. Close enough.

There was a strange choked gasp, and then Harry realized he was no longer floating. His eyes were regaining focus. He could make out the tiny elliptical patterns in the ceiling and the grey of Dumbledore’s beard. Worse, he could see the surprise, fear, and contrition etched on every line of the old man's face.

“Why?” Harry croaked out, his own voice sounding strangely older to his own ears.

“Harry… you’re awake,” Dumbledore said in stunned amazement, his eyes full of trepidation.

Harry didn’t blink as he waited for an answer.

A shadow began to grow on Dumbledore’s face as his eyes turned dark with understanding. “You heard me, then?”

“Yes,” Harry said.

Dumbledore looked up at the ceiling as if he were looking for assistance from some divine force of nature. “How much did you hear?”

“Everything.”

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As Ron followed behind Hermione and Draco, his thoughts dwelled on Harry. Seeing his lover and best mate laid out cold like that had rattled him to the very bone. And as much as he wanted to reassure Hermione, he held just as much doubt as she did about his chances. He had always admired Harry’s bravery, and although sometimes he resented the pedestal that others put him on, Ron knew that he had also placed Harry on the same pedestal many times. There was just something special about Harry, and he had always believed, deep down inside, that somehow his lover would conquer death, even if it happened by sheer luck.

But now, faced with the grim possibility that Harry would not pull through, Ron felt shaky and aimless. What would he do without Harry?

He barely noticed his surroundings growing darker and grimmer as Draco led them down several levels to a dark, dank dungeon Ron had never been to before.

“What is this place?” he asked.

Draco didn’t answer; he simply pulled out his wand and whispered a spell that opened a heavy black door in front of him.

As he walked inside, the lavish décor and the huge green velvet canopy bed took him aback. “Are you going to tell me or do I have to guess?”

“It’s Salazar Slytherin’s old bedchamber,” Hermione answered before throwing him an anxious glance that said perhaps she should have thought twice about answering that so knowingly.

“You’ve been here before?” Ron asked.
“Er… yes,” Hermione answered, her eyes darting to Draco.

Ron nodded, his eyes flickering over to Draco, who was leaning against the bedpost and watching their interaction. He could feel some tension between Draco and Hermione as they waited for his reaction. He almost laughed at how jealous they thought he’d be. Any insecurities and misgivings he used to have about Draco or Draco being with Hermione seemed inconsequential now.

“You guys could have invited me, you know,” he said with a smirk.

Draco gave him an appreciative smirk back and Hermione gave him a small smile. “Well, we’re all here now.”

Ron nodded. “We can’t hide here forever. They’re going to be looking for us soon.”

“Yes, well, let them look,” Hermione said. “As far as they know we’re with Harry right now.”

“And what about Draco?” Ron asked.

Draco moved from the bedpost to the bed. He began unbuckling his Quidditch gear, dropping it into a pile on the floor, as he spoke. “Everyone seems to think that I knocked Harry off of his broom, so it’s probably best I lay low anyway. McGonagall calling me off the field buys me some time.”

“What did she want, anyway?” Hermione asked.

“She wanted to know if I did it. When I told her no, she said she believed me because she saw Harry’s fall.”

“Everyone saw that. I don’t know how anyone could think it was your fault,” Hermione said. “It was frightening. It’s like he just fell asleep in midair and came crashing down.” Her eyes took on a faraway quality that made Ron anxious. He moved closer to hold her but she just turned away, as if ashamed of shedding any more tears in front of him.

Ron watched the back of her head in helpless anxiety. “Yeah, it was pretty freaky. It’s a good thing Dumbledore slowed his fall, or else he would have been killed for sure.”

“Dumbledore,” Draco spat, pulling off the last of his gear before lifting up his robe and falling back onto the bed.

Ron turned to regard him, and the bed. It looked comfy, and he was very tired. He glanced back at Hermione, who was still just standing there like a stature, her back turned to them. He moved quickly to scoop her into his arms. She gasped but didn’t protest as he walked her over to the bed and gently laid her down beside Draco.

She instantly curved her body into Draco, who turned over to wrap around her. He looked up at Ron over her shoulder and gave him a close-lipped smile that summed up the situation perfectly.

They would simply have to get through it, whatever it was, and whatever it would bring.

He acknowledged the sentiment with a slight head nod and small smile of his own as he pulled the last of his own Quidditch gear off, dropping it into the same pile that Draco had made. As he climbed into the bed and snuggled as close to Hermione as he could, once again, Ron thought of Harry, and what life would be like without him. When Draco’s hand stretched out to rest on his arm over Hermione, Ron buried his face into her thick curls, thankful for the shield to hide the wetness that was gathering at the corners of his eyes.
Dumbledore’s hands shook as he clasped them together on his lap. He opened his mouth as if to speak, then seemed to think better of it, closing it and looking down for several moments.

Harry’s eyes never wavered from the Headmaster. Whenever the man was ready, Harry would be ready to hear the answer.

Finally, Dumbledore sighed deeply and looked back at Harry, his eyes apologetic. But Harry was not moved. The contrition he saw there seemed inadequate in comparison to the crimes that had been committed, and he could feel his heart hardening in preparation for whatever Dumbledore was about to say.

“Why?” Dumbledore repeated. “For the same reason I’ve sacrificed a life of fame and glory—for the greater good.”

“The greater good?” Harry asked incredulously. “What’s that supposed to mean? What good is there in trickery?”

“Harry, the world doesn’t just revolve around you and me,” Dumbledore replied patiently. “And as Tom Riddle will soon learn, it does not revolve around him, either.”

“Riddle? You mean Voldemort.”

Dumbledore waved his hand dismissively. “Whatever he calls himself, Harry, never forget that he is simply a man, just like you and me.”

Harry could feel his anger rising. “Only, you’re not just like everyone else, are you, Professor? Normal people don’t do what you’ve done. They wouldn’t be able to live with themselves and there are laws that forbid it!”

Dumbledore sighed. “Harry, sometimes the law is an obstacle to justice. Never mistake them for the same thing.”

“Justice? Is that what you call playing God and allowing good people like my mum and dad to die? You could have saved them, but you interfered!”

Dumbledore took in a deep breath, pointing one long index finger at Harry. “It’s very important you understand this, Harry. Your mother and father were dedicated to the Order and its goals. When they signed up, they were willing to risk their very lives to see that good triumphed over evil.”

Harry sat up in his bed, glaring at Dumbledore; he could feel himself becoming more upset with every word the man spoke. “Excuse me, Professor, but my mum and dad signed on when they were both of age… long after you had already decided that their other prophecy was rubbish. They didn’t get to choose! You took their choice away, just like you tried to take Hermione’s and mine!”

Dumbledore let out a shaky breath. “I was looking after them. They were young and impressionable, just like you and Miss Granger. This may be hard for you to understand now, Harry, but you are just discovering who you are, as people… and sexually. That makes you vulnerable to the wrong sorts of ideas. Unfortunately, your mother and father succumbed to the dark influence of lust.”

Harry shook his head. “No, you don’t know that. It was more than just lust.”

Dumbledore drew back slightly, appraising Harry. “I’m sorry to be the one to tell you this, Harry. I know you never knew your mother and hold her in very high regard. But her relationship with three
men had nothing to do with love.”

Harry’s jaw tightened and he felt a flair of defensiveness as he thought of Hermione and her relationship with him, Ron, and Draco.

“You’re wrong. I love Hermione, and she loves me, and she just so happens to also love Ron and Draco as well. There’s no way you can tell me that it’s not real.” His eyes widened with realization. “You sent that note, didn’t you? You tried to turn us against Draco and Snape!”

Dumbledore sighed wearily. “Harry, there are things you do not understand. In time, you will learn that not only is your faith in Snape misplaced, but your relationship with Miss Granger, Mr. Weasley, and Mr. Malfoy is doomed to fail.”

“No. It's not. You said I was protected by love. My mum’s love. I know what love is—I know what it feels like. And what we have is real.”

“I was afraid you would say that,” Dumbledore said, resignation in his voice. “It’s clear your feelings are clouding your judgment right now. That is why I had to ensure that the other prophecy was not fulfilled.”

“It wasn’t up to you! It’s not your prophecy! It’s ours!”

“Harry, I’m in charge of looking after the wellbeing of the students here… especially you,” Dumbledore said with a tenderness that mocked all of Harry’s previous faith in the man.

“Is that why you gave Hermione the locket? To look after her?” Harry jeered. “Or was it just so you could watch?”

Dumbledore’s eyes were sad, and Harry felt a little satisfaction for it. He hoped it wasn’t an act that perhaps he had cut the man in some way with his words.

“As hard as this may be for you to believe, Harry, I took no pleasure in watching your activities, but I’m not sure the same could be said for Professor Snape. You did spend a full week at his house, if I’m not mistaken,” Dumbledore said ominously.

Harry narrowed his eyes, loathing the veiled innuendo. “You know, I used to hate Snape, but he never lied to me.”

“Harry…”

“No. Snape tried to help us. He’s been working all this time to help us, and what did he get for it? Because I trusted you, he got sacked!” Harry exclaimed.

“There are things you do not know about Professor Snape, Harry.”

“I know enough. I don’t care about his past any more. I know he loved my mum. He told me, and I believe him. And she probably loved him, too, and you… you broke them up with your trickery…” Harry’s voice trailed off as he looked past Dumbledore to the white wall beyond him.

His eyes widened and then returned to study the old Headmaster. “How did you do it?”

Dumbledore tilted his head, contemplating Harry. “Do what?”

“You said you interfered to make sure my prophecy came true. But there’s no way it could come true unless Voldemort marked me as his equal. That’s what my prophecy says. So that means….that
means you told him, didn’t you?”

“I didn’t have to. Professor Snape did that for me.”

Harry gripped the covers, his breath coming to a standstill.

“He was a Death Eater. Never forget that, Harry,” Dumbledore said with a twinkle in his eye.

“But he loved my mum,” Harry insisted, trying to hold onto that one ideal.

“Yes, but Snape loved power and Riddle more.”

Harry narrowed his eyes, his suspicion growing with every evasive answer. “Stop talking in riddles, and tell me the truth!”

“Very well, Harry.” Dumbledore bit his lip before speaking very quietly. “I have nothing to be ashamed of. Many years ago, when your mother and father attended, Professor Trelawney was a classroom aide in Divination here at Hogwarts. It was during that time she revealed the sexual prophecy.”

Harry’s gasped. “The sexual prophecy was made here, at Hogwarts? Who else knew?”

“No one. Thankfully. She went into a trance during a planning session with the Divination Professor at the time, Professor Jenks. Professor Jenks promptly brought Sybill to me, giving me a detailed account of the prophecy that was told. It was never spoken of again.”

“But that didn’t stop you from trying to prevent it,” Harry accused.

“No, it didn’t. I take prophecies very seriously. And this one is very dangerous. Fortunately, I was able to curtail it.”

Harry fought to hold his tongue; he needed to hear the rest.

“A few years later, Professor Jenks passed away, leaving the Divination post open. Sybill contacted me right away to inquire about the position. I was sceptical but interested. You see, Harry, Sybill Trelawney is very gifted. Even she doesn’t know how gifted she is. But she lacks, shall I say, a certain amount of professionalism. For her first interview, I had her visit me at Hogwarts. It did not go well, not well at all, and I had no choice but to decline her application.”

Harry stared at Dumbledore in confusion. “But—”

Dumbledore waved his hand to denote he was not finished. “Although I had decided not to hire her, she was still a very nice person. We both knew by the end of the interview that she had failed miserably. When she began to cry, I offered her a drink and some advice, off the record, about alternative career paths for someone with her disposition. But… after finishing her first glass of brandy, something most peculiar occurred.”

Harry’s eyebrow rose and he leaned in, in spite of himself.

“As a depressant, liquor loosens inhibitions. If enough of it is consumed, all of those worrisome fears and insecurities that can get in the way of projecting knowledge, confidence, and foresight fall away.”

Harry’s mind was already skipping several steps ahead, wondering if his own guess about what had occurred was correct.
“After her first glass of brandy,” Dumbledore continued. “Professor Trelawney went into a trance. It was then that she first revealed your prophecy. I knew right then that I was chosen…”

“Chosen? What do you mean?” Harry asked in puzzlement.

“She revealed it to me, Harry. Me! There are no coincidences in the universe. Fate chose Professor Trelawney to deliver the prophecy, and Fate chose me to hear it! I knew then I was responsible for making sure it came to fruition.”

Harry’s eyes went wide. “You can’t be serious? Have you gone mad?”

“Quite the opposite, Harry,” Dumbledore said, tapping his temple with his index finger. “I am quite lucid. When Fate chose me to receive your prophecy, I constructed a most brilliant plan to see it through. Unfortunately, Fate also chose Professor Snape, only he didn’t know it.

“When it became clear to me that in order for Riddle to mark his equal, he would have to learn of your existence, I arranged it so that Riddle would receive word about your prophecy.”

“How?” Harry asked.

“Simple. I scheduled another interview with Professor Trelawney under the guise that she would be given a second chance to prove herself worthy of a post at Hogwarts. Of course, she eagerly agreed, and we met publicly, at the Hog’s Head Inn.”

“So someone else could hear it…” Harry whispered.

“Yes. I was heavily watched back in those days. It was a common tactic for the Order to hold fake public meetings so that we could feed the other side false information. And when I sent word to the owner that I would be conducting an interview there later that day, I knew it wouldn’t take long before it reached the ears of those doing Riddle's bidding.”

“Only this time, it wasn’t false,” Harry said, his eyes hardening.

“No,” Dumbledore replied. “It wasn’t. Sybill and I drank a few Firewhiskies and chatted about the position, and just like clockwork, she went into another trance. Only this time, she said a completely different prophecy.”

Harry licked his lips, the pieces filling in. “The sexual prophecy.”

Dumbledore nodded somberly. “Yes. As you can imagine, I was completely taken aback and quite concerned. I had heard of such a prophecy before, and it seemed so… crude, so dark. At the end of it, I waited for her to come out of the trance, but instead, she immediately went into another one. The one I had been waiting for her to repeat. But unfortunately, before she could finish it, the owner of the Hog’s Head discovered Severus eavesdropping on us and promptly threw him out. I was afraid that perhaps he didn’t hear it at all, and I would have to find another way…”

“He didn’t know the prophecy was about me. He couldn’t have! He would have never put my mum at risk like that!”

Dumbledore gave Harry a tight smile. “Yes, you’re quite right. He didn’t know because he did not hear the prophecy in its entirety. Based on the information Severus had, he could very well have led Riddle to Neville Longbottom instead.”

“And how did you know that my prophecy wasn’t intended for Neville?”
“I just did.”

Harry scoffed, throwing up his hands. “What do you mean, you just did? What if Voldemort had chosen Neville instead? You took another gamble on an innocent life!” Harry said feeling his stomach turn and twist as a wave of nausea hit him. Suddenly he wished he didn’t know anything; the disgust he felt for Dumbledore at that moment was just as painful as the betrayal.

Dumbledore gave Harry a strange, whimsical smile. “Harry, have you not listened to a word I’ve said? Fate had already chosen you. All the signs pointed back to you. Everything has worked in your favour. I had no doubt he would choose you. And he did. Much to the surprise of Severus, who came to me in desperation, confessing everything I had already known.”

“To protect my mum…” Harry said absently, remembering the sad look in Snape’s eyes when he spoke of her.

“After Severus told Riddle the partial prophesy, it was decided that between you and Neville, you were the subject.”

A gasp escaped him and his mouth went dry with realization. When he set his eyes on Dumbledore again, the old man seemed to be bracing himself for something.

“So you’re—you’re behind everything?” he asked in a shaky whisper, almost too afraid to hear the answer.

Dumbledore’s brow furrowed in puzzlement.

“My parents…”

Dumbledore shook his head. “I did not kill your parents, Harry. Tom did.”

“No, but… you made Peter the Secret-Keeper.”

Dumbledore nodded, his eyes dropping. “Yes.”

“Even though you knew he probably resented my parents for excluding him. You knew he had a grudge, you knew something wasn’t right with him.”

Dumbledore stared down at the bed, as the evidence begin to click into place like a jigsaw puzzle.

“You knew Peter would betray them,” Harry said, feeling tears welling up in his eyes.

Dumbledore’s lip quivered a little as he slowly lifted his old blue eyes to meet Harry’s. “I wasn’t… completely sure.”

“But you were sure enough,” Harry said bitterly. “And just in case he didn’t, you gave my mum a locket so you could track her, didn’t you?”

He felt rage tearing through him, making it very hard for him not to grab his wand and hex the man sitting on his bed.

Dumbledore appeared sceptical. “Harry, you were just an infant. I’m sure you don’t remember.”

Harry shook his head. “No, I do. When I first saw the locket on Hermione, I remembered something, but I didn’t know what. My mum… she had one just like it. She was wearing it when he killed her.”

“Yes,” Dumbledore replied.
“Why were you tracking her?”

The obvious answer hung between them like an invisible wall—a wall that was growing higher and higher with each revelation, and it was all Harry could do not to reach out and push his fists through it. He wanted to hit something.

Finally, Dumbledore answered. “As you said, if Peter did not do what I expected him to do… it would have been necessary to make other arrangements to ensure that your prophecy was fulfilled.”

“You would have killed them, then?”

“No, I never intended for them to be killed. The prophecy did not call for their deaths, only that you be marked by Riddle. I knew a confrontation was necessary. If Fate would have seen fit that your parents live, then they would have, Harry. It was never up to me!”

“How can you say that? You betrayed them! You’re no better than Peter!” Harry exclaimed. A hundred thoughts ran through his head as he turned over all of the things that he had ever known and seen. How many of them had been guided or controlled by this delusional man? It made Harry sick to even think on it. He wanted jump up and tell someone what Dumbledore had done, that he had to be held accountable. But first, he had to piece it all together by getting a full confession.

“And you did all of this so I could defeat Voldemort?”

“Yes,” Dumbledore said with conviction as if that would make everything alright.

“But my prophecy doesn’t even say that I will or can defeat him,” Harry said. “It just says that one of us has to die. But you don’t care, do you? You don’t care about anyone or anything but your damned principles. You’ve gone and ruined lives and you don’t even know how all of this will end!”

Dumbledore levelled a heavy stare at Harry, his blue eyes piercing and clear with promise. “You are mistaken, Harry. I do know how this will end. You will win. As sure as the grass is green, I know you will defeat him.”

“And what if I don’t? What then? Will you regret sacrificing a prophecy that only required sex and love for another that required you to lie and ruin the lives of good people?”

“No,” Dumbledore said resolutely. “I would not regret a thing. You see, Harry, there is no victory to be had with the other prophecy. The triumph of dark magic would be tragic. I will not allow the wizarding world to trade one sickness for another.”

Harry stared back at his former mentor, his anger subsiding and turning into sadness. “You’re a great wizard…”

Dumbledore gave him a small smile, tipping his head in acknowledgement. “Thank you, Harry. I’m glad you still think so. I think, in time, you will fully appreciate the sacrifices I have made.”

“I wasn’t finished,” Harry said. “You’re a great wizard… but you’re just a wizard. You’re not a god, you’re a man. And I’m sorry I ever thought otherwise. You may have controlled my parents and their friends with lies and trickery, but you won’t control me, Professor. Not anymore. Besides, you’re too late. We’ve already performed the ritual.”

Dumbledore’s mouth fell open.

Harry could feel a dark smirk of satisfaction growing on his face. “That’s right, Professor, we did it… Hermione, me, Ron, and Draco all had a good shag, using dark magic. It was bloody and messy
“But it didn’t work, did it?” Dumbledore said knowingly.

Harry sat up, determined. “No. It didn’t… but we’ll get it right eventually.”

Dumbledore stared at Harry with disbelieving eyes. Harry took advantage of his shocked state, and with every nerve and reflex available to him, reached for his wand with lightning speed. But the table was farther away than he had estimated. By the time he managed to get his hand on it, Dumbledore had already withdrawn his own wand.

The old Headmaster stood up, pointing his wand at Harry, a grave look on his face. “I was afraid you’d try something like this, Harry. After all I’ve told you, you still don’t understand how important it is that your prophecy is fulfilled. It saddens me greatly to have to do this, but too much is riding on it for me to allow you to ruin it. You leave me with little choice…”

Dumbledore’s wand hand extended, pointing right between Harry’s eyes and it felt as if time itself had been suspended. His eyes widened and his body froze up momentarily in shock as he realized that he would be on the receiving end of a hex from a very powerful wizard.

“Oblivi—”

Dumbledore only had to open his mouth, and Harry instinctively threw the duvet off his body, towards Dumbledore’s pointed wand and face, giving him only seconds to roll off of the bed and crouch down below its edge, onto the floor. He gripped his wand tightly, debating between using a quick Stupefy or conjuring a Patronus. Either one was extremely risky. How could he ever win a duel with Dumbledore, the greatest wizard alive?

“Harry, please… do not make this difficult,” Dumbledore pleaded in an almost fatherly tone.

Harry tried to crawl along the side of the bed, keeping his head carefully tucked close to it, underneath the mattress. If only he could produce one good Patronus to send to McGonagall or Pomfrey to disrupt Dumbledore.

“Stop hiding. You know I wouldn’t do anything to hurt you.”

“Right,” Harry muttered to himself.

Suddenly the bed was being lifted and pulled away, and Harry’s eyes became transfixed on the newly visible feet of the man he dared not raise a wand to. He felt stunned, caught between intimidation and shock that this was really happening. He raised his eyes slowly as Dumbledore walked forward, his wand still pointed down at Harry.

“You’re really going to Obliviate me?” Harry asked, affecting just the right amount of surprise and hurt to give the Headmaster pause.

Dumbledore sighed. “Harry, when this is all over with, I will restore everything, I promise. But there can be no end if you insist on destroying everything we’ve worked toward.”

“We? You didn’t include me in any of this!”

“Oh, but none of this would be possible without you, Harry,” Dumbledore said. “Now… close your eyes. It’ll be over before you know it.”

As he glared up at Dumbledore, Harry realized the only way out of this was to do exactly what the
Headmaster said. So Harry closed his eyes, his grip on his wand as tight as ever. When he heard the man above him take a breath, Harry rolled over onto his side and pushed up on his feet with all of his strength.

“Obliviate!” he heard Dumbledore shout.

Harry ducked and moved to the side without knowing which way the spell was headed. He didn’t dare glance behind him, in fear that it would slow his momentum. He ran, pushing aside the large divider that had been set up to give them privacy.

He could hear footsteps behind him, and his own breath as waves of magic pushed him forward. Finally, he ventured one glance behind him and saw Dumbledore pointing his wand at his head. Once more Harry ducked just in time as a powerful Stunning Spell flew past his head and hit the door of Pomfrey’s office with great thud.

When he turned around, he could see Madam Pomfrey and an unfamiliar older man straining to see out Pomfrey’s glass office window. Something else flew by Harry’s head and in an instant, the room looked wobbly. He felt disoriented, and his feet became ineffectual as his sight grew blurry. He could make out Madam Pomfrey’s eyes, which were wide with terror as she rushed for the door to meet him as he continued to run with all his might.

“What the—”

“Madam Pomfrey! Help!” Harry tried to shout, but his whole body, even his vocal chords felt distorted.

“Help… He’s trying to… get me,” he said as he stumbled forward, bracing himself to hit the hard tile floor of the infirmary as his knees gave out.

But just as he fell, two strong hands grabbed him around the waist, holding him up.

“Headmaster! Just what do you think you’re doing?” Pomfrey demanded.

“He was… he was trying to… to— ” Harry panted, as the effects of the hex slowly dissipated, restoring energy back to his legs, arms, and lungs.

Pomfrey gaped between Harry and Dumbledore in disbelief as the man holding Harry slowly let go.

“Are you alright?”

Harry nodded. “Yes, I’m fine… now.”

“Well, that’s good, because I’d like to know just what is going on here!” Pomfrey demanded, giving Harry a distrustful look.

Dumbledore sighed and put away his wand, holding up his hand. “It’s a simple misunderstanding—”

“Misunderstanding! Ha! You tried to Obliviate me!” Harry exclaimed, his head still spinning from the chase and effects of the hex.

Dumbledore shook his head, looking at Harry in pity. “Harry, you know I would never do such a thing.”

“He’s lying!” Harry said frantically, looking from Pomfrey to the healer from St. Mungo’s man beside her. “He tried to erase my memories… I swear! You saw him hex me!”
The man stared down at Harry in irritation and then narrowed his eyes at Dumbledore.

“We did see you cast a hex, Headmaster,” he said, a question in his voice.

Dumbledore nodded. “Yes, I was trying to subdue Harry. Once he awoke, he became erratic, delusional, and I thought he might harm himself.”

“Liar!”

“Harry!” Madam Pomfrey scolded. “Now, you did take a pretty nasty fall and hit your head. And we gave you all sorts of potions, so there’s no telling what you think you saw. Let’s get you back to bed. We’ll sort this out later.” She stepped closer to put an arm around him.

“No!” Harry shouted, jerking back from her. “I don’t need any help! I’m fine!” Harry insisted. “What I need is for you to call Professor McGonagall.”

Pomfrey gave Harry a bothered glance, “McGonagall? Harry…”

“Please, Madam Pomfrey, it’s urgent!” Harry said.

Madam Pomfrey pursed her lips. “Harry, I understand that you believe what you’re saying is true, but the fact of the matter is—”

Harry straightened and looked her straight in the eye. “I have proof.”

“What?”

Both Pomfrey and the strange man were now staring at Harry anxiously.

“What do you mean, proof?”

“Poppy,” Dumbledore interjected. “I must ask that you cease from entertaining this silly accusation at once. It is clear Harry is not well…”

“You heard me. I said I have proof. My memories. Now, will you please send for Professor McGonagall? I have a statement to make about crimes committed by the Headmaster.”

As Pomfrey and the other Healer stared back at Harry blankly, he felt himself tensing up, waiting for her reply.

“I don’t know what’s going on here, Potter, but we’ll get to the bottom of it at once!” She spun back to her office, where she bent over and put her hand on something Harry couldn’t see past the bottom of the glass window.

They all waited in awkward silence, Harry glaring at Dumbledore while the older man simply watched him with a sad expression.

Finally, McGonagall arrived, her eyes sharp and her mouth drawn in a thin line.

“Oh, thank goodness, Minerva! We have a situation on our hands,” Pomfrey said anxiously.

“What is it, Poppy?” McGonagall asked, glancing around at everyone. “Why did you send for me? And why is Potter out of his bed? Albus?”

“Minerva, I’m afraid Harry is causing a bit of trouble,” Dumbledore said with regret in his voice.
“What do you mean?” McGonagall questioned, before turning her stare. “Potter?”

Harry felt his head pounding from the injury he had forgotten about. “Dumbledore has been spying on the students on this school!”

“What?” Poppy exclaimed, staring at Harry as if he had slapped her.

McGonagall pursed her lips, giving Harry a disapproving headshake. “Potter, what you call spying, we call monitoring. He’s the Headmaster. That’s his job.”

“No, you don’t understand!” Harry tried to explain. “He’s got the whole school rigged. He’s been spying on students in their dormitories, the bathrooms, even outdoors. He’s watching everyone!”

McGonagall turned to Dumbledore, a sceptical look on her face. “Albus, what is he talking about?”

Dumbledore put up one hand, trying to abate the rising alarm apparent on both Pomfrey and McGonagall’s faces. “It’s a simple misunderstanding,” he said calmly. “I was trying to soothe Harry; he woke up most distressed. I informed him he had nothing to fear and explained the surveillance around the school. Unfortunately, that only made matters worse. I didn’t expect him to react so… violently.”

“That’s not it at all!” Harry protested. “I’m upset because you’re a lying bastard!”

“Potter!” McGonagall gasped. “I don’t care what you think the Headmaster has done, you will pay him the proper respect! One hundred points from Gryffindor for complete and utter insolence!”

“You can take all of the house points you want away from me, Professor!” Harry protested. “I don’t care! Not only is the school rigged, but he’s been lying to everyone.”

“I’ve had enough of these accusations,” Dumbledore said in his defense, his voice taking on an unusual steely tone that made Harry do a double take. When their eyes met, Harry knew without a shadow of a doubt he had to expose him.

“Minerva, please… let the boy speak,” Pomfrey said to Harry’s surprise and relief.

“Poppy!” McGonagall said incredulously.

“Minerva, you don’t know what we saw…” Pomfrey said, glancing to the Healer on her left.

“We? Who is this?” McGonagall demanded, giving the man a hard stare.

“This is Mr. Terry, a specialist from St. Mungo’s,” Pomfrey explained. “I firecalled for him when Harry arrived. His vital signs were very low, we almost lost him, and I didn’t want to take any chances.”

“I see…” McGonagall said, her stare softening only slightly.

“Before you arrived,” Pomfrey continued. “We gave the Headmaster some time alone with Potter. Imagine my surprise when I look up to see Potter being chased towards my office by Dumbledore.”

“Chased?” McGonagall asked in disbelief.

“And that’s not all,” Mr. Terry added. “Your Headmaster cast two hexes at the boy, and one of them struck him.”

Dumbledore shook his head. “Simple Stunning Spells. They were only meant to subdue Harry. He
was a danger to himself and others.”

“He tried to Obliviate me!” Harry insisted.

“What?” McGonagall exclaimed, her mouth dropping open as she stared at Harry in incredulity. “Do you realize what you’re accusing the Headmaster of, Potter? Why would he do such a thing?”

“Because I know everything he’s been up to for the last twenty years, and it hasn’t been good.”

McGonagall gaped back at Harry before slowly looking to her long-time friend and mentor. “Albus?” she asked breathlessly, a rare desperate look in her eyes.

“Minerva… how long have you known me?”

McGonagall nodded her head. “A very, very long time.”

Dumbledore gave her the tiniest of smiles and extended his hand to rest on her shoulder. “Then you know, in your heart, that everything I do is for the good of the students here, and the wizarding world. I’d give my life for them.”

McGonagall patted the hand on her shoulder reassuringly, looking slightly relieved. “Yes… yes, of course, Albus. I know that.”

“No!” Harry cried. “Please, Professor! You have to believe me! He’s delusional… he has some sort of God complex!”

“God?” McGonagall said, narrowing her eyes coldly in a way that made Harry almost flinch. “I know nothing of god, Potter, but I do know Albus Dumbledore! And he would never do anything so underhanded. He’s a fine wizard, the best of them, and I am deeply offended and saddened to hear that you, of all people, would make such an outlandish accusation!”

“It’s not outlandish! Check his wand!” Harry pleaded.

Pomfrey clasped her hands in front of her. “Minerva, please. It’s only fair. A simple wand scan won’t hurt, and it could clear all of this up.”

“Poppy!” McGonagall exclaimed.

“I know what I saw!” Pomfrey insisted, her eyes shifting nervously up to Dumbledore who looked back at her with disapproval.

McGonagall put her hand to her chest as if struggling to breathe, her eyes darting between Pomfrey and Harry before looking back at Dumbledore once more. “Albus?”

“I have already explained why I cast the Stunning Spells,” Dumbledore said.

“You cast more than a Stunning Spell!” Harry retorted. “A wand scan will prove that! Isn’t that right, Professor?”

McGonagall pursed her lips, her eyes seeming to peer through Harry. “Yes. That is correct.”

There was a moment of silence, and Harry almost thought that McGonagall would turn her back on him, but then she gathered her robes around her and nodded curtly. Her eyes found Dumbledore’s. They were apologetic but firm as she held out her hand. “I’m sorry, Albus. I must request your wand for a scan.”
“Minerva…”

“Albus, please. Don’t make this any more difficult than it already is,” McGonagall pleaded in a soft voice that seemed to betray that she was on the brink of tears.

Dumbledore’s stare was unwavering, and for a moment, Harry became anxious that it would be enough to undo McGonagall’s nerve, but finally, he withdrew his wand and slowly placed it in her outstretched palm.

“Thank you,” she said deferentially. She walked back towards the area where the bed had once been in place. Dumbledore, Harry, Pomfrey, and Mr. Terry slowly followed, keeping a respectable distance from her and each other.

She withdrew her wand and then held up Dumbledore’s wand to the light of the window.

“Priori Incantatem!”

The light from her wand turned from blue to red to white in a matter of seconds and Dumbledore’s wand shook with each new colour. She ended the spell with a whisper and then said something else that Harry could not hear before turning around to stare at all of them.

McGonagall’s face was long, and she appeared to have aged many years as her eyes found Dumbledore’s.

“This wand shows that an Obliviate spell was indeed cast very recently,” she said.

Harry, Poppy, and Healer Terry watched Dumbledore in thick anticipation for his reaction. But the man said nothing; his eyes were glued to his wand.

“Well?” McGonagall demanded, her eyes hard and full of anger as she looked upon her colleague.

“Minerva, I can explain,” Dumbledore started.

McGonagall pursed her lips, waiting, her face the same stony expression she usually reserved for troublesome students.

“But… I would rather do this in private,” he said softly.

“No,” McGonagall said coldly. “This will be heard here, since everyone present is aware of the accusation and the act.”

“Very well.” Dumbledore sighed. “Harry’s memories will be only of what he thinks he saw and heard. As Poppy has already said, he was, and still is, under the influence of medicinal potions. He also suffered a major concussion. His memories, if you can call them that, are hardly reliable. I was attempting to Obliviate them because they were outrageous and would have caused both him and others serious psychological harm.”

“You don’t get to decide that!” Pomfrey protested, glaring at Dumbledore. “Headmaster or not, I’m in charge here! This is my infirmary!”

“And it’s against the law,” added Healer Terry, with a condemning glare.

Pomfrey nodded. “That’s right! Minerva, you cannot overlook this. The Headmaster’s behavior is inexcusable!”

McGonagall nodded reluctantly.
“Minerva… please,” Dumbledore started.

McGonagall held up her hand to silence him. Dumbledore gasped and drew back in surprise.

“Is there any more evidence?” she asked.

“I have my memories!” Harry volunteered quickly, his heart racing.

“Minerva, did you not hear what I said? Harry’s memories are hardly reliable!” Dumbledore insisted.

“I will be the judge of that! Whatever the cause of your actions, Albus, Obliviating a student is clearly against our policy. We make no exceptions,” she said firmly.

“There are always exceptions, Minerva,” Dumbledore insisted.

“Not when I am the one making the decisions!” she said defiantly. “Poppy, please send for Filch, and tell him to bring me a Pensieve.”

“Yes, right away, Minerva,” Pomfrey said, turning quickly to carry out the task.

Once she left, they waited in strange, awkward silence. Dumbledore had gone as still someone frozen by a petrifying hex, while Healer Terry and McGonagall took turns shrewdly studying both Harry and Dumbledore.

When Poppy returned, her expression was tight and scornful, her eyes intent on shaming Dumbledore. He, however, remained impassive and still.

Finally, Filch burst through the door. “You called, Poppy?” he asked, holding a large round slate bowl.

“Yes, thank you, Filch. You can put it right there,” she said, pointing to the windowsill where McGonagall stood.

Filch nodded eagerly, paying no attention to Harry, Dumbledore, or Healer Terry as he normally would have done.

Harry watched him intently as he walked towards the windowsill, looking for other signs that the man had been Imperio’d. But Filch’s eyes didn’t appear glassy or vacant. The only evidence of the curse was his unquestioning obedience and his utter lack of suspicion or malice towards Harry.

Once he put it down, he just stood there staring at it.

“That will be all, Filch, thank you. You may leave us now,” McGonagall instructed, staring at the man strangely.

Filch nodded and turned, looking straight ahead as he walked out.

“Potter, come here,” McGonagall ordered, holding out one arm.

Harry did as he was told until he was a few inches from her. “You know how to withdraw memories, yes?”

“Actually, no… I don’t,” Harry said.

“It’s not something we teach students, Minerva,” Dumbledore said smartly, causing McGonagall to narrow her eyes uncharacteristically at the Headmaster.
“Yes, I’m aware of that, Albus. But that’s never stopped Potter before, has it?” she asked curtly. “Potter,” she said, turning back to regard him. “I’m not going to retrieve your memories; it’s a very tricky procedure. You’ll have to do it.”

“Me?” Harry asked, gobsmacked as to how exactly he would do that.

“Yes, put your wand to your temple, like so,” McGonagall said briskly as if giving a lesson to a daft student.

Harry mimicked her actions, watching her close.

“Now, concentrate very hard on the specific memory you want to retrieve. Not parts of it, not how it made you feel. Try not to replay the entire thing in your mind. Just think of as something whole, a scene if you will.”

“Alright,” Harry said slowly, concentrating on doing everything she was saying and doing.

“Now… tap your wand to your temple like so,” McGonagall said as she performed the trick, “and draw it slowly away from your head like you would a spool of yarn.”

Harry scrunched up his face as tapped his wand to his temple, concentrating on his memory as he pulled his wand away. He gasped as he saw a swirl of white-grey mist in his peripheral vision.

“Poppy,” McGonagall said, to which Pomfrey immediately nodded and stepped forward to gather the matter coming from Harry’s head into a vial.

“There, that should do it,” Pomfrey said, after gathering the last of it.

Harry stared at the vial containing his memories in amazement as she emptied the vial into the Pensieve. When it was ready, McGonagall studied it like one would survey a murky lake before taking a dive. She took a deep breath and promptly bent over to stick her face in the swirling liquid.

Harry could hardly breathe as he watched and waited for her to emerge, his eyes occasionally darting to Dumbledore, who watched her sombrelly. His face had gone nearly white, and he seemed to be bracing himself for her return.

After ten minutes or so, she snapped upright, her posture poised, her expression affronted and appalled as she gaped at the Headmaster.

“Minerva…” Dumbledore started.

“Oh, Albus, how could you?” she said in a hurt voice, her eyes glassy with tears.

“What did he do? What did you see?” Pomfrey asked anxiously.

“I saw enough,” McGonagall said with a grimace on her face, her eyes reflecting disappointment and disgust as she gazed on her former mentor and friend.

“You’re no better than our enemy, and what’s worse is that you can’t even see it,” she said in broken whisper.

“How can you say that, Minerva? After all I’ve done for this school… I’m trying to save the wizarding world,” Dumbledore defended.

“You cannot save what you do not truly value, Albus,” McGonagall said adamantly. “The wizarding world isn’t who you deem worthy to be a part of it. Every student, every person, Squib, Muggle-
born, half-blood, pure-blood, woman, and man are all a part of this world, and it’s very clear you do not think they all deserve a equal place in it!”

Pomfrey gasped, and Harry kept his eyes glued to Dumbledore’s face for his reaction.

He shook his head. “You misunderstand.”

“I understand perfectly, Albus,” McGonagall said in an icy tone that made Harry’s eyes widen. Watching her scold Dumbledore was about as surreal as floating above his body.

“I understand that you’re a conniver, and a liar, and… a despicable human being,” she spat bitterly. “And I want you out at once!”

“You cannot remove me, Minerva. I am the Headmaster,” Dumbledore said resolutely.

McGonagall raised an eyebrow, a slight roll to her head as she gripped the side of her robes to lift them. “Just watch me.”

“Poppy, please, inform Filch that we require the presence of a member of the Governing Board, at once.”

“The Governors?” Dumbledore sputtered. “Minerva… you can’t be serious…”

“I am quite serious, Albus,” McGonagall said with a deadpan voice that held the edge of a threat in it.

Dumbledore slowly eyed her and his gaze fell upon his wand; he raised his hand and mouthed something that looked like Accio wand.

Harry quickly glanced to the object but it remained in its place, unmoved.

“No,” Minerva said. “You see, Albus, I feared you would try such a thing. I’ve cast anti-Summoning charms on it. Until a full investigation is launched, your wand is property of the school. You’ll have to wrestle it from me if you want it.”

“You can’t do that!” Dumbledore snapped in a way that had them all staring at him in wide-eyed shock. “That wand… it’s… special. It’s mine.”

“I can, and I have,” McGonagall said simply. “Now, we will wait for the Governors to arrive to hear all of the evidence, and then—”

Dumbledore took a step back, and McGonagall raised her wand defensively as if in preparation for an attack, while Harry, Pomfrey, and Healer Terry all stood on pins and needles watching and waiting to see what he would do.

“I will not stand here and wait to be judged for things that none of you can possibly appreciate or understand!”

“Now, Albus,” McGonagall said, taking a cautious step forward to calm him.

Before she could say another word, the sound of wings approaching drew their attention to the open window. Fawkes flew in and Albus Dumbledore clapped his hands, disappearing in a ball of smoke and blinding golden light.
They all stood staring at the place where Dumbledore had just been standing, the smoke he’d left behind dissipating. Finally, McGonagall turned to Harry.

“Potter… this isn’t over. The conversation I witnessed in that Pensieve leaves me with many questions,” she said. “I am not only deeply troubled by the Headmaster’s admission, but I am also disturbed by the acts you confessed to have engaged in with Miss Granger, Mr. Weasley, and Mr. Malfoy.”

Harry’s eyes darted to Madam Pomfrey and Mr. Terry, who were both leaning in to listen.

Fortunately, McGonagall appeared uncomfortable with having an audience. “We’ll discuss this later…”

“Yes, Professor.”

She turned and began to make her way towards the door of the infirmary.

“Minerva, what are you going to do?” Pomfrey asked.

McGonagall paused and turned around. She looked preoccupied, her face lined with a long frown.

“I’m going to secure the castle. Albus must be taken out of the wards. And then I’m going to contact the Governors to inform them that, for the time being, he is no longer allowed in this castle, pending a formal investigation. I will have to assume the role of acting Headmistress.”

Pomfrey nodded. “Yes, of course.”

“And as Headmistress, my first order is that no one in this room speaks of what was seen and heard, is that clear?”

They all nodded and she gave them a curt one of her own before turning to open the door to the infirmary. When she did, the sound of chatter from beyond the infirmary exploded and Harry could hear the excited voices of his friends and housemates. Before it could swing shut, Harry walked away from the window to peer out of the opening of the door. There was a crowd of burgundy and gold Quidditch robes, surrounded by others wearing plain wizarding robes. Some were trying to peer
inside the infirmary, only catching a brief peek at Harry; the others seemed especially focused on McGonagall.

“Professor, is Harry alright?” Harry heard Ginny ask.

There was a general hush among the group as she began to speak and then the door swung completely shut behind her.

With the noise contained and her infirmary sealed from peering eyes, Pomfrey took a deep breath of relief.

“Well, aside from all of this commotion and the extraordinary events that just took place, you’re still under my care, Potter. Now back to bed with you!” she said, pushing her hands out towards him to guide him.

“But, Madam Pomfrey, I feel fine,” Harry insisted.

“I won’t hear it, Potter. You fell more than a hundred feet with only an Aresto Momentum to slow the fall. And we still don’t know why you fell!”

“Well, I thought it was obvious,” Harry replied quickly. “I was pushed.”

“That’s not what McGonagall said. Are you saying that Draco Malfoy is responsible for your fall, then?”

“Er…” Harry paused, feeling caught between lying and going with the obvious answer. He didn’t want to say anything that would prolong his stay or arouse any new suspicion, but he also didn’t want to get Draco in trouble. That was the last thing his lover needed right now.

“Well, no, I mean… it’s a part of the game. Quidditch is a contact sport. Draco and I shove each other all the time when we’re going for the snitch. I suppose I just got too excited and lost my balance. He wasn’t trying to knock me off my broom.”

Pomfrey studied him closely for a few moments, staring at his head and then into his eyes before giving a slight nod. “Regardless, you need to rest! I can’t have you walking about with a concussion.”

“It’s all gone, see, feel it,” Harry said, grabbing her hand and pulling it up to the spot in his head where he still felt a dull throb.

“Mmm, so it is…”

“Just like magic.” He smiled cheekily and was met with a disapproving glare from Pomfrey.

“Please, Madam Pomfrey. I feel fine, and my friends must be worried sick about me.”

There was a loud buzzing coming from Pomfrey’s office, startling them both. She looked to Healer Terry, who made his way back and leaned over to press something.

“Well? What is it?” Pomfrey called to him.

“It’s McGonagall. She said that she’s received an owl from The Daily Prophet requesting an update on Potter’s status. Apparently it’s been leaked that he was almost killed… by Draco Malfoy.”

“Oh, no,” Harry groaned.
“Shh!” Pomfrey said. “Anything else?”

“Yes, she says she’s already told them that Potter is fine and that Malfoy had no culpability, but she wanted to warn you both, should any attempts be made to contact you for an interview.”

“Well, I never!” Pomfrey exclaimed. “Those vultures are just horrible. You were carted in here no more than two hours ago, and already they’re nosing about!”

Harry nodded in agreement, a small smirk on his face. “And the longer I stay on bed rest, the more curious they’ll become. People will wonder why I haven’t been released.”

Pomfrey narrowed her eyes and then sighed. “Alright, Potter, I’ll let you go, but on one condition.”

Harry nodded eagerly. “Sure.”

“You stay in bed! No frolicking about!”

Harry smirked.

Pomfrey blushed. “Get your mind out of the gutter, Potter! You know exactly what I mean. If I see you hanging out in the hallways, or on the Quidditch pitch, it’s right back into the infirmary with you!”

“Yes, ma’am,” Harry said, as deferentially as he could.

“All right, go on then,” she ordered, waving him out.

“Thank you, Madam Pomfrey. Er, nice to have met you Healer Terry,” Harry called back as he headed towards the door.

“Take care of yourself, Harry,” Healer Terry called.

Harry couldn’t walk fast enough to leave. When he opened the doors, he was clobbered by his teammates, housemates, and everyone else who was curious or interested in how he was doing.

“Oh, Harry!” Ginny exclaimed, rushing to put her arms around him and give him a tight squeeze.

“You alright, mate?” Dean asked.

“You gave us a good scare!” Neville said.

“I’m fine, guys, really,” Harry said. He couldn’t help but smile to see so many of his friends and teammates here. The affection they showed during moments like this never got old.

“Well, what happened up there?” Dean pressed.

“Everyone is saying Malfoy pushed you off your broom,” Ginny said, her eyes searching his for confirmation.

Harry shook his head. “No, it’s not anything like that. We were both racing for the snitch and he gave me a little shove. I must have lost my balance. He wasn’t trying to knock me off.”

Seamus narrowed his eyes. “Are you sure about that? You could have died out there.”

“But I didn’t,” Seamus” Harry said, irritated. “I’m fine.”
His eyes scanned the crowd and then moved them up the short corridor of the infirmary. He hadn’t expected to see Draco—that would have been too conspicuous—but he had hoped to see Hermione and Ron. But they were nowhere to be found.

“What did Pomfrey give you? We heard you were near death!”

Harry shook his head. “No, that’s not true. Listen, guys, I’ll catch you up on everything in a bit, promise. Right now, I need to speak with Ginny… alone.”

There was a collective groan and some frowned, giving Ginny a suspicious look.

“Please?”

Several huffs and 'fine, whatever's later, he and Ginny were alone in the hallway.

“What is it you want to talk about, Harry?” Ginny asked hesitantly.

“I was wondering if you knew… where everyone else is.” He raised an eyebrow to indicate whom exactly he was speaking of.

Ginny smiled an awkward, tight smile and then shrugged. “Dunno, haven’t seen anyone else since I came in from the game.”

Harry sighed. “I can’t believe they didn’t stick around until I awoke.”

Ginny gave him a sympathetic shrug. “Well you saw the crowd. I’m sure they wanted to wait, but who would want to deal with that? Everyone has loads of questions about what happened.”

“I suppose,” Harry sighed. “Perhaps they’re already back in the common room, then? I don’t want to go there if they aren’t, though.”

Ginny shook her head. “No, after they brought you here, a few people went there looking for them, but no one was there.”

Harry inwardly groaned. He didn’t want to wander all over the castle and grounds looking for Hermione, Ron, and Draco, especially when he had just promised Pomfrey he’d stay in his bed, but he had to let tell them everything that he learned and what had just occurred with Dumbledore.

“Ginny, can I asked you for a favour?”

Thirty minutes later, Harry had his map, his Invisibility Cloak in his hand, and an alibi. He was careful to stay out of view of everyone, holding himself up in the bathroom stall on the third floor where Moaning Myrtle promised to keep his secret in exchange for a compliment. When he couldn’t find them on the map he was just about to give up and go back to his dormitories when Myrtle informed him that Salazar Slytherin’s chambers were below the dungeons and wouldn’t show up on the map. After promising her that he would return to talk to her later in the week, she gave him directions on how to get down there.

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Dumbledore Apparated to the only place he knew he would not be followed, at least not in the immediate future. He was still shaking with anger as he appeared with a loud pop on the sidewalk across from 12 Grimmauld Place. He had underestimated the power of fate. Admittedly when he had confessed everything to Harry, he did not think that any of it would ever be heard, and certainly not repeated. But Harry had been awake the whole time. Dumbledore grimaced, still in shock that
someone who had clearly been unconscious and so close to death could hear and absorb new information. It only confirmed a nagging suspicion that he had been holding onto since Harry had brought him Tom Riddle’s diary. If only he could prove it…

Before he could further consider it, the door to Grimmauld opened, and Remus emerged from the house. He studied Dumbledore from across the street for a moment, his eyes suspicious.

When Dumbledore lifted his hand and covered his face in a gesture that communicated extreme weariness, a private joke among professors, Remus’ face lit up immediately and he smiled as he descended the short stack of steps.

Dumbledore was at a loss for words as his former student approached. He had been dismissed from his post, reprimanded and shunned by one of his closest colleagues, had his wand confiscated, and had almost been subjected to a formal investigation which would have surely led to his official dismissal. The only thing worse would be a public trial before the Wizengamot and a sentence to Azkaban. At the moment, Dumbledore didn’t discount that possibility.

“Hello!” Remus exclaimed, holding out both arms to embrace his old Headmaster and comrade.

“Remus.” Dumbledore tried to smile, returning the embrace more firmly than was usual for him. It felt strangely comforting to be welcomed and highly regarded by someone right now.

“What are you doing here?” Remus asked, looking at Dumbledore with a bemused expression.

Dumbledore tried to smile once more but its falseness was intolerable. He dropped all pretence and sighed heavily. “Remus, I’m afraid to say that I have been informally removed from Hogwarts.”

Remus’ face reflected confusion and doubt as he shook his head. “What? What do you mean? They can’t remove you! You’re the Headmaster!”

“They can indeed, but I managed to evade them.”

“Why would they want to? Is this the work of the Governors? I bet half of them are under the Imperius,” Remus said, his expression becoming angry.

Dumbledore simply sighed. “I’m afraid we have bigger problems than the Governors being under the Imperius, my friend.”

“Like what?” Remus asked, his eyes growing more fearful.

Dumbledore kept his expression cool as he considered how he should proceed. If he told Remus that he was sure that there would be an attack on Hogwarts, he would have to explain how he suspected such a thing and why he had not mentioned it until now or taken precautions to prevent it. Telling the complete truth had never been Dumbledore’s specialty, and it always seemed to backfire. The less people knew, the better. It was for their own good, really.

“I believe Hogwarts is in danger,” he said ominously.

Remus’ eyes went wide. “What do you mean? Next to Gringotts, that school is the safest place in the world!”

“Don’t count on that, my friend,” Dumbledore said, patting Remus on the arm. “I do not wish to continue this conversation in the street. Let’s get inside.”

Remus stared at Dumbledore a few moments before following him across the street and up the front
steps. When Dumbledore paused at the door, Remus cursed under his breath.

“What are we going to do?” he said more to himself than to Dumbledore.

“Call a meeting,” Dumbledore said as he began to turn the doorknob. “We’ll assemble every member of the Order.”

Remus nodded. “Well, Snape and I are already here—”

Dumbledore froze, quietly letting go of the doorknob and turning to regard Remus in genuine shock. “What? What is he doing here? Did you not get my message last week?”

Remus nodded. “Yes, yes, we all got it. But he’s back. He hasn’t gone amuck. He is one of us, without a doubt. Over the past few days, we’ve… gotten to know each other better. He and I have actually been having some good chats, and—”

“Remus!” Dumbledore interrupted, disturbed by how at ease and familiar his former student was about Snape. “Severus is no longer trustworthy. His absence was highly suspicious. Not only did he force me to remove him from the school, but we don’t even know where he was, and he left us with no way of contacting him. He was gone for over three weeks. His loyalty is questionable at best!”

“Er, I don’t know about that. I don’t think—”

“It doesn’t matter what you think!” Dumbledore snapped.

Remus opened his mouth in disbelief.

“I’m sorry,” Dumbledore said softly, suddenly feeling every bit as villainous as he had just been accused of being. Remus was an earnest man, and he didn’t deserve to be spoken to in such a manner.

“Dumbledore, I respect you, I really do,” Remus started carefully. “But you haven’t been around. You haven’t seen him. Snape’s been in bad shape. When he first arrived, he looked as if he had been tortured.”

“Of course, he has. Tom can be quite cruel to his followers. Don’t let your compassion blind you, Remus. You should know better than anyone that Severus is a bitter, angry man. Who knows what his anger could produce? He may try to sabotage our efforts. He is, from here out, excluded from all Order activities.”

“But—”

Dumbledore stared back at the door for a moment, his aggravation brimming. He took a deep breath and then turned to look at Remus once more. “Where is he?”

Remus swallowed. “He’s in the kitchen, having a drink.”

Dumbledore nodded. “Give me your wand.”

“No,” Remus said.

“Remus… please. Mine was confiscated.”

“Well, I’m sorry to hear that, but you have no need for a wand, Dumbledore. Snape may be a git, but he’s not a bad bloke.”
“Is it like me to be irrational?” Dumbledore asked in a soft imploring voice.

Remus sighed, studying his former Headmaster with scepticism. “No… but…”

“Then please… trust me.”

Remus stared at Dumbledore for a few moments before pulling it out and handing over his wand. “I think you’re making a mistake.”

“I wish I thought the same,” Dumbledore whispered. “Now, please, stay behind me.” He ignored the stunned looked on Remus’ face as opened the door to 12 Grimmauld Place.

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When Hermione awoke, there was a faint knocking on the door. She could hardly move with Ron’s heavy arm over her, his weight resting against her back, pinning her against Draco’s slender form, which she had curled her body into. She opened her eyes and gently pushed her way up to a sitting position, waking both of the boys as she did so.

“What is it?” Draco asked, squinting his eyes and still half asleep.

“The door,” she whispered.

Draco’s face turned to stone as he stared between her and Ron, who was now sitting in a rigid upright position, his eyes pinned to the heavy black wooden door.

“Who else knows about this room?” Ron asked Draco.

Draco slowly sat up. “Not sure, probably a handful of Slytherins, but I doubt most of them actually believe it really exists. Everyone thinks it’s a rumour the upper-years spread to prank first-years.”

“Well, someone else definitely knows,” Hermione whispered before her eyes went wide. “What if it’s Dumbledore?”

Ron scoffed. “That pervy bastard wouldn’t knock. He’d probably just come right in.”

“That would be rude, Ron. Not everyone is like you,” Hermione retorted.

“You know, you’re really asking for it,” he warned as he stood up. He tiptoed to the door, reaching for the doorknob.

“Ron, what are you doing? Get away from the door!” Draco whispered furiously.

“I’m going to see who it is and what they want!”

“Ron!” Hermione said in exasperation.

“What do you want to do, Hermione? Just hide out in here all night? Someone knows we’re in here — no need for us to play games,” he said.

“Easy for you to say. How will I explain being here?” Draco asked.

Ron tightened his jaw looking around. “Duck down then, under the bed, or hide in the wardrobe.”

“The wardrobe?” Draco asked, affronted. “You expect me to hide like a common criminal?”
“Well, you are a Death Eater,” Ron said.

“Funny,” Draco said, giving Ron a fake smile to which Ron responded by shrugging.

Another knock, a much louder knock, had them all stilling in apprehension.

“Oh, no!” Hermione mouthed silently.

“Hullo? Anyone in there?” they all heard Harry’s voice say. Their tense and anxious expressions immediately transformed into ones of relief and glee.

“Harry!” Hermione cried. “Let him in, Ron!”

Ron immediately opened the door to see Harry standing outside with a wide-eyed look of happiness as he gaped at his three lovers.

“Harry!” Ron said, pulling the boy into a firm embrace before kissing him hard on the mouth.

When Ron let him go, Harry's face was flushed and he was grinning. “Well, it’s nice to see you too, mate!”

Ron shut the door just as Hermione ran up to Harry, jumping onto his waist so that both of her legs were wrapped around him.

“Hermione!” Harry nearly stumbled, and Hermione quickly hopped down, standing back to look at him.

“You’re alive!”

“Of course, I’m alive,” Harry said with an amused smile.

“Don’t of course me!” Hermione scolded. “You should have seen yourself! Oh, I’m so glad you’re alright!” she exclaimed again, hugging him once more. She didn’t want to let go. With her body wrapped around his, she could feel his heartbeat in his chest, his excited breathing in her ear, his warm skin… he was alive.

“I’m more than alright, I feel fine,” he said, returning her tight embrace.

She pulled back to look down at him, unable to control the grin taking over her face. She leaned in close, taking her time to feel his breath against her face, reacquainting herself with the brilliant green of his eyes once more before pressing her mouth against his.

She smiled against his mouth as he took over, his arms enveloping her as their kiss deepened.

“Let the man breathe, Hermione,” Draco chided. Hermione found herself smiling against Harry’s lips before dismounting and finally drawing back.

“Glad you’re alive,” Ron whispered squeezing Harry from behind.

“Glad to be alive,” Harry said. He pulled away, glancing past Hermione to where Draco was standing. She stepped back to observe them.

“You gave us quite a fright there, Potter,” Draco said, his voice betraying the light-heartedness he was trying to inflect with his smirk.

Harry simply gave him a small smile. “That’s it? No hug?”
Draco shook his head, leaning in as Harry pulled him tight against his chest.

“Did you catch it?” Harry whispered.

Draco pulled back, smiling. “Yeah.”

Harry grinned.

Draco puffed out his chest. “I told you I could use that move against you.”

“It was brilliant.”

Draco’s smile faded. “What happened up there?”

Hermione and Ron drew nearer, and Harry looked around at all of them. “To tell you the truth, I don’t know. I just… blacked out.”

“Right after I shoved you?” Draco asked.

Harry nodded. “Yeah. I mean, I was feeling a bit off before that. Lightheaded and sort of dizzy, but when you shoved me, it’s like someone drew curtains over my eyes, and I felt—” He paused, looking at them hesitantly.

“What, Harry?” Hermione pressed.

“Like I was being pulled outside of myself,” Harry said softly, looking around at them nervously.

They all gawped at him in confusion.

“What do you mean, pulled outside of yourself?” Ron asked. “Outside of your body?”

“Yeah, pretty much. Just like before, I was floating, only this time, it felt like something was pulling me. But that’s not even the worst of it,” Harry said.

Hermione’s brows furrowed. “What could be worse?”

Harry swallowed and took a deep breath and Hermione could feel dread rising within her stomach. “Well… while I was outside of myself, Dumbledore confessed everything.”

“What do you mean; everything?” Hermione asked.

“You’re not going to believe it…”

“Try us. As far as that old goat is concerned, I’d believe anything at this point,” Draco said bitterly.

“Wait, Harry, before you begin…if you were outside of yourself, how do you know what you heard wasn’t a dream or something?” Hermione asked sceptically.

“Because I could hear him, Hermione. Every word was crystal clear… and he confirmed everything when I woke up.”

“Well,” Ron gasped. “What did he say?”

“I think I need to sit down. I’m feeling a little weak,” Harry confessed.

“Right!” "Sure!” "Of course!” Hermione, Ron, and Draco all said at the same time, giving him room and making an obvious path to the bed. He sat down and Hermione sat down right beside him, with
Draco on his other side, and Ron lying across the bed behind him.

Forty minutes later, Hermione, Draco and Ron were gaping back at Harry, completely speechless as he wrapped up his tale about what Dumbledore had revealed, the former Headmaster’s attempt to Obliviate him, the chase to Pomfrey’s office, McGonagall’s questioning, and Dumbledore’s dramatic exit.

“That’s completely barmy!” Ron whispered in disbelief.

Hermione shook her head; the enormity of Dumbledore’s actions was hard to digest. She needed to time to think through everything Harry had just said, but one thing had emerged clear as day.

“Well, at least that confirms the note was from Dumbledore,” she said.

“I think we all knew that note was from Dumbledore,” Draco said. “What I want to know is, if he somehow found out that I had been assigned by the Dark Lord to spy on you three, why did he wait until now to tell you? Why not tell you from the very start?”

“It is strange,” Hermione said, thinking. “He let almost an entire year go by and didn’t say anything until you came back a few weeks ago.”

Harry rubbed his temple while Ron scrunched up his face, thinking.

“Maybe he didn’t think it would work,” Hermione said. “He didn’t really know what Snape was up to until you told him, Harry. Perhaps he thought sacking Snape would make a mess of everything.

“But it didn’t,” Harry said. “We’ve all been together since we’ve been back, even after Snape got sacked.”

“Right,” Hermione said. “But when Draco’s father showed up, he probably figured that would surely put an end to everything.”

Ron nodded. “I think you’re right, Hermione. When Draco’s dad came to pick him up, Dumbledore said something funny to me…”

“Oh?” Draco asked in annoyance. “And exactly what did he say about me?”

“He said that there was nothing to be done about you,” Ron recounted. “That your future was already set… It was like he was writing you off as a Death Eater right then and there.”

Draco’s jaw tightened. “Is that so?”

“Yep,” Ron said. “Honestly, I thought it was a creepy thing for a Headmaster to say. He’s supposed to have hope for the future and all of that.”

“Apparently not.” Draco frowned. “It’s always been obvious he has favourites. Namely, Gryffindors.”

Hermione and Ron exchanged a guilty look before looking to Harry.

“So McGonagall is in charge now?” Ron said, trying to change the subject.

“Yeah. Probably for good,” Harry answered. “There’s no way they’re going to let Dumbledore set foot back inside this castle.”

“Father always said Dumbledore was not to be trusted, but I wouldn’t have ever thought he could
“We should have known,” Hermione said. “After the way we heard him talking to Snape. He sounded like an entirely different person than the one we usually see. Oh, Harry, this is so awful. I can’t imagine how this is going affect the Order.”

Harry snorted. “I’d say it’s time for new leadership.”

Hermione studied him. Harry appeared resolute and determined but she could tell by the way he was avoiding her gaze and holding himself stiff that he was holding something back.

“Harry, I’m sorry. I know how much you looked up to him,” she said, putting out an arm to comfort him.

Harry sighed, and fell back onto the bed, his arms covering his eyes. They all watched in silence, waiting for him to say or do something.

“I’m just tired,” he said. “After listening to him go on and on about my prophecy and my destiny, my fate, it seems… inevitable. At this point, I think he’s right. The other prophecy is doomed to fail. We tried the ritual and it didn’t work. Voldemort is still alive, and so am I. I just want all of this to be over with.”

“Harry, we don’t know if our prophecy failed,” Hermione countered. “It just hasn’t happened yet.”

Harry dropped his hand and turned his head to look up at her. “Hermione, if it was going to happen, it would have happened already. We did the ritual, and nothing happened!”

“Well, that’s not exactly true,” Draco said. “Something happened... to you.”

“That’s right,” Ron said. “And whatever it is, it’s been getting worse since the ritual.”

“Do you really think that means something?” Harry asked.

Hermione bit her lip, thinking. “I do. I think it means we’re close or something but even if we are, it’s too risky to try again. Killing Voldemort isn’t worth losing you, Harry. I never want to go through that again.”

“Hermione’s right. If doing this prophecy means hurting you or sacrificing your life… it’s rubbish as far as I’m concerned,” Ron said. “And I don’t want any part of it.”

“Oh, what does it matter anyway?” Harry asked, exasperated. “I might die, anyway! My prophecy only gives me a fifty-fifty chance of surviving.”

They all sat in the thick silence as the reality of that statement infused the air like poison gas.

“Well, I don’t really know much about your prophecy,” Draco said. “But I know if we keep shagging the way we do, together, it definitely will lower your chances of surviving. I’m with Ron and Hermione on this—it’s too much of a risk.”

“So that’s it, then,” Harry said, heavy sadness in his voice. “We’re really giving up on the sexual prophecy. I suppose I have to do this alone.”

“No, Harry,” Hermione insisted. “When are you going to get it through your thick head that you’re never alone? We’re always here for you, whatever happens.”

“Right… I know,” Harry sighed.
She rolled over him and straddled him, pulling his arms back down to stare down at him. “Look at me.”

He slowly opened his eyes, and she could see that they were weary and sad.

She placed her hand on his cheek and leaned in to kiss him again, wanting to take away all of his weariness and pain.

They began to kiss and Harry’s hand found the small of her back and then slowly ventured up to the nape of her neck and then into her hair. As the kiss continued, Harry’s grip in her hair became tighter and more possessive and Hermione responded by pressing harder against him.

Feeling Harry’s hand in her hair in such a commanding way ignited a fire inside of her. His kiss became more demanding, and his mouth more brash, as he began to probe hers with his tongue.

“Mmm,” she moaned into his mouth, squirming over his hardening erection. The brush of their bodies against each other sent tingles to her pierced bits. Harry’s hand left her hair to explore her body.

When their kiss broke, Hermione smiled to see Harry’s eyes so full of adoration.

“What do you need?” she whispered in his ear.

“Nothing, Hermione. I have everything as long as you, Ron, and Draco are here,” he replied.

“You sure?” she asked, sliding her hand down his chest with a light, teasing touch that she knew would make him squirm.

“Well, if you put it like that,” Harry said, grabbing her wrist and bringing it up to kiss her hand before pulling it behind her back.

“Slow down, you two. I don’t think it’s a good idea for Harry to be shagging,” Ron said.

Hermione drew back a little, considering Ron’s warning. “Perhaps you’re right.”

Harry scoffed. “You just said it had something to do with all of us having sex at once. One on one is fine! I probably can even handle two a time.”

Draco snorted. “You’re unbelievable. I thought you had a concussion?”

“It’s all better—Pomfrey uses magic, you know,” Harry said with a smirk.

“Well, in that case…” Draco said, wriggling his eyebrows.

As Dumbledore entered, his eyes scanned the long, dark corridor.

“Pompous Blood Traitor!” screamed Mrs. Black.

Dumbledore rolled his eyes, walking slowly and cautiously towards the kitchen with Remus a few paces behind.

“No need to tiptoe. He’s not going to attack us,” Remus said softly.

Dumbledore scowled. If only he could perform a Silencing Spell on Remus or send him away. He
froze, feeling his former irritation returning as he spied Snape seated at the kitchen table, just inside the door.

Snape seemed to sense a change in the atmosphere and looked up quite casually, as if expecting Remus. Upon seeing Dumbledore, however, he paused, his teacup in hand frozen in front of his chest. A slow, curious eyebrow rose on his face as he stared back at the former Headmaster.

“Albus. To what do we owe this pleasure?”

“You!” Dumbledore whispered fiercely, every bit of frustration bleeding out unexpectedly as he continued to walk forward.

“What?” Snape questioned, looking at the former Headmaster in curious bewilderment.

“This is all your fault!” Dumbledore said, stalking closer, through the entrance towards the kitchen. He could hear Remus breathing behind him, but the other man remained silent, apparently too enraptured with the scene before him to say anything.

“I beg your pardon?” Snape said, putting down his tea and standing up to face the Headmaster, his arms by his side, and his legs set apart in a defensive stance.

“Your meddling has nearly ruined everything. Do you know how hard I’ve worked? How much foresight and planning it took to get to this point?”

“I’m sure you’re about to tell me,” Snape said with a contemptuous sneer.

“Oh, you are mistaken Severus. Telling you anything is foolish. You’d probably just run and tell someone else,” Dumbledore mocked.

Snape narrowed his eyes, taking in Dumbledore fully. “What are you doing here?”

Dumbledore’s jaw tightened as he tried not scowling at the ungrateful man before him. “I should ask you the same. Shouldn’t you be entertaining Riddle?”

Snape’s upper lip curled. “No. This is where I belong.”

“I’ve already told you, your services are no longer needed.”

“Yes, and I told you that you cannot force me out of the Order. It requires a vote,” Snape said, folding his arms over his chest.

“Then a vote we shall have,” Dumbledore said resolutely. “Remus…”

“Yes?” the man answered from behind him.

“I want you to owl each and every member of the Order at once and inform them that their presence is needed here immediately. We are having an emergency meeting,” he said, feeling the ebb of excitement building within him.

“Dumbledore…” Remus started.

“Remus, do as I say!” Dumbledore said, turning around to set an icy glare on his former student. Remus’ eyes narrowed and then his face went impassive as he nodded.

“Fine,” he said curtly. Dumbledore relaxed a little, patting the thin man on the arm, letting his hand linger just long enough to be taken as an expression of care and forgiveness.
Remus gave him a mirthless smile, glancing at Severus before he turned around. Dumbledore returned his attention to Snape.

The man had a defiant smirk on his face that tested the most patient bone in Dumbledore’s body. His hand felt awkward and ached from not being able to hold his wand—Remus’ wand felt inadequate and clumsy in his hand. It was times like this when he doubted fate the most, but whether he had his wand or not, Dumbledore was still confident he was the more powerful of the two, and he doubted Snape would test him to confirm it.

“Well, well, Albus, it seems you are finally revealing your true colours,” Snape said smugly.

Dumbledore remained silent; he had no doubt Snape would let his bitterness trip his tongue.

“You know very well where my loyalties lie,” Snape continued. “I’ve been a valuable spy for the Order. I’ve done everything you’ve told me, and more.”

There was pride in his voice and it sickened Dumbledore. Snape had no right to it. Pride was for noble men, men of integrity. Not former Death Eaters and those who worshipped the Dark Arts.

Dumbledore tried to control his voice and not let his disgust colour his words as he spoke. “Yes, that’s the problem, Severus. No one asked you to do more. You were simply supposed to do as you were told.”

“I’m not your dog, old man,” Snape spat. “Or one of your insipid blind followers. I’ve watched you long enough to know that your way isn’t the only way. I saw an opportunity to—”

“Bring more darkness and chaos in the world?” Dumbledore mocked. “To legitimise dark magic and corrupt innocence?”

“Innocence? Those four have long lost their innocence, thanks in no small part to your 'protection' over the years,” Snape scoffed.

Dumbledore’s face tightened in indignation.

Snape’s brow furrowed as he stared back at Dumbledore in bewilderment. “What exactly is your problem with the sexual prophecy, Albus? The sex? Or is there something else you are hiding?”

Dumbledore straightened, lifting his chin up. “It is immoral, and while you may hold an unhealthy preoccupation with dark magic, Severus, it is not something to be taken lightly. It would be most terrible if they were able to see it through to the end.”

“Yes, what a shame it would be if they actually managed to accomplish something extraordinary without your infinite wisdom and assistance.” Snape sneered. “Worse still, Potter may actually live to tell the tale.”

His words were wrapped in bitter sarcasm, but their truth pinched and prickled Dumbledore like a hornet’s sting. And so he drew upon all of his knowledge and logic to inflict a cutting jab of his own. “Always the sceptic, Severus. That is your weakness. You doubt the power of the light and put too much faith in the dark. But the Dark Arts have failed you before. Harry will be our saving grace.”

He paused, considering Snape, a revelation forming. “Perhaps that is why you have put so much effort into thwarting his prophecy. Does the thought of Harry playing such a pivotal role in the fate of our world vex you?”

“No, it does not,” Snape said through gritted teeth.
“Oh? I’m not so sure,” Dumbledore prodded silkily. “He bears a striking resemblance to his father. Of course, I don’t have to tell you that. It must be difficult for you… seeing James’ face day after day, a constant reminder of what was taken from you, and the mistake you can’t take back.”

For the first time since the beginning of the conversation, Snape’s face reflected unguarded, raw emotion. Resentment and outrage marred his features, contorting his mouth into a snarl, while his cheeks stained with an uncharacteristic flush.

Satisfied, Dumbledore gave him the smallest of smiles. “I do sympathise with you, Severus, but I cannot excuse your actions because of pity.”

“Pity?” Snape spat. “I don’t need your pity, you egoistical bastard! I’ve given the last decade of my life to protect that boy!”

“Don’t get self-righteous with me, Severus. I’ve watched you for many years now. You’ve treated Harry with nothing but contempt. Your so-called protection looks more like punishment for all of the wrongs you perceived were done against you by his father! You’ve given nothing compared to what you’ve taken,” Dumbledore retorted.

“And what about you?” Snape asked.

Dumbledore raised an eyebrow.

“What have you taken?” Snape pressed.

“I know not what you speak of,” Dumbledore replied.

“Oh, I think you do,” Snape said, an accusation in his eyes. “How many risks have you taken to see Potter’s prophecy fulfilled?”

Dumbledore’s blood pressure rose at the smug tone to Snape’s questions. The way the man distorted and belittled his life’s work was infuriating. “I have done all that I can to assist Harry. He is like a son to me.”

Snape scoffed and then chuckled dryly. “And what parent would rather their son face death than carnal pleasure? I wonder… just how far you would go to see it come true.”

“It is out of my hands, Severus. Fate dictates—”

“Fate?” Snape said, amused. “You talk a lot about fate, but you do not really trust it. Potter remains in danger under your care.”

Dumbledore felt another flare of indignation at the accusation, even though…

“I’ve watched over Harry long before he arrived at Hogwarts. How dare you, of all people, question my loyalty or judgment about Harry’s wellbeing!”

“Pardon me, it must have slipped my mind—your judgment is infallible,” Snape said with a taunting leer.

“As much as it must pain you, Severus, you know that I am rarely wrong. That is why you came crawling back to me after you realised the error of your ways,” Dumbledore said triumphantly.

“I came back for her! Only her! Never forget that,” Snape snapped before chuckling and raising his hand to his forehead as if he had just received incredible news. “All this time… I’ve been so set on making amends… I’ve been blinded to just how arrogant you are.”
Arrogant... The word grated on Dumbledore’s nerves more than any curse ever could. Over the years, a few close friends had confided in him that perhaps his genius, accomplishments, and standing in the wizarding world were in fact his greatest weaknesses. They hinted that he could be more than a little arrogant, biased in his preference for practices and people who favoured his views, and slightly self-absorbed in his work and accomplishments.

Nonsense. He believed himself to be a fair, equitable, and if he did say so himself, very humble wizard. Everything he did was for the betterment of others, even if they couldn’t recognise it themselves.

He felt neither the obligation nor the patience to explain himself to a man who had so carelessly thrown away his chance at redemption.

“That’s enough! I will not stand here and be insulted by a foolish man with a bitter heart. Your obsession with the dark will be the death of you, Severus, but I will not allow it to infect me or the Order any longer. You will hold your tongue until the others arrive,” Dumbledore ordered.

Snape looked surprised and, to Dumbledore’s displeasure, amused.

“You have no authority over me; I can speak freely here,” he said, a challenge clear in his voice.

“I am Head of the Order,” Dumbledore replied.

“Not for long,” Snape said. “Not after I tell them what you’ve done. I didn’t piece it together before —I don’t think I wanted to. But now… now the truth has become quite apparent.”

“You know nothing, Severus. And your word means nothing. You are, and always will be a former Death Eater. They will understand when I tell them what I have done. They trust me because I have shown commitment and wisdom. You, however, have no friends here.” Dumbledore could barely contain smugness in his voice. He knew it was terrible form for the victor to gloat, but Snape had pushed him to the edge.

“Will you tell them everything, Albus?” Severus asked in a dark tone, his eyes unwavering and set upon the Headmaster.

Dumbledore tilted his head in question, the feeling of déjà vu settling over him as he recalled one of their last conversations at Hogwarts. A conversation he had purposefully cut short.

“How you’ve 'fixed' Hogwarts to watch over everyone,” Snape said nonchalantly, though there was a hint of anger in his voice. “Yet somehow you remained unaware of the identity and secret actions of Quirrell during Potter’s first year? Quirrell wasn’t a particularly clever man… or what about Barty Crouch, Jr? I wonder, how both of them managed to slip by your surveillance?”

For the second time that day, Dumbledore’s stomach balled itself up into a tiny knot and a sweat broke out on his forehead.

“Or how we scoured the school for nearly an entire year, searching for the Chamber of Secrets, nearly losing four lives, only to discover it was in the third floor bathroom all along,” Snape continued. “Tell me, Albus, how on earth did your precious security system miss that?”

As black as Snape’s eyes were, they seemed to gleam as he listed his observations. Dumbledore felt the last of his patience waning, and the urge to hex Snape rose up strong. He quelled it, squeezing the wand in his hand so tight he could feel it leaving an imprint in his palm.

“You purposely put Potter in mortal danger,” Snape accused, obviously no longer interested in
Dumbledore's frustration boiled over. It was clear Snape had been watching very closely and had come to some conclusions of his own. Erroneous conclusions that needed to be set straight.

“And tell me, in your infinite wisdom, Severus, how else was I supposed to prepare Harry to face a Dark Lord on his own? Hmm? He cannot defeat what he fears. He cannot conquer if he does not see himself as a conqueror. Before he defeats Tom, he needs to have the courage, skill, and confidence to do so. Facing death was the only way to instil those qualities in him!”

Snape grimaced, raising his hand to point a long and adamant finger at Dumbledore. “So you’re admitting that you’ve risked Potter’s life on the chance of fulfilling a prophecy he could have avoided! Merlin… you are truly mad.”

It was the second time that day Dumbledore had been called mad, and it was enough to snap his patience. Before he thought of what he was doing, Dumbledore lifted the wand in his hand, his voice bellowing.

“Enough!” he shouted.

He didn’t think twice about the spell—he didn’t even have to say it. All of his anger seemed to be drawn through the wand in his hand like a magnet. Snape’s eyes widened considerably as a fog of blue rushed towards him like a chaotic thundercloud. He moved to the side with the speed that surprised Dumbledore, and the spell hit the bottom of the cupboard like shattering glass.

He cursed Minerva under his breath for stealing his wand. Snape was much older and slower than Harry, and if he only had his wand instead of Remus’, such mistakes would never happen!

He spotted sudden movement, and his eyes were drawn to Snape’s wand. The man’s stance was stiff with tension, his wand hand perfectly still and poised like one prepared for duel.

“That’s enough!” Dumbledore heard Remus shout from behind, halfway down the hall. Dumbledore willed himself not to turn around and shoo him away. All he could do was wave his hand back to signal that Remus’ presence was not needed.

“Stop this now!” Remus shouted, his footsteps becoming louder as he moved up the hallway.

“Stay back, Remus,” Dumbledore warned. “This doesn’t concern you.”

“I’ve been listening,” Remus said. “Whatever the situation is, duelling isn’t going to solve this. Snape, please, put away your wand!”

Snape kept his eyes on Dumbledore as he spoke to Remus. “My apologies, Remus, but Albus thinks he can waltz in here and just tell me what to do. I must correct him.”

Dumbledore kept his eyes locked on the man, taking in every inch of his body as Remus continued to approach them. The situation was already tense enough—Dumbledore did not want to have to take on the both of them, so he tried to diffuse the tension.

“You’re right, Remus,” Dumbledore said almost calmly. “This will all be settled shortly, when the Order members arrive.”

“I didn’t send for them,” Remus admitted.

“What?” Dumbledore asked, turning around in shock.
Remus’ face was tight with frustration. His eyes held the same sad disappointment that McGonagall’s had only minutes before.

“I said I didn’t summon them. I wanted to hear what you had to say to Snape. I can’t believe the chances you’ve taken with Harry’s life. How could you?” Remus demanded.

“Remus…” Dumbledore started.

Remus’ eyes went wide as he looked past Dumbledore’s shoulder to where Snape stood.

“Snape! No!”

“**Incarcerous!**”

Dumbledore whirled around just in time to see several ropes flying towards him like a vessel of snakes had been unleashed. He held his arm up to his face and pointed his wand hand out to freeze them in place.

“**Immobilus!**” Dumbledore shot back. A simple flick away sent the frozen ropes to the floor with a thud.

He glanced down at them before returning his eyes to Snape.

“Severus. I’m disappointed in you.”

“Not half as disappointed as I am in you,” Snape sneered, his wand still pointed in preparation for another hex.

Dumbledore clicked his teeth. “Don’t play the fool again, Severus. Your magic is no match for mine. Lower your wand… now.”

But Snape refused, and as the seconds stretched out to a minute, Remus pleaded once more for the men to stop. Dumbledore could hear him advancing.

“Snape isn’t the enemy, Dumbledore!” Remus shouted.

“Quiet, Remus! You don’t know what I know!” Dumbledore said, his gaze never leaving Snape.

He was startled when Remus pulled his wand arm back, trying to drag him further back into the hallway.

Instinctively, Dumbledore pushed Remus back with a powerful gust of magic and then waved his hand to cast an invisible shield.

“He certainly doesn’t,” Snape drawled. “He doesn’t know everything you’ve done, how you’ve—”

Snape’s mouth continued to move, but Dumbledore couldn’t hear anything over the pounding of his blood in his ears. He could barely feel his hand, but he knew it was shaking with barely controlled anger. A thunderclap boomed inside head and all he could see was red. Snape had to be shut up, immediately.

“SILENCE!”

As soon as he said it, a fountain of magic spilled out from the tip of Remus’ wand, but it wasn’t the cohesive jet stream Dumbledore was used to, and it moved more slowly than any spell he had ever cast.

Snape was quick with his reflexes, flicking his own wand like an expert duellist and holding it out
before him to shield himself from the wide and unwieldy hex.

The flood of grey and white matter hit his shield like a tidal wave rearing up in the ocean, and before Dumbledore could dart out of the way, it crashed all around him.

He glared at Snape, realising that Remus’ wand was a liability. He would have to just use his own wandless magic to fight Snape. But before he could summon the effort, Snape pointed his wand and shouted an unfamiliar hex. Dumbledore gasped and then jumped to the side just as thick links of metal chain sprung out at him like spears.

As his back hit the wall, the chains crashed to the floor with a heavy clang, only an inch or two away from his feet.

Dumbledore opened his mouth to hurl a counter spell but no sound came forth. He gritted his teeth as he realised he had been cursed by his own hex. It was no matter; he didn’t need his wand or verbal spells to conquer Snape.

This time he didn’t even have to summon his magical centre. He could feel his power spilling out of him like sonic waves towards the chains. The thick metal trammels reared up and arched high in the air like two basilisks ready to strike and in the next second they did, diving hard and fast towards Snape.

Dumbledore watched intently, following their moment as they approached their target. Snape tried to launch a counter spell to fling the chains back but they were not deterred. Dumbledore tried not to smirk in satisfaction as Snape resorted to dodging them. He couldn’t. Each chain was the width of the man’s body, and they cornered him on either side. With each sideways step or jerky motion Snape made, the chains would snap just centimetres from his face and body, threatening bodily harm. He was trapped.

In the distance, the portrait of Mrs. Black could be heard shouting about ruckus and mischief in her home, while Remus continued to shout and pound his fist against the heavy shields. Snape was breathing heavily, but it could be scarcely heard over the snapping and rattling of the chains as they threatened to strike his face.

One distraction, one misstep, was all Dumbledore needed to bring Snape down. The temptation to have the chains wrap around the man and squeeze the life out of him made him feel both giddy and guilty. Those were dark thoughts. He was not a dark wizard. He thought himself much better than that.

Remus yelled as the chains rose higher and then coiled around Snape’s body like two snakes sharing a meal. Snape gasped as the chains tightened around his body, lifting him into mid-air. Dumbledore couldn’t stop himself from stalking towards the scene, the object of his anger, and the current bane of his existence.

It was hard not to take some satisfaction in seeing the normally reserved and aloof Severus Snape gasp for breath as the magical chains continued to twist around his thin form. For a brief moment, Dumbledore considered the benefits of letting the chains work towards their end. If Snape were to expire within their grip, there would be no one in the Order to challenge him. They would want to know why, of course, but that would be simple. He could tell them that Remus had walked in on an attack, and Snape threatened his life. With Snape gone, there would be no one to interfere with his plan to restore reason and sanity back to Hogwarts. It would be difficult to repair what had been broken, but not impossible. Not for him.

He frowned; however appealing ending Snape’s miserable existence was, it was a dark thought, one
that would produce an even darker act. There were other ways to save Harry’s prophecy from ruin besides killing Snape.

Blinking, he completely pushed the dark thought from his mind and then waved his hand at the chains, which immediately disintegrated, falling like ashes to the floor. Snape dropped and stumbled, falling to his knees and panting for breath.

Dumbledore walked towards him and stopped only a few feet away, looking down at Snape’s crown. Before Snape could look up, he pushed his way through, penetrating the man’s mind.

It was dark in there, except for the balls of light. Dumbledore recognised them immediately. They were doorways leading to Snape’s memories and thoughts. He focused his energy on reaching into one of them. But when he went and tried to open it, he was roughly pushed back, and the doorway disappeared, the darkness surrounding Dumbledore growing.

In Snape’s mind, he didn’t need a voice. He could feel the man, his essence, his brooding temperament, his bitterness all around him, nearly suffocating him. Dumbledore scanned the remaining balls of light, and he could feel Snape watching him, waiting to put up more shields if he dared try to access another one.

‘I don’t care about your memories, Severus. I simply want to tell you to stop this foolishness now. Stop fighting me. Please, accept your fate with dignity.’

There was stillness and silence in the dark of Snape’s mind as Dumbledore waited for a reply—and then he got one.

One by one, each door disappeared, and with it, the faint light in Snape’s mind became dimmer until Dumbledore was engulfed in complete darkness.

‘Severus?’

Dumbledore groaned as something strong and angry punched him, sending him stumbling back in the darkness. Before he could catch his balance, he was being pushed out of Snape’s mind with such force he didn’t even try to fight it.

Dumbledore, now ejected from Snape’s mind, backed away a few steps in stunned bewilderment at the power of Snape’s Occlumency, staring in shock at the man still kneeling on the floor.

Slowly, Snape lifted his head, one glaring black eye peering through a curtain of black hair covering his sweaty face. “Accept my fate with dignity?”

‘Yes, you stubborn fool!’ Dumbledore wanted to say. As it was, without a voice, all he could do was nod.

“I will accept my fate,” Snape said quietly, which elicited a sigh of relief and an approving smile from the Headmaster.

“Only if you accept yours! Impedimenta!” Snape shouted, pointing his wand up at Dumbledore in a quick move worthy of a Seeker.

Before Dumbledore could raise the wand in his hand in defence, he was falling back onto his arse, hitting the floor of the corridor with hard thud. It hurt—his bones weren’t what they used to be, but he knew staying down for too long would be his undoing.

He summoned his body to its feet, rising as if a springboard had lifted him.
Snape’s eyes were wide with amazement but full of resolve. Dumbledore merely shook his head. Snape’s ability to attack him was severely handicapped by his need to announce each spell. It was best to end the duel quickly than drag out his humiliation. When Snape opened his mouth to cast a spell, Dumbledore decided to make a quick and decisive move to put the former Potions master in his place, once and for all.

With his fists curled into the tightest balls possible, he pushed out everything he had towards Snape. A huge gust of wind, worthy of a hurricane, swept through the kitchen, sending Snape stumbling back against the kitchen table. Chairs, cups, and various knick-knacks went crashing back against the far wall, counter, and floor. Snape was trying to hold on to the table behind him with one hand, his wand hand shaking before him against the current of the wind.

Dumbledore refused to give him reprieve as he continued to move forward, pushing the wind on with each step. He noted with satisfaction that Snape’s feet were beginning to slide as he tried to find balance against the onslaught of air pushing him and the kitchen table back. He wouldn’t be able to hold on long—no man could.

And whether that meant he would slip under the table and hit the counter with his head, or fly over it and hit the wall, or perhaps even fly out of the kitchen window, was no longer a concern of Dumbledore’s. He simply wanted the man put down.

Snape opened his mouth and his lips wobbled, spittle flying out as the wind rattled his every movement. He could hardly hold his wand, let alone speak against the force Dumbledore was unleashing.

‘Any second now,’ the Headmaster thought to himself. ‘I’ll be rid of you.’

Their eyes locked, and for one knowing moment, all of the unspoken animosity, power plays, and distrust seemed meaningless. How had they come to this? He had once valued this man for his persistence, his work ethic, and his hidden humanity. But no more…

He thought he saw a flash of regret in Snape’s eyes, and then it was gone, replaced by a fire that made Dumbledore pause. Snape was still powerless as he struggled to stand, holding on to the table, his body shaking in a losing battle against Dumbledore’s magic. He couldn’t speak, nor brandish his wand, but his mouth was moving… There were no words coming out, not that Dumbledore could hear, and in the face of the wind, Snape’s lips formed no discernable syllables that indicated he was casting a spell.

What was he trying to say?

Snape forcibly turned his wand and then flicked it as his lips moved once more. Dumbledore narrowed his eyes, baffled by what the man was trying to accomplish when the wind changed direction. But instead of coming towards Dumbledore, it began to gather all of the broken dishes, knick-knacks, and fragments of wood from the demolished chairs into a circular funnel that spun in front of Snape.

Dumbledore backed up, and it moved towards him. He retreated further, pushing his hands out to propel it away, but the funnel only spun faster still, inching towards him with each turn as it drew in more and more debris.

What was this magic? Dumbledore was at a loss. He stepped back again, and his calf hit something hard. He looked behind him to see Remus standing beyond the invisible shield he had set up. Only Remus was standing much further back now, his eyes wide with fear as he stared at the approaching funnel.
"Severus!" Dumbledore yelled at the top of his lungs. No sound came out. And now he could only see flashes of the man through the rapidly moving tornado headed his way. He looked to his left, but there was only a wall, and to the right the same.

A broken teacup nicked his robes, and then the chord to the Muggle toaster Arthur had insisted on keeping at Headquarters swiped him across the face, cutting his skin from ear to ear. He instinctively put up his hands in self-preservation, tears of pain and his own blood soaking his face.

Dumbledore couldn’t see anything anymore. He could only feel his body being lifted up as the funnel sucked him in and tossed him in circles against wood, broken china, and ceramic knick-knacks. The non-stop spinning and speed of the funnel made him nauseous. He was about to be sick when something hard hit him against the ear.

He tried to shield his head but his arms were useless against the current of the funnel, and it only took a few second later before something harder still broke against his forehead. His eyes burned with tears, blood, and debris, and in the undercurrent, his body felt every bit as old and frail as it really was.

By the time the third piece of wood collided with his head, Dumbledore was grateful for the darkness that overtook him.

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Hermione yawned silently against Harry as she rubbed her head against his chest to confirm, once more, that he was really alive and laying right beside her. The horrifying moments of watching him fall from the sky and seeing his deathly looking face in the infirmary may as well have been a bad dream. She cracked one eye open to stare up at him, and instead found herself looking at Draco. He was watching her, his body mirrored hers, curved against Harry on the other side, his head resting on Harry’s shoulder. There was a small smile on his face.

She looked at him suspiciously. “What are you smiling about?”

Draco gave her a dismissive eye roll. “Why can’t I smile? I’m perfectly content right now.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes,” Draco replied, lifting his arm out. “Look around, this is a good set up.”

“I’ll say,” Ron chimed in from behind Hermione as he snuggled in closer. “This is a really posh bed. I always pictured Salazar Slytherin as being a creepy sort of bloke, but he can’t be too bad if his taste in beds is anything to go by.”

“I think we should make this room ours,” Draco said.

“I thought that had already been established,” Hermione said smartly.

Draco raised his eyebrows. “Well then, let’s make it official. I propose tying you to the bed as our claim on this room.”

Harry stirred and made a low purring sound in the back of his throat as he stretched between his two lovers. “We were supposed to do that an hour ago, but you two puckered out.”

Draco rose up on his elbow, frowning down at Harry. “I beg your pardon, Harry, but we did no such thing. You’re the one who fell asleep while we were getting warmed up.”
A nagging concern compelled Hermione to speak, despite already knowing what Harry would say. “You think that perhaps you should have stayed in the infirmary?”

Harry huffed. “Hermione, I told you, I’m just very tired. She pumped me full of potions and my head still hurts a bit. Other than that, I’m fine…ouch!”

Hermione shot up from her laying position to sit upright. Harry’s face was contorted in pain, and he was gripping his forehead in a way she hadn’t seen in months.

“What is it?” Draco asked in alarm.

“It’s his scar!” Ron said.

“It’s burning again, Harry?” Hermione asked.

Harry just nodded, his fingers working over the scar as if it were a sore muscle.

“What’s that mean?” Draco asked

“It’s not good,” Ron said. “It probably means You-Know-Who is up to something.”

“They’re that connected?” Draco asked in shock.

Before Hermione could reply Draco gasped sharply, and grabbed his left arm. His eyes widened and a small wounded cry escaped him. He pushed back the sleeve covering his tattoo.

Hermione, Harry, and Ron all leaned over, gawping at Draco as he stared down at the Mark rippling over his skin like a reflection in a lake.

Finally, he ripped his eyes away from it to look back at them.

“What’s that mean?” Hermione asked with a panicked voice. “Do you have to go to him or something?”

Draco’s brow furrowed in confusion and fear. “I—I don’t know. I don’t think so…I mean, how can I? There’s no way McGonagall’s going to allow me to leave.”

“Unless your father comes to pick you up again,” Ron said.

Draco closed his eyes and groaned.

Hermione could feel a slow rising dread blooming in her belly. “You think he would?”

“I’m not sure,” Draco said, still wincing as the Mark continued to shift. “I suppose anything is possible.”

“Well what do you think he’d be calling for?” Harry demanded, rising to sit up. “A raid? Or perhaps something worse?”

“I said I don’t know!” Draco snapped.

They all froze, staring at him anxiously. Draco put his head in his hands to collect himself and took a breath. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright, Draco,” Harry said in a soft voice. “Whatever it is, we’re not going to let you go at it alone.”
“And what if you have no choice?” Draco asked. “You three can’t sneak back into Slytherin with me, and if my father shows, you definitely can’t tag along.”

The churning in Hermione’s stomach turned to knots and she looked back at Ron who gave Draco a sympathetic frown. Next to her Harry had forgotten the pain of his scar and was staring down at Draco’s arm in concern.

Draco sighed. “Whatever it is, I’ll probably have to deal with it alone.”

“Draco, you’re never alone,” Hermione said.

“That’s right,” Ron said.

“And you’d do well to remember that,” Harry said. “Remember your Patronus and the coin.”

“And the ring…we’ll always be connected, no matter what,” Hermione said.

Draco gave them all an appreciative small smile and then sighed. “I suppose we better get back. It’s probably getting pretty late.”

Harry nodded reluctantly and then moved down the bed to hop off and pick something up from the floor. He extended his hand out to Draco, the object he was holding shimmered even in the darkened torchlight of the room.

“Your Invisibility Cloak? Harry, I couldn’t…” Draco said.

Harry narrowed his eyes. “Don’t even pretend you’ll refuse it.”

Draco smiled, standing up to come around the bed and accept it. “I’m not sure how this is going to help me…”

“Well, it’ll give you cover to sneak back into your room without a lot of questions,” Harry answered. “And who knows how else it’ll come in handy. Just keep it close and hidden.”

“Thank you,” Draco said, giving Harry a tight hug. Hermione smiled up at them, and then rose to her knees to make her way over to the edge where they were standing. She pressed herself into Draco’s back, wrapping her arms around them both. She inhaled Draco’s scent deeply, closing her eyes, trying to memorise every curve and movement he made. The thought that he may have to return home sickened her with fear.

They embraced for several moments, until the bed began to wobble. Hermione opened her eyes to see Ron half standing, half kneeling on the bed, looking at them sheepishly.

“You think it’s safe for me to join in?”

“Oh, Ron, it’s just hugging!” Hermione said with a smile. “I’m sure Harry won’t pass out from that…get over here.”

When Ron moved over to lean in, trying his best to wrap his arms around all three of them, for a moment, Hermione forgot all of her fear. She held her eyes closed, enjoying the warmth of their affection.

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“I can’t believe what just happened here,” Remus said, looking every bit as shocked as Snape felt.
"Yes, well, this year has been full of surprises," Snape muttered. He felt invigorated, enraged, and... vindicated by his victory over the Headmaster. He had managed to cast a non-verbal spell he had only read about. And it actually worked, against arguably the greatest wizard of their time.

His eyes flickered to Dumbledore’s unconscious form on the floor amidst all of the debris from the kitchen that had landed when he ended the spell. The Headmaster had definitely suffered a concussion, but between the healing spells he and Remus had cast to close the wounds, Snape was sure it was nothing life threatening. They bound him with the Body-Bind Spell, and Remus took back his wand, so even if Dumbledore did wake up, he could not conjure magic. But just to be sure, Snape and Remus carried him upstairs to Sirius’ old room, and placed heavy wards against the door.

“What are we going to do now?” Remus asked once they had finished and had taken a seat in the living room. “This has the makings to destroy the Order.”

“Perhaps not...”

“This won’t go over well. When the others find out, they’re going to be devastated. It could lower morale.”

“They don’t have to know just yet,” Snape said with a strong suggestive tone.

“Everyone is about to find out,” Remus said. “Dumbledore has been removed as Headmaster.”

“What?” Snape gasped, his face uncharacteristically aghast.

Remus nodded. “That's right. Well, why else would he show up here in the middle of the day? It wasn’t for a spot of tea, I can tell you that. His wand was confiscated and they were about to summon the Governors to conduct a full investigation.”

Snape sat up a little straighter, trying to stop his mouth from unhinging. “Really?”

“That’s what he told me... but I wonder what happened exactly.”

“I sense McGonagall had something to do with this,” Snape said softly, thinking. “I don’t think he would just hand over his wand to anyone else. Hmm... this is an unexpected development.”

“You're telling me,” Remus said with a small incredulous chuckle. “McGonagall must have found out how mad he's become. I wouldn’t have believed it unless I had heard it for myself,” he said, shaking his head.

“That means McGonagall is acting Headmistress. This could work to our advantage,” Snape murmured.

“How?” Remus asked. “When everyone finds out what Dumbledore has been up to—”

Snape narrowed his eyes and leaned into Remus. “Remus, no one needs to know about this. Not just yet.”

“It’s too late for that now, Snape. Dumbledore’s reputation is in tatters. We have to tell the others. It could affect how we work, how we fight. We’re all in this together, and we don’t keep secrets from each other.”

“Incorrect,” Snape said. “The Order has a long history of not sharing all of its assignments, information, or plans with all members. Maintaining covert operations is crucial to our survival. I, myself, have had several secret assignments given to me by Dumbledore himself. And I’m sure I’m
not the only one."

Remus nodded reluctantly.

“Besides, there’s more at risk here than Dumbledore’s reputation or the morale of the Order. We must do what we can to assist in the fruition of the prophecy. Not Potter’s… the other one.”

Remus sat back, contemplating Snape’s words. “After all of this, you still think they can pull it off?”

Snape nodded. “Yes. I do.”

Remus shook his head. “I don’t know. Perhaps we should leave it alone. If a prophecy is going to happen, it just will. We probably shouldn’t be meddling. Dumbledore is a good example of that. He should have never been that involved in Harry’s prophecy. Who knows how he’s screwed it up, doing what he did? If there’s one thing I have learned, meddling always leads to more trouble than it is worth.” Remus’ face darkened and his eyes dropped to the floor.

Snape swallowed, remembering the fate of Pettigrew and the million-Galleon question he had been holding in since he had returned to Grimmauld. It sat like a Hippogriff between them, and when the silence couldn’t get any more pregnant, he simply just had to ask.

“Remus… While I was in the company of the Dark Lord, it was reported that Pettigrew had been… eaten.”

Remus’ face paled at the word *eaten* and he closed his eyes, looking like he was about to be sick.

“Did you…?”

“Yes,” Remus groaned, dropping his head into his hands.

Snape stared down at the man in disbelief.

“Why? I know I told you to track Pettigrew down, but to purposely not take your Wolfsbane…”

“I didn’t skip it,” he murmured. “I never do.”

“What?” Snape said.

“I said I didn’t skip it!”

Snape gaped back at him. “Then *how?*”

Remus face flushed deep red and he looked down at the floorboards in shame. “Something just… snapped inside of me. It broke through whatever binding the potion provides. The beast just… came out.”

“How it that possible? I brew it myself!” Snape snapped, surprising himself at the indignation and embarrassment he felt over his potion failing.

“Snape, Wolfsbane is a brilliant concoction, and you’re a damned good potions maker, but it’s not natural to contain it.”

Snape frowned, looking past Remus to contemplate what he was saying. He had always felt uneasy around the man during the full moon, even under the seemingly powerful Wolfsbane potion. The memory of his sixth year and how dangerous Remus actually could be still haunted his dreams occasionally.
“My potions never fail,” Snape said defensively.

“Never say never. When the full moon comes out… It’s hard to explain.”

“Try,” Snape ground out.

Remus closed his eyes once more. “You have no idea how hard it struggles to break free even when I’m on Wolfsbane. It doesn’t matter how regularly I take the potion or how long I take it, it’s always going to be struggle for me. As much as I hate to admit it, what’s inside of me is natural… the potion isn’t.”

Snape’s eyes lit up as something occurred to him. “I see. Remus… I need to get a message to McGonagall… but I’m not sure if she will hear from me. There’s no telling what lies Dumbledore has fed her.”

“I can contact her. What is it?”

“Tell her to give Granger this message: When the time is right, if there is any left, use it, all of you.”

Remus mouthed the words, his eyes questioning. “You’re not going to tell me what that means, are you?”

“It is of no consequence to you, but it might be for the four if the Dark Lord’s plan is successful.”

Remus gasped. “What plan? Does this have something to do with Hogwarts?”

Snape nodded solemnly.

Remus swallowed. "Dumbledore said the school is in danger…”

Snape pursed his lips, his previous anger with the headmaster reigniting. Of course Dumbledore would have known. He watched everything, and Snape had no doubt that the man had known that Crabbe, Nott, and Goyle had been up to something, yet he had done nothing about it, nor had he warned anyone. Perhaps he even thought it would be another test for Harry to pass. Typical.

“Yes, I believe he is correct.”

Remus threw his hands up. “Great—so why are we just standing here? We need to do something!”

Snape sighed. “Lupin, getting melodramatic will get us nowhere.”

“Melodramatic! We’re talking about lives here, Snape. Students. They’re just kids for Merlin’s sake! We have to tell the others.”

“No! We can’t. If we do that, everything will be compromised. Draco’s cover, and mine.”

“Are you saying we have to sit here and wait for it to happen? What if they kill someone? Or take hostages? These are Death Eaters!”

“I know that!” Snape snapped, scowling at Remus. He gasped and then winced, his right hand quickly finding the place on his left arm where his flesh had begun to burn. Remus’ eyes went wide.

“I’m being summoned. I must go,” Snape said resolutely.

“But you just got back!” Remus said in concern. “You haven’t even healed completely yet.”
“I’ve healed enough to defeat Albus Dumbledore in a wand duel. I think I’ll be fine. No one keeps the Dark Lord waiting.”

“Stop calling him that!” Remus said with irritation. “He’s no Lord, he’s just a—,” he paused, and both he and Snape leaned back as the chimney lit up.

Mad-Eye Moody’s head appeared in the fireplace, his one good eye glaring at Snape with contempt. “What are you doing here?”

Snape’s upper lip curled, but it was Remus that spoke. “He’s helping us; Moody… he’s still a part of the Order.”

Mad-Eye gave Snape a sceptical look. “I’d thought you’d be with your little Death Eater friends, killing and blowing things up.”

“Pardon me?” Snape asked.

Mad-Eye grunted. “Never mind, I didn’t come here to argue. I came to tell Remus you’ve got to come down here.”

“Come down where?”

“The Ministry…” Mad-Eye said, looking over his shoulder before returning his attention to them.

“Why? What’s happening?” Remus asked.

“Just get down here, and quickly,” Mad-Eye said. “And owl Dumbledore and McGonagall. Tell them we’re under attack.”

“No…not just the Ministry…”

“Well where then?” Remus demanded.

Mad-Eye chuckled dryly. “You might as well as ask me where isn’t there an attack. The Dark Lord has launched a full-scale war on the entire country, and not just the cities…the countryside. We need every man and woman we can get… Bloody hell! I have to go…”

“Moody!” Remus called. But it was too late, the light in the chimney extinguished, leaving only shadows and residue soot.

“Merlin…War?”

Snape rose abruptly, casually brushing his left arm once again. Remus stood with him, staring down at it. “I suppose that’s why you’re being summoned, then?”

“That would be a logical conclusion,” Snape said.

“So…” Remus said.

Snape raised one eyebrow in question.

“Perhaps we’ll see each other out there.”

Snape made a distasteful face like one who had eaten something rotten. “Remus, if we do cross
paths, I suggest you stay out of my way. As satisfying as it sounds, it would not go over well if I were forced to hex you.”

Remus snorted, giving Snape a half smile. “Just make sure you take your own advice, Snape. Stay out of our way and keep your head down.”

“I’ll do what I can,” Snape said wearily before his eyes moved past Remus towards the stairs.

“Remember, keep quiet about Dumbledore for as long as you possibly can.”

Remus shook his head. “This feels so wrong.”

“I’m just asking for you to cover for the next day or so, until we both can get back.”

“And what if you or I don’t make it back?” Remus asked.

Snape grimaced. “Then I suppose the truth will emerge on its own, as it always does. I have to go.” He pulled out his wand. “Remember the message for McGonagall to give to Granger. And Remus…”

“Yes?”

“I don’t say this often but… thank you.”

“For what?” Remus asked.

Snape tried to control his scowl. Why did the man have to push him to say things that were clearly difficult?

“For believing in me,” he said before Disapparating to the front gates of Malfoy Manor.
Through these fields of destruction, baptism of fire,
I've watched all your suffering as the battle raged higher.
And though they did hurt me so bad,
In the fear and alarm,
You did not desert me, my brothers in arms.

“Brothers in Arms” by Dire Straits

I won't duck and run
I won't duck and run
I won't duck and run…
I must have told you a thousand times,
I'm not running away.

“Duck & Run” – Three Doors Down

Once Snape appeared before the Malfoy gates, he began the familiar ritual of clearing his mind. Mind-cleaning required self-awareness, and his most prominent thought, as he slowly made his way up the walkway, was why he was being summoned back to the Manor so soon. The sudden request left him unnerved and uneasy, and once more, his thoughts drifted to Draco, and then to Dumbledore. What exactly the Headmaster had said or done to get himself removed from his vaunted position, Snape wasn’t sure, but he had to hold onto the hope that it did not involve the revelation of his plan or Draco’s assignment. That could mean certain doom for him and Draco, and could prove to be dangerous to Potter, Granger, and Weasley as well.

As he climbed the short steps to the Manor, the heavy oak door creaked open as if the house itself had been waiting for him. Entering, Snape kept his eyes sharp, expecting the unexpected. He paused. There, at the end of the foyer, stood at least thirty persons dressed in heavy black robes. Those facing his direction were wearing the formal silver and white skull Death Eater masks that were normally reserved for public ventures and formal meetings. He willed his mind to override his confusion and dismay as he approached. He had to stop, though, when he reached the end of the foyer that provided entry into the main sitting room. There were many more than thirty persons present; the crowd of masked faces totalled at least a hundred, if not more.

His eyes scanned over them, searching for something familiar, but nearly everyone was wearing a mask, except for Greyback and Bella. Finally, he found who he was looking for. The Dark Lord was already staring at him expectantly when he noticed him.

“Severusss…”

“My Lord, I came as soon as I could,” Snape said, bowing his head reverently.

“Yes, you made much better time than before.” The Dark Lord smiled. “We’re nearly ready.”

“Ready, my Lord?”

“We have just received word from one of the Governors that Dumbledore has been removed from Hogwarts, and that miserable old cow, McGonagall, has been left in charge. As fate would have it, Nott, Crabbe, and Goyle have also finally established a successful connection into the school.”
Remembering he was without a mask, Snape slipped into the most familiar Death Eater mask he had ever worn, acceptance and understanding. It kept him from looking every bit as apprehensive as he felt.

“You shall lead them.”

Snape couldn’t help but raise his eyebrow at the order. Why him?

As if reading his mind, the Dark Lord responded. “You know the school better than anyone here, since you’ve walked its halls every day for over a decade.”

“I see.”

“Is there something the matter, Severus? You sound… hesitant.” The underlying challenge was barely concealed by the mock concern in the Dark Lord’s voice.

“On the contrary, I am most pleased to carry out your wishes,” Severus replied. “I am just surprised how quickly this has materialised. And…we received word that there was a full scale attack launched on Great Britain.”

“Indeed. It’s the perfect diversion, and it allows us to as they say ‘kill two birds with one stone’. We are most fortuitous to have allied with many dark creatures and even the Muggle underground,” the Dark Lord said, smiling. “The universe has spoken. It is my time to assume control over Hogwarts.”

Indeed, it did seem eerily fortuitous that Dumbledore’s expulsion had coincided with the success of Nott, Crabbe, and Goyle’s assignment. Something was definitely afoot.

“We have many allies now. Enough to create distraction during our take-over of Hogwarts. By the end of the night, I will have Harry Potter, his Mudblood friend, as well as complete control over Hogwarts. With Hogwarts in our hands, we will be able to control the Ministry, and the best part about it is that the Order and Aurors won’t know what happened until it’s over.”

Snape’s mouth went dry and he secretly wished he could send Remus a Patronus but there really was nothing that could be done. Considerable planning had gone into this without his involvement, and even if they were alerted, the Order and Aurors would be outnumbered.

“And I have decided that Lucius will be assisting you in this mission.”

“My Lord?” Lucius said, clearly surprised. Immediately, Snape’s eyes were drawn to a masked man on the Dark Lord’s left. There was just a hint of platinum blond hair peeking out of Lucius’ hooded robe, confirming his identity.

“Lucius, I am offering you a chance to redeem yourself. You can decline, of course,” the Dark Lord said, his eyes dancing with the spark of a dare within them.

“Of course, my Lord, I would be honoured,” Lucius said quickly, but his voice was not as assured; in fact, to Snape, it sounded rather shaky.

“I’m sure Draco will be most happy to see you,” the Dark Lord said with a nasty wide-toothed grin. “You will seize the castle by any means necessary, but Potter, Granger, and Weasley are not to be touched. They should be captured and brought to me.”

“Here?” Snape asked.

“No, I will be arriving at Hogwarts once you send word that the castle has been secured.”
Snape was nearly speechless at the thought of the Dark Lord inside of Hogwarts, and he had focussed especially hard not to look surprised. But it was the command to capture all three of the Trio that was most disconcerting.

He decided to probe, with great caution. “My Lord, I thought you were only interested in Potter?”

“Oh, yes, Severus, I am most interested in Harry,” the Dark Lord said. “He must be destroyed, but by my hand and my hand alone.”

“Of course,” Snape said. “But the other two?”

The Dark Lord raised his head, waiting for Snape’s question, and Snape felt like he had just stepped in Devil’s Snare.

“What of them, Severus?” The Dark Lord prodded.

“Forgive me for prying, my Lord, but I am curious… Are you still concerned about the other prophecy?”

The Dark Lord’s mouth turned down into a sour frown, and for a moment, Snape regretted his instinct to press. The Dark Lord glided closer to him, his non-existent nose no more than an inch from Snape’s.

“It is quite silly of me, isn’t it, Severus?” he said in a soft voice that Snape was sure could only be heard by those closest to them. “Especially since there is no evidence of its existence…”

“You? Silly? Most definitely not, my Lord,” Snape said quickly. “And you are correct: there is no evidence of such a prophecy.”

The Dark Lord leaned in as if to give Snape a kiss, and the other man fought not to draw back in disgust. He had never been that close to the Dark Lord before, and even this close, the fiend’s putrid breath was offensive.

“Then perhaps you will be able to explain why I still have the most persistent nagging notion that the sexual prophecy does exist.”

Snape did not reply—how could he?

“What do you think me paranoid and foolish, Severus?” the Dark Lord whispered as if seeking reassurance from a childhood friend.

“No, my Lord, you should trust your intuition. It is very powerful,” Snape insisted.

“Intuition?” the Dark Lord chuckled. “Superstition and intuition can be helpful guides, yes, but ultimately, one must rely on logic. Shall I lay out the logic behind my belief in the existence of the sexual prophecy?”

“If you wish, my Lord,” Snape said.

“In the past year, there has been a strange constellation of events that cannot be ignored. The myth of a sexual prophecy endures despite the lack of evidence of its existence. It continues to resurface, and always during the reign of a Dark Lord. It was said before, when I first ruled the wizarding world. Now that I have returned, once again I hear rumours of it among the old, disrepute Seers as well as the insane.”
That there were rumours of the prophecy and that it was known among Seers and those who were mentally unstable did not surprise Snape; what did surprise him was that the Dark Lord put himself within earshot of any of these unsavoury people. Or perhaps he had spies.

“And then there is the demise of Pettigrew. It still vexes me,” the Dark Lord said with uncharacteristic sadness, and if Snape were wearing his own Death Eater mask, he would have silently scoffed at the fiend’s show of sorrow.

“Poor, poor, Peter,” the Dark Lord lamented. “To have met such a gruesome and terrible fate…”

Lucius clicked his teeth and shook his head in an effort to sympathise. “Truly, it was most unfortunate to hear of his passing, my Lord.”

The Dark Lord’s sad eyes turned sharp as he glared at Lucius and waved a dismissive hand in his face. “Do not pretend as if you care, Lucius. It is no secret you detested the man.”

Lucius straightened but did not answer.

“And he was really quite pathetic,” the Dark Lord continued. “But he was faithful to me and served me well. I have no doubt that he was in the Forbidden Forest because he had discovered something of interest to me. Perhaps a lead concerning the prophecy, or maybe he was spying on the Mudblood and her lovers. Whatever the reason, it is unfortunate that his only reward was to be eaten alive. But I do not think it was an accident; in fact, I am convinced he was murdered.”

Snape tried not to swallow as he thought of Remus, before pushing the man from his mind, clearing it once more.

“And then, last but definitely not least, there is the peculiar case of the Mudblood, Hermione Granger. The best friend and lover of Harry Potter. She fits the prophecy’s description of the Mudblood said to have more than one lover. Do you see where I am going with this, Severus?”

“Yes, my Lord. You make a most compelling case for the prophecy’s existence.”

“Yes, very compelling. So you see, it is quite logical to conclude that, like Potter, his Mudblood lover and their other lover, Weasley, must be destroyed. There must be no loose ends left behind.”

“I understand, my Lord. As you wish,” Snape said.

“Good. Now that we’re clear about that, you will take the others to Knockturn Alley, where you will go to Borgin and Burkes. Borgin will provide you with entry into a Vanishing Cabinet.”

Snape made a small noise behind his closed mouth to indicate he wanted to speak.

“Yes?” the Dark Lord questioned.

“Pardon me for asking, my Lord, but… surely the Vanishing Cabinet is not large enough to accommodate all of us?”

The Dark Lord grinned. “Yes…you are correct, Severus. But you are an accomplished wizard, yes?”

“My Lord?”

The Dark Lord sighed. “Improve, Severus. Improvise.”

Snape waited for the punch line as the Dark Lord drew closer. “You will widen the Vanishing Cabinet, widen it considerably. Enough to accommodate up to ten Death Eaters. You will first enter
it alone. When you come out on the other side, you will then widen the cabinet that resides in Hogwarts, and lead the others through. If it does not work, you will try it again, until it does, do you understand?”

Snape swallowed discreetly, his mind buzzing from the implications of his task. “Yes, my Lord.

“Lucius will be the last to step inside,” he said, turning his eyes onto Lucius. “And before you enter, Lucius, you will send word to the owner of the shop that the mission has been fully engaged.”

Lucius bowed his head. “Yes, my Lord.”

The Dark Lord turned before the crowd of black robes-clad men and women before him. He raised his hands towards the ceiling like a conquering warrior. “Tonight, Hogwarts—tomorrow, the world!”

There was a mighty uproar of shouts, and fists and wands waving in the air, and Snape's stomach roiled with nausea. How would they ever get out of this?

The Dark Lord clapped his hands. “To Knockturn!”

“To Knockturn!” another rowdy victorious cheer answered.

Snape’s eyes scanned the crowd and then found Lucius, who was staring back at him through his mask. There was nothing else to be done but the Dark Lord’s bidding. Lucius gave him a curt nod of acknowledgment and Snape returned it as he took a deep breath, tucking the last of his faith and hope in fate away as he threw back his cape. ”To Knockturn,” he said, flourishing his wand for Disapparition.

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When the Trio emerged from the dungeons, a pin drop could be hard, and the darkness was so thick, they could hardly see two feet in front of them.

“Ouch!” Harry said, wincing as he rubbed his scar.

Ron and Hermione stopped and stared at him in sympathy.

“Your scar is still hurting?” Hermione asked.

“Yeah,” Harry said, with a pained expression.

Hermione and Ron exchanged a worried glance.

“How long do you think we were down there?” Harry asked, changing the subject as they finally approached the entrance hall, where there was a spot of light from the moon shining down through the stained glass windows of the corridor, creating an eerie kaleidoscope of light.

Hermione frowned. “Too long, it seems. It must be past curfew.”

“Well, at least we don’t have to worry about Filch… or Dumbledore,” Ron said.

“I would rather have Dumbledore catch us out past curfew any day over McGonagall,” Harry murmured. “We’ve lost too many points for Gryffindor this year. If we lose any more, they’ll kill us.”

“And they would be well within their rights,” said a cold stern woman’s voice somewhere in front of
The Trio froze, peering through the faint glow of red, green, and blue offered by the reflection on the windows, until finally McGonagall said a Lumos, revealing keen, speculating eyes.

“Pro-Professor…” Harry stammered.

“Where have you three been? It’s past curfew! And Potter, you were given bed rest!”

“Yes, ma’am, I, er—”

"Professor, Harry couldn’t get any rest in his dormitory," Hermione interrupted. "Everyone was fussing over him, so Ron and I thought it would be best if he found someplace else to rest. We took him down to the dungeons and set up a bed for him in one of the old detention rooms.”

McGonagall pursed her lips, running her eyes over each of them suspiciously before looking up at the far ceiling.

Hermione followed her gaze and noticed that it rested intently towards the banisters of the sixth or seventh floor, though which one she couldn’t tell.

They all stood there, listening in silence and staring up at the banisters, wondering what in the world McGonagall was looking for; then their new Headmistress turned her head back sharply, startling them. “I have a message for you three.”

Hermione, Harry, and Ron all exchanged puzzled looks.

“Lupin owled me,” she said.

“Remus?” Harry said, his face becoming worried.

“Yes. He wanted me to deliver a message from Pro—” She cleared her throat to correct her gaffe. “Mr. Snape.”

The Trio all stared at her in rapt attention. She softly huffed and spoke as if inconvenienced. “When the time is right, if there is any of it left, use it… I trust you know what that means.”

“Er… no,” Ron said, exasperated.

“Use it?” Harry repeated. “Use what?”

Hermione gasped. “Professor, did Snape say how we would know when the time was right?”

“No,” McGonagall replied in annoyance, “and frankly I—”

There was a heavy thud and then the sound of glass shattering from up above, where McGonagall’s attention had previously been. Her eyes widened in shock and she began walking towards the stairs, calling back, “Back to your common room, all of you! No one is to leave their House until further notice!”

They watched as she took the stairs two and three at a time, her wand drawn. She cursed as the stairway moved, however, planting her just adjacent of her original intended target.

“Bloody stairways! Seventh floor. Now!” McGonagall ordered, her wand drawn at the stairwell as if she were scolding a student. It promptly redirected itself, turning right and fastening onto the open landing of the seventh floor.
Hermione grabbed Harry’s hand, pulling him out of the centre of the hallway and into the shadow of the darkness against the wall. Ron stood where he was, still watching as McGonagall climbed the stairs with determination until she reached the landing.

“Blimey, what is going on?” Ron asked in a hushed whisper.

A series of high volume pings like Sickles being flicked at the wall rang out through the darkness, and then a groan of frustration. Hermione swallowed, squeezing Harry’s hand. They all looked to the left where Filch’s office was buried, waiting for him to emerge, but he was nowhere in sight, and for once, Hermione was disappointed not to see him.

Within seconds, McGonagall’s voice cut through the eerie stillness of the castle like a warning siren.

“Crabbe! Goyle! Nott! Come out this instant! I know you’re in there!”

For a moment there was nothing but silence, and even Hermione held her breath. She jumped when a surprised cry from above reached crescendo with a shriek, then dying as quickly as it came. Only silence remained in its wake, and Hermione immediately thought the worst.

“Harry… McGonagall… I think she’s been attacked,” she whispered, feeling very short of breath.

Before Harry or Ron could reply, the sound of heavy footsteps running drew their attention to the seventh floor once more. Two heavyset bodies were hurrying alongside the banisters towards the far left stairwell leading down to the ground floor.

It was Crabbe and Goyle.

The Trio stared at their two classmates as they descended the stairs, and then Harry stepped forward as if preparing to confront them once they reached the bottom. But a shout from above gave him pause, and then they all heard a flurry of footsteps. Hermione mouth dropped open as two Death Eaters came into view, and then her heart sank as she heard the unmistakable rich commanding voice of Snape.

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“Wait,” Snape said in the same contemptuous tone he used to use in class. “No one moves until the second group arrives. Remember what we discussed. We are here to secure the school, not to perform a massacre. Exercise constraint when possible.”

Ron gasped, his eyes staring up in disbelief. Hermione grabbed Harry’s arm, pulling him back again. She motioned urgently for Ron to follow suit. They all drew back into the shadows once more, just before Crabbe and Goyle ran past them towards the dungeons, where Slytherin House was located.

The sound of multiple pairs of footsteps grew from above, and they all strained their heads to peek without revealing themselves in the low light gleaming down the centre of the floor from the windows. Hermione instinctively gripped her wand tightly as a flurry of black robes and silver skull masks lined up along the banisters in wait.

“We have to go, now! We’re not supposed to be here,” Hermione said urgently.

“Hermione, they’re not supposed to be here!” Harry protested softly. “It’s happening! Right now. Draco told us it would and it is. We can’t just run and hide. We have to do something!”

“Harry, before we do anything, we have get back to the common room and warn the others. But first, there’s something I need to do!”
“What?” Ron asked incredulously.

Hermione moved quickly, brushing past them to slide along the wall and around the corner leading down to the dungeons.

“You two go on, I’ll catch up with you soon,” she whispered, disappearing from their sight and into the darkness of the corridor leading down to the dungeons from which they had just emerged.

“Oh, no, you don’t,” Ron whispered furiously, catching up to her and grabbing her arm, “Just where do you think you’re going, Hermione?”

“No time to explain,” she said, breaking from his grip and beginning to run.

She expected them to badger her or try and grab her again, but Ron and Harry simply ran right behind her all the way down to Snape’s old Potions classroom.

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Under the protection of Harry’s Invisibility Cloak, Draco felt comfortable taking his time walking back to his common room. It was pitch black and unnervingly quiet when he and the Trio had emerged from Salazar’s bedchambers but, fortunately for him, he had a much shorter distance to walk than they did.

When he arrived, the Slytherin common room was empty, so he pulled the cloak off and folded it, stuffing it into his Quidditch robes pocket as he strode up the steps to his dormitory. He took great care in opening the door so as not to disturb his dorm mates, slipping inside the room like a thief.

He froze immediately as his eyes found Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott’s empty beds. Only Blaise was present, deep in slumber, barely veiled by his half-drawn sheer white curtain.

Draco gnawed the inside of his lip, wondering where his dorm mates had gone. Perhaps the Room of Requirement. But they had never been at it this late before. The Trio immediately came to mind, and he found himself hoping that they had made it back to their common room without running into the other three. His thoughts then drifted to the safety of the school.

What if Crabbe, Goyle, and Nott succeeded in doing whatever it was they had been assigned?

He shook his head. Crabbe and Goyle were as thick as they came. They had been working on this assignment for a better part of the entire semester, perhaps even longer, with no success, and the addition of Nott hadn’t brought them any more luck. He brushed aside his concerns as he disrobed and changed into his night clothing before climbing into bed for sleep.

But sleep didn’t come. Draco lay wide-awake in bed for the next hour, waiting for his dorm mates to come back. He thought of getting up to go and look for them, but then dismissed it, remembering that it was made clear that he was not included in the assignment, and the Dark Lord would not react favourably to meddling. Besides, it would force him, once more, to lie about where he’d spent the last part of the day after Potter’s accident.

His curtain shivered as a thump over his head shook the ceiling. Draco stilled and then sat up as a distant scream rose and died. It was followed by another that sounded as if it had come from outside, on the grounds. His heart raced, and in one instant, he was keenly aware of every dark imprint of shadow and solid object around as he stared into the darkness. His ears strained, primed for more informative sounds. There was definitely activity outside. As muffled as it was, he could hear the dissonance of varying voices shouting over each other, and if he was not mistaken, there was even more coming from within the castle itself.
He looked over to Blaise’s bed to see his housemate sitting up as well, staring at him through his partially drawn curtain.

“What’s going on?” Blaise asked.

“I’m not sure,” Draco answered truthfully. “But it doesn’t sound good.”

He climbed out of bed and slid into slippers but then thought better of it, and changed into the Quidditch gear he had discarded near his bed.

“Why are you putting on your Quidditch robes?” Blaise asked.

“Because something is happening, and I don’t want to be caught in the middle of it wearing my night clothing and slippers,” Draco said irritably.

Blaise scrambled to get out of bed and began dressing as well, but they both paused when a light from downstairs appeared, illuminating the foot of their door.

The door swung wide open, smacking against the wall, and then Crabbe and Goyle rushed inside.

“What the—”

“Shhh,” Crabbe said to Blaise, pulling the door closed behind him.

“Don’t shush me!” Blaise said. “What are you two up to? Where’s Nott?”

“He’s probably outside!” Goyle said, his chest rapidly rising and falling. His eyes were wild and excited as he stared back at Draco with the beginning of a victorious smile.

“Why is Nott outside, Goyle? And what’s going on?” Draco pressed.

“It’s happening, Draco!” Crabbe said in a hushed voice.

Draco froze, feeling trapped and claustrophobic. His mind and emotions were a jumble of confusion and worry as he thought about the Trio, where they were, and what would be expected of him. Was the Dark Lord actually here, inside Hogwarts?

“What’s happening?” Blaise asked with annoyance, glaring at the two boys.

“Hogwarts is under attack. The Dark Lord has finally infiltrated these walls,” Goyle said with no small measure of pride.

Blaise moved forward, his fist balled at his sides threateningly. “What? Are you both barking? Is this what you two and Nott have been up to for the past few months?”

“That’s none of your business, Zabini!”

Blaise scoffed. “It’s everyone’s business now. This is our school, you daft dim-wits!”

“Not anymore,” Crabbe defended. “This school belongs to him now.”

Blaise grimaced and then shook his head, plopping down on his bed once more, his face still reflecting shock. “Congratulations. You just handed Hogwarts over to a madman!”

Draco swallowed as he forced his next words out. “I suppose we should be out there, then—with them?”
Goyle shook his head. “No… that’s why we’re here. You have to stay here, Draco.”

“What?” Draco asked, both relieved and sceptical about this instruction.

“We were given direct orders to make sure you didn’t leave the House.”

“By whom? *Him*?” Draco asked.

Goyle and Crabbe both shook their head in silence.

“Oh,” Draco said, grateful that either Snape or his father was here, watching over him. But that feeling was gone as quickly as it came, replaced by a queasy sensation in his stomach as he pictured them standing side by side, inside the school… attacking people.

He held down the bile that rose in his stomach. “And what are you two supposed to be doing? Guarding me?”

“More like hiding,” Blaise said snidely.

“We’re not hiding, we’re following orders!” Crabbe said defensively. “We were told to stay right here.”

Blaise snorted. “Right.”

“For your information, Zabini, we’ve done our part!” Crabbe said proudly. “And it wasn’t easy! Besides, he has an army out there; they don’t need our help.”

“An army?” Draco repeated incredulously as he thought of the fifteen to eighteen followers he was used to seeing—and that was on a good day. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, there’s got to be at least a hundred Death Eaters coming through the school right now.”

“No way,” Draco said. “He doesn’t even have that many!”

“Wrong. He has followers from all over… more than we ever imagined,” Crabbe said.

“And that’s probably not even all of them. Just the ones he summoned for this assignment,” Goyle explained.

Draco gaped at them in disbelief. “But…how would he get them in here…”

Crabbe grinned. “Snape widened the cabinet.”

“He can do that?” Draco asked.

Goyle. “Yeah. And there’s no telling what other sort of tricks they’ve got up their sleeves. I say the whole lot of Slytherin stays put until the dust settles. The Dark Lord isn’t going to stop until he gets what he wants,” Goyle added.

“And what is that, exactly?” Blaise asked.

Crabbe and Goyle exchanged a glance. “Potter, Weasley, and Granger.”

Draco had to clench his jaw tight so his mouth wouldn’t drop open. Suddenly every sound around him was like a symphony from a nightmare: the shouts, the sound of hurried footsteps, and the noise outside. Where were they? He had to warn them—
A sharp scream from downstairs sent all of the boys running to the door to follow the sound.

When they arrived, they saw that the common room door was open, but what was beyond it was hardly visible through the crowd of Slytherins gathered. But it wasn’t all of them. Many Slytherins hung back from the door in the far corners or on the couches, leaning over to watch the events from a safe distance.

“Close that door! Now!” Goyle ordered.

They all gasped and moved away from the door, and Pansy slammed it shut. She turned around with wild eyes.

“What is going on?” she demanded.

“No one opens that door until we say,” Crabbe said, ignoring her question.

“And who do you think you are?” demanded the seventh year Prefect, Kendall Vaisey, who came to stand dangerously close to Crabbe.

Crabbe cracked his knuckles while Goyle withdrew his wand, pointing it at the Prefect’s face. There was a collective gasp.

“We’re with them, and unless you want us to toss you out there, you’ll shut your gob and do as you’re told,” he threatened.

Murmurs and whispers broke out as people slowly made their way to the couches and corner desks to sit, many more gathered in a growing huddle by the hearth.

Draco could feel several eyes on him, Crabbe, and Goyle, and he hated it with every fibre of his body. Everyone in his House thought he was just as responsible for the attack as the other two, and he could hardly deny it right here.

“And what about the others?” Tracey Davis asked in a quiet voice that made everyone turn and stare at her in surprise.

“What others?” Crabbe asked, in confusion.

“The professors… the other prefects… the other students from the other houses. You want us to just sit here and wait while they fight?” she asked shrilly, her face going pink with frustration.

“Don’t tell me you want to go out there, Tracey,” Millicent asked incredulously.

“No! I don’t! I don’t even want to be here right now!” Tracey cried, as Pansy put an arm around to comfort her.

“Well, you don’t have a choice. Everyone is staying right here until it’s over,” Goyle said.

“Tracey’s right,” said Kendall. “We can’t just leave everyone out there to fend for themselves.”

“And why not?” asked Terrance Higgs. “Let the bloody Gryffindors take on the Death Eaters if they think they can.”

“I’m with Terry. I’ve seen enough,” Adrian Pucey said. “There’s too many of them out there.”

There were several murmur and head nods in agreement, but Draco also noticed that there were almost as many who were not taking a position, remaining silent and watching the debate in
“I think we should all just stay here,” said Pansy. “Besides, some of them may be… kin to many here,” she said uneasily, looking up at Draco, Crabbe, and Goyle.

Draco fought not to roll his eyes. Like she cared.

“But some of them are our friends, Pansy,” Daphne Greengrass said.

“Right,” Kendall added. “And they’re out there defending our school without our help.”

Goyle narrowed his eyes, forcing Kendall to back up. Goyle walked closer towards the centre couch where Daphne was sitting, hovering over her in an intimidating stance. All eyes were on him now.

“That’s enough of that talk. Slytherin comes first. Pans is right, some of those Death Eaters are our parents! If you want to leave, fine, but you’ll be on your own. Once you step outside that door, you won’t be allowed back in…and you’ll forever be considered a traitor to this house.”

No one responded or moved, but their eyes did, and to Draco’s surprise and relief, he knew he was not alone in contemplating how to make an exit.

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When the Trio emerged from Snape’s old potions classroom to return to the entrance hall that would lead them to Gryffindor, almost twenty minutes had past. And things had changed considerably. Death Eaters no longer lined the banisters, but there were still Death Eaters emerging from the Room of Requirement. Hermione, Harry, and Ron all stood frozen for a moment as they watched black robed figures make rounds, descending in groups to each level as if in search of something.

“Oh shite… oh shite,” Ron whispered over and over.

“Shhh, Ron,” Harry whispered. “We have to crouch down low and make a run for it.”

“We can’t take the stairs!” Ron whispered back fiercely.

“I know that!” Harry said, looking frustrated,

“We can’t take *those* stairs,” Hermione said. “Follow me…”

The boys looked at each other and then crouched behind Hermione as she slinked along the wall. Once they were out of the aerial view of the centre banisters, she made a run around the far right wall where there was a small narrow staircase leading up into the darkness.

“Where does this lead?” Ron asked nervously.

“To a west corridor that no one uses,” she explained.

“How do you know about this?” Harry asked as he and Ron followed her up the stairs.


Hermione shook her head. “No, Draco and I used it after our study sessions… Dumbledore forbade anyone to use it beginning of the year, remember?”

Once they reached the top, sure enough, there was the narrow corridor Hermione spoke of. There was an extra set of steps at the end of the hallway, and a hidden doorway that ended right near the
common room door.

Another distant yell had them picking up their pace and running towards the Gryffindor common room.

When they arrived, the password no longer worked and the portrait shook her head vehemently, shooing them away. “Go away!”

“Let us in, you old coot!” Ron shouted.

“Who’s there?” asked a small voice from behind the door.

“It’s us… Hermione, Harry, and Ron,” Hermione said.

The door creaked open, and the Trio ran inside, shutting it behind them. Everyone was gathered in the common room, their eyes reflecting confusion, worry, and questions.

“Hermione! Where have you been?” Parvati exclaimed. “Are you all right? What’s going on out there?”

“You three were out past curfew,” said Amelia Lawes, one of the Prefects, who was standing in the centre of a crowd of clearly vexed Gryffindors. Hermione scanned the room for the other Prefect, but Kenneth was nowhere to be found.

“That’ll cost you and us house points!” Amelia scolded.

“Screw your House points,” Ron exclaimed. “We’re under attack!”

A chorus of shouts and exclamations broke out, and Amelia tried in vain to maintain order.

“Everyone, please, remain calm!”

“How can we stay calm?” Seamus asked angrily. “Cormac and Kenneth are out there! And Miss Prefect here won’t let us go out there and help them. I say forget the rules, let’s get out there!”

The murmuring grew louder and the crowd in the room began to move forward.

Hermione turned to look back at Harry and Ron in panic. The thought that two of their housemates, fighting Death Eaters alone was too terrible to imagine and the pressure of the room was suffocating.

“Whatever you have to do, Hermione, do it quick!” Ron urged.

She nodded quickly, putting up her hands to halt the crowd. “Hold on! There are Death Eaters out there. Lots of them!”

“Yeah? Then let’s have at them!” Seamus yelled to a chorus of shouts in agreement.

“Listen, all of you—” Hermione tried to say in a calm voice.

“There’s no time for talk!” said Andrew Kirk. “We’ve got to defend our school!”

“Yeah!” several people agreed, and the crowd resumed its push towards the door. But the Trio stood their ground in front of the common room door. Ron crossed his arms while Harry pulled out his wand, glaring at all of them. “No. Not until you hear what she has to say. Go on, Hermione.”

Hermione gave Harry a thankful nod and turned around once more.
Parvati leaned in, staring at the phials in Hermione’s hands, and the bulges in her, Ron and Harry’s robes. “What’s that you three have in your hands and robes?”

“I’m about to explain. I need you to trust me right now,” Hermione requested.

The Gryffindors all stared at her strangely.

“Remember the potion assignment Snape set for the sixth years at the beginning of the year?”

There were several puzzled glances exchanged.

Hermione took a deep breath. “Right. Draco and I—”

“Draco? You mean Malfoy? You want us to trust you, and you’re still consorting with the enemy!” Seamus accused. “Why should we listen to anything you have to say?”

“Oh, shut it, Finnigan! That has nothing to do with this!” Ron barked.

“Sure it does! His dad is probably out there right now. And why do we have to listen to you, anyway?”

“Because we care about this school, too, tosspot! Now be quiet and listen to Hermione or I’ll make sure you can’t use your voice for the rest of the night,” Ron said, raising his wand at Seamus’ face to a spattering of shocked gasps.

“You don’t have to threaten him like that, Ron,” Dean said. “Seamus is just concerned.”

“We all are,” Katie Bell said.

Harry nodded. “And we understand, but it’s important we keep our wits about us, especially right now. Hermione has something she has to say, so please… just listen.”

At Harry’s insistence, they all settled, remaining silent and staring up at Hermione in anticipation.

“Thank you, Ron and Harry,” Hermione said. “As I was saying, Draco and I have been monitoring the development of the Protective Shielding Potion to completion. We have enough saved up to distribute to most of you.”

“Protective Shielding Potion?” Ginny asked.

“It’ll shield you, much like a suit of armour. Only it’s invisible.”

“Are you sure it works?” Neville asked. “My Shielding Potion never developed properly.”

“I know,” Hermione said. “But we kept up with all of the samples and corrected the ones that were deficient. I’m not sure how long it will work, but I’m pretty certain it can’t hurt.”

“Are you positive about that? I’m not sure I trust anything coming from Snape,” Ginny said.

There were agreeing murmurs.

“Listen, everyone, there’s a lot you don’t know about Snape,” Harry said. “And right now we don’t have time to explain. Just do what Hermione says, please.”

“Alright,” Hermione said, handing out some phials to the older students and pulling more from her pocket to distribute.
They all eyed the strange brownish liquid sceptically.

“You actually want us to drink that?” Dean asked, grimacing.

“Yes. One swallow should be enough for everyone,” Hermione replied.

“Eww, it looks like turd water!” Lavender exclaimed.

“Ugh! Lavender, that’s disgusting!” Parvati said, with a reproachful look. “Why did you have to go and say that right before we drink it?”

“How’s it work, exactly?” asked Jack Sloper, a third year.

“It interacts with your body’s natural magical centre to form a protective shield,” Hermione explained. “But you won’t have to take it.”

“Why not?” whined Jack.

“Because you’re not going out there,” Ron said firmly. “Only fifth, sixth, and seventh years are allowed to leave.”

Amelia nodded in agreement. “Right, you heard him. First, second, third, and fourth years will wait in here.”

There was a chorus of groans among the younger students, until Amelia silenced them with her hand. Hermione surveyed the group of older students holding phials in their hands.

“We all do it together. One swallow.”

“One.” They all raised the phials to their mouths with grimaces.

“Two…” There were several deep breaths and eyes closed in anticipation.

“Three!”

Hermione closed her own eyes and took one huge swallow, gulping it down to rid herself of the taste as soon as possible. There was a warming sensation at the back of her throat, moving to her chest and belly, and then it was gone. She opened her eyes and everyone was looking around at each other in anticipation.

“Well, that wasn’t so bad.” Ron sighed in relief. “Harry, do you feel any different?”

Harry shook his head. “No… do you?”

Ron shrugged and then reached out and punched Harry in the arm.

“Ouch! What did you do that for?” Harry cried.

Ron shrugged. “To see if I could touch you. It’s supposed to be like invisible armour, right?”

Hermione groaned in frustration and then pulled out her wand and aimed it at Seamus, who cried out in fear. “Petrificus Totalus!”

A white stream shot out of her wand, but it instantly disintegrated over Seamus as if it had hit a ward.

“Oh! It does work!” Neville said with a grin.
Everyone shouted and clapped, looks of relief flickering over their faces.

“Let’s go!” Harry said, giving them all one last glance before opening the door.

They all shouted in unison as they spilled into the hallway, shouting and pushing their wands in front of them as they charged ahead. Screams and shouts of spells being cast—and finding their marks—filled Hermione’s ears. She ran alongside Harry and Ron; behind her were several others, including Ginny, Parvati, Demelza Robbins, and Katie Bell.

Seamus, Dean, and Neville ran down the other set of stairs on the left, followed by the rest of the older year Gryffindors, including Colin, Romilda, and Lavender.

The castle was alive with portraits running to and fro to observe the events taking place below. Hermione followed their eyes and looked down over the stairwell banisters and nearly stumbled as she took in the mass of Death Eaters scattered below. The floor was covered in black robes topped by skull masks, as well as many professors, staff, and older students, some still wearing their night clothing.

As they descended the stairs, they had to dodge several wayward spells, and then Hermione remembered. “We don’t have to duck; we’re protected.”

“Speak for yourself,” Ron said. “I’m not taking any chances.” He dipped low as a red spark shot over his head.

When they reached the bottom of the stairs, they were greeted by six Death Eaters—one for each of them.

The one closest to Hermione pointed his wand and shouted out a binding hex that crackled all around her and then disappeared. Her confidence renewed, Hermione directed a Stunning Spell towards him that sent him flying back onto his arse. She immediately cast a Binding Spell to restrain him before he could get up. On her right, Ginny, Ron, and Harry all deflected the spells directed at them, then launched counter attacks of their own, sending one Death Eater into a funny jig before he doubled over and crashed to the ground; another was frozen solid. The one facing Harry completely lost his wand.

The Death Eater then moved forward as if to seize Harry.

“Stupefy!” Harry shouted, sending the man crashing into the foot of the south staircase that usually would eventually lead down to the Hufflepuff common room.

Their eyes were all drawn to it, and to the two Death Eaters engaged in wand duels with Anthony Goldstein and Lisa Turpin. Lisa was able to disarm her opponent, but no sooner than she did, the Death Eater duelling with Goldstein cast a disorientation hex that sent Goldstein stumbling down several steps before knocking his head against one, rendering him unconscious.

“Oh, no! Anthony, are you all right?”

Hermione ran to see to him, but someone yanked her back, causing her to lose her balance.

Before she could collect herself and turn around, the grip on her slackened, and behind her, she heard the heavy thump of a body crumpling to the floor. Quickly glancing back, she saw her defeated would-be captor and Ginny's flushed, determined face.

“Thanks,” she said. Ginny nodded and then turned her head sharply to the right, to the top of the east stairs.
Hermione looked up; as far as her eyes could see, on every level, there were Hufflepuffs, Gryffindors, and Ravenclaws engaged in battle. Some were duelling, while others took to shoving and kicking as they tried to wrangle out of the grips of Death Eaters, who seemed to be trying to drag them to the various landing posts at the top of each of the stairs. There were Death Eaters coming in and out of the Great Hall, some dragging reluctant and fighting students. Hermione’s eyes were drawn past all of the hustle and commotion to the stillness in the centre of the banister on the second floor right above the Great Hall, where one lone Death Eater stood, looking down at all of the chaos.

She narrowed her eyes, wondering if it was Snape. She thought of rushing up to confront him when a scream from outside the walls drew her attention to the main doors of the castle.

The large oak entrance doors were wide open, and there was shouting and screaming coming from outside. She saw the back of Harry’s head as he ran towards them, and then she turned to follow, stopping in her tracks at the picture outside. There were several duels taking place; one that stood out was between two Death Eaters and Cormac McLaggen. Harry immediately ran towards him to assist, when Hermione felt the tingle of a hex hitting her from behind. Then the tingle was gone, and someone was pulling at the back of her robes.

She threw her head back and a silver skull mask was staring down at her. She raised her wand and shouted out a conjunctivitis curse. The man promptly let go of her, howling as he tried to soothe his burning eyes.

Then Ginny screamed. When Hermione turned her head, she saw the girl struggling as she attempted to cast a spell on the man who had grabbed her. But the Death Eater’s hand was on Ginny’s wrist, squeezing and twisting. She whined in pain, unable to manoeuvre her hand properly.

"Leave her alone!" Ron shouted, and Hermione glanced back to see him geared to launch an attack, but then his wand was knocked out of his hand by the man’s Expelliarmus. Hermione gasped. Of course—the Expelliarmus charm was immune to the protection of the shielding potion because it was aimed at the wand, not the person.

Hermione and Ron exchanged a brief glance of understanding, and then Ron snarled and ran full force into both Ginny and the man, knocking them onto the floor. Ginny quickly crawled away, out of the clutches of the man as he wrestled with Ron, and she then jumped on the Death Eater’s back. Ginny began cursing and pulling at his facemask while Ron struggled to crawl from out underneath, his arm reaching out for his fallen wand.

Hermione pointed her wand at the man but it was hard to take aim with Ginny on his back and Ron underneath him. Finally, Ginny pulled up his mask, and they all paused. It was Theodore Nott’s father, a man they had grown accustomed to seeing on Platform 9¾ each year. After the shock dissipated, the man reached around to yank Ginny from his neck, sending her falling awkwardly on her side against the floor.

Ginny shrieked in pain as Nott turned around to point his wand down at her. He shouted a powerful Crucio but it crumpled upon impact, leaving only red sparkling imprint against Ginny’s body. Nott’s eyes bulged in disbelief, and Ron took the opportunity to stun the man. He bound him for good measure and then ran to see about his sister.

“Ginny! Are you all right?” Ron asked, kneeling down to tend to her. Ginny winced but nodded.

“Go on, I'll be fine,” she said with much effort, her face red from the impact of the fall. The way she was holding her waist, it was clear her back was anything but fine. Ron pulled reached down and scooped her up in his arms, carrying her off.
With the reassurance that Ron was taking care of his sister, Hermione looked around to see who needed assistance. On the east stairs, her eyes were drawn to Katie Bell, who was running towards Hannah Abbott and the Death Eater she was duelling. Another Death Eater was sneaking up from behind.

“Hannah!” Katie cried.

Hannah turned around and was struck by a strange pink glowing hex, one Hermione couldn’t place. She swayed a little on her feet and then pitched over the banister, falling more than fifty feet. Hannah’s body landed with a smack and crack, and for a moment, all of the students nearby paused, gaping in shock and disbelief.

A strangled cry from up top sounded as Neville rushed down the stairs towards Hannah's broken form.

Hermione couldn’t take her eyes off of the distorted figure that used to be Hannah—or the dark pool of blood spreading beneath the girl.

If only she could have given the Protective Shielding Potions to everyone…

Quickly, she searched for opportunities to sneak some to students, and her stomach lurched when she caught sight of Luna duelling with a much larger Death Eater on the second floor. Without thinking, Hermione began to move forward, intent on giving her friend some of the potion.

“Hermione!” Ron called, pointing outside towards the door. Hermione paused and whipped her head around to see Harry running outside towards the mayhem outside. A Death Eater pointed towards him, and then another emerged from the shadows.

“Harry!” Hermione yelled, running towards him. Harry turned his head to look at her just as a Death Eater behind him pointed his wand. Before Hermione could aim hers, the Death Eater’s wand flew from his hand. On the other side of Harry stood Cormac, who had disarmed the Death Eater. The other Death Eater in front of him didn’t stand a chance, as Harry cast *Expelliarmus* and Cormac did a petrifying spell.

They nodded at each other and then went in separate directions.

Hermione breathed a sigh of relief to see that both Harry and Cormac seemed to be handling themselves without issue, but when she turned around she saw that the other students were not fairing as well. She searched for Luna, but didn’t see any sign of the girl. But as far as her eyes could see back into the Great Hall, and to both her right and left and on each level, there were Hufflepuffs, Ravenclaws, and Gryffindors, and they were outnumbered. The number of injured or lifeless bodies scattered along the floor and staircases seemed to be growing, with no relief in sight.

Where were the Slytherins? she wondered. Where was Draco?

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The atmosphere in the Slytherin common room was tense and rife with confrontation unlike never before. Draco watched as the demeanour of his housemates shifted from fear and self-preservation to uncomfortable apprehension and guilt. Several people were having silent conversations through eye contact; questioning, wondering, debating about whether they should be assisting their classmates.

Glances were exchanged, mouths would open, only to clamp them shut under the threatening glare of Crabbe and Goyle, who both paced the room, watching everyone like guard dogs.
Sitting on the edge of the couch, with his head resting on his hand, Draco rubbed his forehead as yet another scream from above penetrated their common room walls. This one sounded worse than the others; it was a horrified and grief-stricken scream, as if it had been a witness to death.

He had heard a similar scream before…

They all froze, listening harder to the wails and shouts that followed.

Urquhart, who was sitting by the hearth, stood up and began to walk towards the door. “Enough of this! I’m going out there.”

“I’m coming with you,” Kendall said, following him.

“Go on, then,” Goyle said. “But once you leave, we’re not letting you back in.”

“I’m going, too,” said Tracey, standing up to follow them.

Crabbe scoffed. “Right, you can’t even pick up a flobberworm with your bare hands, and you want to fight a Death Eater?”

“It’s better than standing around here like a coward,” she spat back.

Crabbe balled up his fists, moving towards her, but Kendall blocked him.

“Just what do you think you’re doing, Crabbe? She has a right to go out there and fight. We all do,” Kendall defended.

Crabbe shook his head at him and then looked back at Goyle, who shrugged. “Go on then, get the fuck out, and take Tracey and anyone else who’s stupid enough to go, as well.”

Urquhart huffed and shook his head, turning with Kendall towards the common room door, with Tracey following closely behind. Pansy popped out of her seat, prompting everyone’s head to turn.

“Tracey!” she called desperately.

Tracey turned around slowly, tears in her eyes. “I can’t stay here, Pansy.”

Pansy looked back from the door to Crabbe and Goyle and then around at the others. Draco watched her with wary interest, certain that for all of her posturing, she would not try to intervene or follow.

“I can’t believe you’re just going to let them go out there alone!” Pansy cried.

“Since when do you care, Pansy?” Goyle asked.

“Since now. They’re our friends!”

Crabbe scoffed. “Sit down, Pans. We all know you don’t give a rat’s arse about anyone other than yourself. No need to make a show.”

Pansy narrowed her eyes and balled her fists, but she didn’t move.

Millicent Bulstrode did. “Tracey, wait. I’m coming with you,” she said, running towards the door.

“Milli, no! Not you, too!” Pansy cried.

“I’m sorry, Pans. She’s right, I can’t just sit around and do nothing.”
“Come on, then,” Urquhart said, opening the door.

Pansy withdrew her wand and broke into a sprint towards the door to follow them.

When she did, it was like a spell had been broken—several Slytherin wizards and witches from every year stood up to follow her. Goyle quickly pointed his wand at the common room door.

It slammed shut with a clap, pulling Urquhart against it harshly, with Kendall, Tracey and Millicent bumping into him from behind. They all turned to stare at Goyle, who was moving through the gathering crowd. When he reached Pansy, he pulled her back roughly by the arm, causing her to stumble.

Draco stood up.

“Get your hands off of me, you meathead!” Pansy said, pointing her wand at Goyle.

No sooner did Pansy brandish her wand did Crabbe stick his into her face, tapping her nose punitively. “You don’t want to do that, Pansy,” he threatened.

Pansy scowled. “And what are you going to do, Crabbe? Turn me into a biscuit so you can stuff your fat face?”

“Even better,” Crabbe snarled. “I’m going to make sure I never have to see your pug face again.”

There was a collective gasp as everyone stared at Crabbe in shock at his open threat.

Draco couldn’t believe his ears, either. When had Crabbe become so… evil?

Pansy herself looked gobsmacked by Crabbe’s threat and slowly lowered her wand.

“You wouldn’t!”

“Try me.”

Draco didn’t give a second’s thought about what he was doing. He strode towards Crabbe, pushing the tip of his wand into the boy’s back.

Slowly, Crabbe turned around, his eyes reflecting disbelief and hurt. “Draco? Wh-what are you doing?”

“What I should have done when you and Goyle came back tonight,” Draco said. “Put your wand down, Crabbe, and let Pansy go.”

“What are you saying, Draco?” Goyle asked, his face twisted in incredulity. “That it’s all right to turn our backs on Slytherin?”

“No, but you gave them a choice, and they’ve made it. If Pansy and the rest want to go out there and help them defend the school, that’s their right!”

Goyle set his jaw, staring daggers at Draco, while Crabbe just gawked at him in disbelief.

“I knew you were a Blood Traitor. I just didn’t want to believe it,” Goyle spat, making a sudden move to point his wand at Draco’s forehead.

Draco pushed the point of his wand into Crabbe’s neck to emphasise he still had an advantage.
“Call me whatever you want, Goyle, but get your wand out of my face, or Crabbe gets hurt.”

Crabbe whimpered.

“You don’t have it in you, Draco,” Goyle challenged. “You’re one of them now—you’ve been soft since you took up for Potter and Weasley that day in Potions.”

They stood glaring at each other for what felt like a full minute before Goyle scoffed and shook his head at Draco. “Right. Milli and Pansy, sit your arses down, now! And the rest of you following her do the same. Urquhart, Kendall, and Tracey, get out!”

Urquhart huffed, turning back towards the door, with Kendall and Tracey behind him. Millicent and Pansy exchanged a look and agreeing nods, but instead of taking a seat, Millicent turned towards the door, and Pansy ignored Crabbe’s pointed wand and followed her.

Goyle growled and stepped closer to her, aiming his wand more pointedly. “I said, sit down, Pansy!”

“Expelliarmus!” Draco said, turning his wand from Crabbe to Goyle within a second.

When Goyle’s wand flew out of his hand, the boy instinctively balled his fists and stepped towards Draco as if he intended to deal out physical retribution. Draco already had a hex on his tongue in preparation for such retaliation. But before he could say anything, he felt the tip of Crabbe’s wand pushing brutally against his temple. “Not so fast, Draco…”

Draco froze, cursing the two in his head and wishing he had done something sooner to prevent this, but then Crabbe gasped in surprise.

Looking to his left, Draco saw over a dozen wands pointing back at him, or rather, at Crabbe and Goyle.

“That’s enough! Crabbe, put down your wand,” Blaise said, stepping up, his wand stretched out in front of him towards Crabbe.

Draco gaped at the darker wizard in surprise, and then at the others behind him. There were witches and wizards, Slytherins from every year. It wasn’t all of them, but enough, and they had the same determined look on their faces as Blaise as they moved forward.

“You and Goyle are the ones that need to take a seat,” Blaise said.

Crabbe’s wand shook in his hand as he stared back at all of the students whose wands were aimed at him.

“What’s wrong with all of you? Don’t you care anything about Slytherin? About pure-bloods? The Dark Lord wants to make our world better, and you’re turning against him. You’re turning against your own kind!”

“Oh, put a sock in it, Crabbe!” Pansy said. “You’re so full of shite! You don’t really care about Slytherin or pure-bloods, you never did!”

“Oh, I supposed you’ve turned into bloody saint overnight, Pansy. You’re the most selfish bitch at this school!” Goyle shot back.

“At least I’m not the idiot that will be blamed for the destruction of it!”

“You got it all wrong, Pans,” Crabbe pleaded. “We do care! That’s why we’re doing this!”
No, you don’t! Millicent said. “You and Goyle just want power. You’re bullies!”

“And if you cared anything about Slytherin, you wouldn’t have let the Dark Lord into our school!”

“Yeah!” said the growing crowd of students at the foot of the steps.

Draco scanned their faces. He could see and feel a renewed energy amongst them. A lump grew in his throat as he thought of Hermione, Harry, and Ron. They were already out there, along with everyone else, while he was in here bickering.

“Enough of this,” Draco said. “Whoever wants to stay here, suit yourself, but if you want to fight with the rest of us, let’s get to it.”

He gave an approving head nod to the Slytherin team captain, who opened the door, ushering in a chorus of screams, breaking glass, and shouts.

“Go on then, traitor!” Goyle snarled, stepping up to Draco, while the others began to file out.

“Goyle…”

“Yeah?”

“Get your fat arse out of my way before I transfigure you into the pig you really are,” Draco said, sticking his wand at Goyle’s throat. Goyle glanced back at Crabbe, who was still at the mercy of Blaise’s wand, and then lowered his eyes before backing down.

Draco looked back at Pansy and Blaise. “Are you two going to stay in here with these idiots?”

“Hell, no,” Blaise said, with a look of disgust at Crabbe.

“Definitely not,” Pansy said, flipping her hair and marching out with her head held high.

“Have fun duelling with your dad, Draco! I’m sure he’ll be really proud!” Goyle called as the common room door slammed behind Draco. As much as he hated it, Goyle’s words struck fear in his heart, and he found himself taking slow, measured steps, while up ahead Pansy and Blaise walked briskly.

Suddenly, Pansy stopped and turned around, and Blaise and Draco came to a halt with her.

“Draco…what you did back there… I just want to say—”

“Save it, Pansy… let’s survive this first, and then we’ll talk.”

Pansy gave Draco a small smile and glanced at Blaise, who jerked his head towards the direction of the battle. “Let’s get moving, then.”

Draco shook his head. “You guys go on. I’ll be out there soon. There’s something I have to do.”

Blaise and Pansy gave him a puzzled look before nodding reluctantly and resuming their brisk walk towards the battle.

There was smoke now. Hermione could smell the burning wood and the faint odour of ash, and she wondered if it was the lingering vestiges of hexes or if something inside of the castle had actually been set ablaze. She was assisting wherever she could, blocking and duelling for more vulnerable and more inept students, but for every person she assisted, there were more being bombarded and
pushed around by Death Eaters.

But no one was pushing her. It was curious, but she counted it as luck. Behind her, Professor Flitwick was making an impressive show of his duelling skills, taking on four Death Eaters at once, while at the entrance, Hermione could see that Professors Vector and Binns had formed a formidable team against another group of Death Eaters. It looked like Professor Binns was having a ball, causing confusion and spooking out the Death Eaters with his exaggerated ghostly antics.

She tried to peer past them, outside, for any sign of Harry. But the chaos out there was too scrambled and hurried. Flashes of red, white, and green, of grass, of people pushing and running amidst flying banshees, all clouded her vision. Besides Firenze and Madam Hooch, no distinctive faces stood out from amongst the swarm of Death Eater robes flurrying about.

She jumped as a great crashing sound echoed from above. Looking, she saw only students duelling with Death Eaters, but then came the unmistakable loud and boisterous voice of Professor Sprout, shouting out orders.

She gaped up to see who exactly she was ordering. Three Death Eaters were trying to dodge several bouncing bulbs flying at them, hitting them squarely in the head, chest and legs. Under any other circumstances, the sight may have been funny but right now it only offered reassurance.

A few feet to her left, a smaller fourth-year Hufflepuff with freckles and brunette curls not unlike Hermione's own was doing an admirable job duelling until the Death Eater cast a Confundus and then pulled his wand back to deliver another hex. Hermione dived in front of the girl, allowing the hex to strike her. It promptly disintegrated and the Death Eater in question drew back and stared at Hermione, but didn’t make an attempt to attack her.

She pushed her wand forward, threateningly, unnerved by the seemingly passive stance he took. Why wasn’t he trying to hex her? As she moved towards him, he backed up and looked to his side. Another Death Eater drew near but kept his distance. Behind her, the Hufflepuff scurried off, and Hermione was secretly thankful because something was wrong here, and she had yet to figure out what.

Another Death Eater joined them, so there were three staring at her from a respectable distance. Hermione swallowed. Was this some new tactic? If it was, she had the perfect hex—she waited for them to act and then the moment she had feared arrived…

"Avada Kedavra!" someone shouted up above and to the right. The curse reverberated off of the walls and echoed for every level to hear. Up until this point in battle, no Death Eater had said those dreaded words. Time itself seemed to stop. Hermione’s eyes turned to the owner of the voice, a Death Eater standing opposite Terry Boot at the top of the stairs. A green spark flew out of the tip of his wand, hitting the boy square in the chest. They all watched helplessly as Terry froze and fell back, tumbling headfirst down the staircase until he landed at the bottom, his eyes vacant from the killing curse and his head bleeding from the fall.

Someone screamed and it was followed by the sound of hexes cast and defensive spells being delivered.

The Death Eaters that had been standing before her were now embroiled in duels with others, and for one curious moment, Hermione had the strangest thought: why don’t they want to fight me? She should be so fortunate—only it felt like a rejection. Indignation and a new boldness rose within her. She looked around her to see where the battle was most intense and ran towards it, instinctively dodging as red and white sparks zoomed over and past her head.
The noise level had increased tenfold since Terry had fallen, and while his death had sparked outrage and resolution among the Hogwarts staff and students, it seemed to push the Death Eaters into ruthless warfare. There were more green sparks now, too many of them.

Hermione did the best she could to shield students who didn’t have the benefit of the potion, using her ‘untouchable’ status to push back, disarm, and bind Death Eaters when she could. But it wasn’t enough. They all watched in horror as Eddie Carmichael, Megan Jones, and Wayne Hopkins all dropped dead after being hit by the Killing Curse. With each death, the remaining students' duelling grew more frantic and distracted, looking behind and around them, making themselves more susceptible to being hexed. And they were.

Seamus, Katie, Dean, and even little Colin tried assisting the Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws in battle, but for every Gryffindor there were two Death Eaters, and the latter were quickly learning that even if they couldn’t use magic, they could use their hands. One of the Death Eaters grabbed Seamus from behind as he tried to aid Ernie McMillan. Another Death Eater closed in, and Seamus kicked him while the other held him, but as soon as he did, two more were on top of him, wrenching his wand from his hand, one of them kicking the boy violently as he tried to protect himself. When Dean tried to intervene with a stunning hex, he managed to thwart one of the Death Eaters off Seamus, only to have two more rush at him and clobber him to the floor. Katie seemed to panic and freeze, which spurred Hermione into action.

Hermione broke from the group she had been assisting to run towards her housemates, feeling wild and uncertain. There were far too many Death Eaters and she and Katie couldn’t fend them all off. She stopped in mid-run, staring at the pitch black opening to the corridor on the far left leading down to the dungeons. There was a pounding like footsteps, and a chant she had heard before.

‘Da locum melioribus! Da locum melioribus!’

She gasped and then laughed in spite of herself when she saw the first Slytherin, the Quidditch team captain, Urquhart, emerge, his wand pointed out. Behind him, there was the Slytherin Prefect, Kendall, and then Tracey Davies and Millicent Bulstrode. And they kept coming.

Above her, there were appreciative cheers among the Gryffindors, Hufflepuffs, and Ravenclaws. The Death Eaters seemed momentarily shocked by this new development, and several students took advantage.

She smiled up at them and then stretched her neck, waiting for the familiar crown of platinum blonde hair. But as Slytherin after Slytherin (and there were many more than she could have even hoped) emerged, and even Pansy and Blaise, there was still no sign of Draco.

Her hopes sank when the last of them came out, and he was nowhere to be found, but she pushed away her concern and disappointment when she saw something silver racing towards her. She nearly dropped her wand as a sizable wolf Patronus galloped up to her.

“He’s coming for you three. Get out,” the wolf said with Draco’s distinctive voice. Hermione swallowed, wanting to reach out and stroke it on the whim that she would feel some remnant of his being, but as soon as it finished speaking, it turned into mist and was gone.

Her eyes scanned the area around her, and that was when she noticed, once more, that no one was around her. Everyone was engaged in fighting. The realisation hit her like a hex of its own. No one was going to chase her; in fact, no one had even challenged her since the battle began. It was as if she had been warded. She looked behind her, and there they were, four Death Eaters—but they weren’t doing anything, they just stood, watching her, setting a wide protective barrier around her and most of the fighting.
She tried to catch her breath, her eyes darting to the far right corner where there was heavy fighting and saw that Ron, too, was assisting others, but no one was really going after him, yet there were three Death Eaters keeping watch over him from above. Harry was nowhere in sight, and suddenly she was terrified. This was a trap, just for them, and she had no way of telling either one of them.

“Ron!” she yelled, trying to get his attention.

But her cry was drowned out by an agonised scream, followed by a series of pained groans. She looked to her left to see Pansy on her knees before a Death Eater, convulsing under a Cruciatuus Curse. Her body was contorting in unsightly ways, and her left arm, which held her wand, was twisting as if it were boneless.

“Stop it!” Millicent cried, running toward Pansy to intercept the Death Eater performing the curse. As soon as she got close enough, though, her body was sent flying back, her head making a sickening sound as it hit the stone wall.

Hermione ran full force towards the Death Eater, her wand out in front of her, but before she could reach him, he froze, falling like a stone to the floor. Hermione scanned the area around the Death Eater but couldn't find the culprit.

“Pansy, are you all right?” Hermione asked, bending down to assess the other girl's injuries.

Pansy’s left arm was twisted grotesquely and she was still shaking from the pain of the curse, but when she opened her wet eyes, she looked relieved. She gave Hermione a feeble shake of the head and then her eyes widened as she began to slide along the floor towards the corner as if being dragged.

Bewildered, Hermione moved forward to grab Pansy’s feet to pull against the invisible force, but before she could reach Pansy, two strong arms enclosed around her, and she instinctively bucked against the body pressed against her back, kicking and grunting, trying to find any weak point so that she could escape.

“Oh, I like it when you fight… brings out your pheromones, and you smell yummy,” a gruff voice snarled in her ear.

Hermione’s eyes went big as she felt his tongue swipe her ear lobe and then she screamed as she felt the pointed jags of his teeth brush against the delicate exposed flesh of her neck.

Then the beast that was holding her faltered, loosing his balance and stumbling back, his grip loosening. Hermione didn’t waste any time taking advantage of Greyback’s misstep, breaking free of him. Something grabbed her arm, pulling her back against a firm body and she could no longer smell the smoke, her senses were overwhelmed by the scent of musk of sweat and… soap.

She gasped. “Draco?”

“Shhh… yes. I just wanted you to know I’m here. Did you get my message?”

“Yes,” Hermione whispered, sighing in relief. But as satisfying as his presence was, the reality that it would be very dangerous if he were discovered hit her.

She rubbed her brow as if in distress, bowing her head low as she whispered. “You shouldn’t be here.”

“I know,” he whispered. “But I’m not leaving you until I know you’re safe.”
Hermione fought from rolling her eyes at his stubborn insistence and then thought of something.

“Fine, but if you insist on staying, please take this,” she said, pulling out a phial and shoving it towards his invisible form.

“What?”

“Just take it… please.”

For a never-ending second, Hermione held her breath, and then she felt him grab the phial from her hand.

“Done,” he said.

She breathed a sigh of relief. “Draco…”

“Shhh,” he whispered, and then she felt him whirl around. She looked up to see a large wolfish looking man closing in.

“Who are you talking to?” he asked in the same gruff voice he had whispered in her ear. She shuddered.

She backed up, feeling Draco’s arm and then pulled away, not wanting to do anything that would reveal his presence. On each side of her Death Eaters were closing in, cautiously, as if she were a formidable opponent.

“Someone hexed me, and it wasn’t you!” Greyback said angrily, snarling at her. Hermione kept her wand in front of her, her hand shaking.

“You’re wrong. It was me… and I’m not afraid to do it again,” she said.

“I know it wasn’t. Who were you talking to?” he demanded.

“You imbecile! He said not to harm them!” came an annoyed silky voice that sounded far too familiar.

Hermione turned towards the direction of the voice, only to be greeted by a tall, imposing figure staring down at her. “Take one more step, and you’ll regret it,” she threatened, raising her wand.

The man chuckled. It was a rich, amused sound filled with smug confidence. She had no doubt now who was behind that mask.

“Mr. Malfoy. I know it’s you.”

Lucius lifted his mask, his grey eyes piercing. He seemed completely unfazed by her identification.

“Very good, Miss Granger. Then you should also know that I will not settle for anything less than your complete cooperation.”

Hermione raised her wand higher, holding it up to Lucius’ face. His eyebrows rose and the corner of his mouth twitched like he was controlling a smirk. It was utterly infuriating.

“Dear child, stop this foolishness now,” he urged. “I haven’t tried to attack you, but you will have to come with me… now.”

“No. I won’t.”
Lucius moved in closer and was instantly repelled, so much that he stumbled, almost falling back. It was a rare and satisfying moment for Hermione, to see Lucius Malfoy so rattled. His normally cool eyes were wide in surprise and anger, and then he collected himself, regaining his poise. His eyes were keenly focused on her and then he tilted his head and pointed. It took only a second for six or seven Death Eaters to close in, tightening the loose circle that had formed around her, from all sides.

"Exposium!" Lucius said, pointing his wand in her general direction.

Hermione froze as his spell approached her. There was an audible gasp of surprise in the circle as Draco’s body became clearly outlined under the cloak, highlighted by silver dust. Lucius moved in quickly, pulling the Invisibility Cloak off of his son, gasping in shock when Draco was revealed.

“Draco,” Lucius whispered.

“Father,” Draco said, straightening, his wand raised towards Lucius.

Lucius looked down at his son, and his unyielding wand, blinking. “You... You attacked me…”

“You were about to attack her.”

“I knew it.” Greyback said. “I knew I heard her talking to someone. Looks like your son is a traitor, Malfoy.” The man sounded pleased with this revelation and seemed to be watching Lucius for an entertaining response.

Lucius took a visible swallow before his eyes darted to either side of him. His face transformed instantly from shock to an impassive stone mask, except for his eyes. They were hard and merciless.

“Very well,” he said, more loudly than he needed to. “You have made your choice. Seize them.”

When a Death Eater to Lucius' left sprang towards her, Hermione let off a Stunning Spell, sending him flying back, but then she was being picked up again by the wolf-looking man they called Greyback. Draco tried to hex the man, but another Death Eater closed in on him, blocking her from his view. Hermione watched as one of them tried to perform a Cruciatus on Draco, only to have the red hex burst into sparkles of light over him. Draco instantly turned, undoubtedly to cast the same Unforgivable on the man, when Lucius yanked him back by the collar. Draco appeared momentarily helpless as his father wrenched his wand from his hand.

“I’m doing this for your own good,” Lucius said, giving Draco another hard shake. Draco grunted and twisted only a moment before stilling completely.

Hermione stared at him, bewildered, but Draco wouldn’t look up at her. It was as if Lucius had some sort of Imperius on him. Lucius took Draco aside and stared back at Hermione struggling within Greyback’s grasp.

“The more you struggle, the more risk you bring to your fellow classmates,” Lucius said, looking up. Indeed, it seemed as if the Death Eaters had gained considerable control.

Inside and outside, the sounds of shouting, screaming, and whizzing hexes decreased in volume, until there was nothing but groaning, crying, and shuffling. Scanning the massive space of the Entrance Hall, bodies lay scattered. And for all of his skill, Professor Flitwick had been surrounded by Death Eaters, his wand in one of their hands. Professor Vector was drenched in sweat, shaking visibly and held up by two Death Eaters, while Professor Binns floated in a strange stasis slightly above the floor.

The Gryffindors had mostly been restrained by physical force and bindings, while the rest had been
subdued by the simple threat of the Killing Curse, and many were now on their knees or had their hands behind their heads at wand point. There were a few still fighting, but it was clear they were doing so in vain. Hermione watched as a stoic and courageous Ravenclaw girl, no older than a third year, was sent to her death over the banisters. Her scream was much more harrowing than the rest in the silence of surrender.

“Alright… alright,” Hermione said, ceasing to struggle.

The beast holding her chuckled low in his throat, and she could feel his hot breath on her neck.

“Greyback... behave. She belongs to him,” Lucius said, a warning in his voice.

“Hermione!” she heard Ron shout from the far south corner, near the corridor where Filch’s office was hidden.

“Ron!” she cried, trying to peer past Lucius and Draco and the Death Eaters surrounding her. She couldn’t see anything but more Death Eaters. It looked as if Ron had been cornered.

“Are you all right?” Ron shouted back.

“Not really. But I’m not hurt, if that’s what you mean,” she tried to say reassuringly. She wanted to ask him if Harry was all right, but she knew she couldn’t. He was the main prize.

“That’s enough,” Lucius said. “You will be silent now.”

Hermione glared up at him, wanting to spit in his face but constrained herself as her eyes came to rest on Draco. He wouldn’t look at her; his gaze was focused on the floor and his body appeared stiff under his father’s hand.

Hermione felt her breath shorten as she thought about Harry. He had been outside, and now it was silent except for the distant screaming of Banshees and orders of surrender being shouted out to those who had been defeated.

The clicking of steel-toed shoes hitting marble grew louder from the direction of the entrance doors until they reached centre of the Entrance Hall.

“This castle now belongs to the Dark Lord. If you value your life, and the lives of your family, you will obey all orders,” came the familiar voice of Severus Snape.

Hermione’s mouth dropped open and once more she glanced towards Draco. His jaw had tightened, and she could tell he was grinding his teeth.

The footsteps resumed, coming closer to her circle, and then he was there, his mask raised as he stared down at her and Draco.

One eyebrow quirked as he and Lucius exchanged a long look.

“How unfortunate,” Snape said.

Lucius pursed his lips, but said nothing.

“Was there any difficulty?”

“Yes. It appears they have some sort of protective shield on their bodies. It is impervious to curses.”

Snape’s eyes seemed to light up as he glanced at Hermione and Draco. “I see.”
“And you have Potter?” Lucius asked.

“Yes. Firenze and Hooch gave us a bit of a challenge but one is dead, and the other has been subdued. Potter and Weasley have been contained.”

Lucius nodded. Hermione watched as once more they shared a strange look. She wanted to call out to Snape, pull him aside and find out exactly what was going on. Surely, he had a plan?

But he wouldn’t look at her; instead, he sighed and turned his back, giving one last order before leaving the circle.

“Bring them outside. All of them.”
Her Dark's Own Light

All our times have come,
Here but now they're gone.
Seasons don't fear the Reaper,
Nor do the wind, the sun or the rain.
We can be like they are
Come on baby (don't fear the Reaper)
Baby take my hand (don't fear the Reaper)
We'll be able to fly (don’t fear the Reaper)
Baby I'm your man...

“(Don’t Fear) the Reaper” –The Blue Oyster Cult

Time has stopped before us
The sky cannot ignore us
No one can separate us
For we are all that is left
The echo bounces off me
The shadow lost beside me
There's no more need to pretend
Cause now I can begin again...

“The Beginning Is The End Is The Beginning”– Smashing Pumpkins

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Masking his fear, Harry strained to see what was occurring just beyond the circle of black robes surrounding him. He wasn’t exactly sure how he had lasted this long, but before being captured, he had managed to disarm and bind several Death Eaters. Not single-handedly, though: McLaggen, and Urquhart had fought brilliantly alongside him until the first Avada Kedavras were cast. After that, things had turned progressively worse. Once the Death Eaters learned that Harry was impenetrable by magic, they launched an aggressive counter attack, piling on top of him like an offensive rugby line. Harry’s thin frame was no match for their weight and within seconds, his wand had been brutally twisted out of his hand, leaving his wrist feeling like it had been stabbed with tiny shards of glass.

Now his hands were secured behind his back with vines, and McLaggen lay dead in the wet grass alongside Theodore Nott, whose mouth was permanently frozen in shock. Several feet away from them, Firenze had been immortalised in eternal sleep, his body resembling a mythical statue that had been knocked over by the wind. Both Urquhart and Madam Hooch had been magically bound, forced to surrender under the threat of death.

Throughout the battle, Harry had hoped that Hagrid would show, but the half giant hadn’t made an appearance. Forcing the darker possibility from his mind, Harry held on to the hope that his friend had somehow managed to send for help or was somewhere confined.

Despite being bound and enclosed inside a brigade of Death Eaters, Harry refused to stand still. Frustration, fear, and concern drove him to use his body to push and shove against the circle trapping him. He was contemplating how he might barrel his way through, when Snape parted the tight circle.

“So they have them?” one of the Death Eaters asked Snape.
“Yes… plus one,” Snape replied.

“What do you mean?”

“It appears we have a traitor in our midst. Draco Malfoy was apprehended while defending the Granger girl.”

There was collective murmuring among the Death Eaters, and then someone chuckled.

Harry looked around the circle; hearing sounds of amusement at Draco’s betrayal made him nervous. One sharp look from Snape silenced them all. “It is regretful. The Dark Lord will not be pleased.”

“What now?”

“They are to be taken to the pitch,” Snape informed.

Harry narrowed his eyes. Why the pitch? He pulled and twisted within his captor’s grip, and Snape waved away the man away before replacing him by Harry’s side.

“Stay still, Potter… you’ll see everything soon enough,” he said impatiently, giving Harry a tight squeeze.

Voices grew louder just beyond the circle, and Harry could hear footsteps approaching. He tried to peer out again but could only make out glimpses of his classmates and Death Eaters marching down the hill. The sound of their feet crunching wet grass reminded him of more innocent times when crowds would walk carefree towards Hogsmeade or Quidditch matches.

Harry looked up at the man he had trusted for some sign of reassurance or hope. But there was nothing of the sort in Snape’s cold black eyes. The man barely looked at Harry, and when their eyes finally met, there was only a blank mask.

Harry blinked, at a loss for words. Suddenly he wasn’t so sure Snape was undercover. The man had just led an attack on Hogwarts, had allowed students and teachers to die right in front of him. Had his former Potions professor completely turned? And if he hadn’t, how in the world did Snape plan to help them escape by holding them hostage? Did he even have a plan?

“He was a Death Eater. Never forget that, Harry… he loved power and Riddle more,” an old familiar voice whispered in his head.

“You really are a traitor, then,” Harry said finally, hoping for some reaction.

Snape sighed, but did not respond. Frustrated, Harry clenched his fist, resisting Snape’s grip. The urge to push his bound body against the man rose up within him just as a familiar voice called his name.

“Harry? Harry!” Hermione yelled with panic in her voice from just beyond the circle.

“Hermione?”

“I’m here, Harry!”

Harry saw a glimpse of her bushy mane as she tried to jump, and then he heard a struggle.

“Hermione, are you all right?” Harry called.
“Yes, I’m fine… but they have Draco and me.”

“Have you seen Ron?”

“No, but I heard him. He said that he was all right…”

Harry breathed a small sigh of relief, trying to quell his growing fear. What would they do to Draco? He wasn’t even supposed to be here, not like this.

“Don’t worry, Potter. You’ll all be reunited soon enough,” Snape remarked.

Harry did a double take. Was that sarcasm or a genuine attempt to reassure? Perhaps it was some sort of hidden message. Harry couldn’t tell.

After several minutes, a smaller Death Eater with a thin frame entered the circle surrounding Harry. “They’re all secure and seated,” the man said to Snape.

“Very good. Now go to the seventh floor and wish for it. It will be revealed to you. Send word to the Dark Lord that we have secured the school and we will await his arrival in the pitch.”

The smaller man bowed slightly before running off to do Snape’s bidding.

Harry looked at Snape in disgust. “You’re sending for him? So that’s what this is all about. He’s coming here to kill me, isn’t he?”

“Yes, he is,” Snape replied simply.

“I suppose he wants to make a big show of it, so everyone sees,” Harry said bitterly.

Snape did not respond, instead he turned his head forward. “To the pitch,” he commanded.

They marched towards the pitch, and the scent of lightly dewed grass and earth filled Harry’s nostrils. It should have been calming. He looked up towards the sky. It was a crystal clear with sparkling stars scattered throughout, like diamonds on black felt. Harry could almost imagine reaching out to touch them. Memories of flying on such a night on top of Buckbeak flittered through his mind. The liberating feeling that memory gave him seemed almost cruel now. But he tried to hold onto it, to push away the fear of being delivered to Voldemort by Snape, with Hermione, Ron, and Draco trailing behind him.

Just the thought of one of them suffering roused determination to change the course of things, and he found himself jerking in Snape’s grip, forcing the man to stop.

“Don’t make this harder than it already is, Potter,” Snape said wearily, shaking him hard.

Harry glared up at the man, but Snape refused to look at him any longer as they continued to march towards the Quidditch pitch.

The march promptly halted, and Snape gave Harry a cursory glance before motioning with his hand to the others. They dispersed, walking towards the bleachers to stand before the audience of students and Death Eaters holding them.

It was deathly silent, and a strong sense of déjà vu seized Harry as memories of his first challenge in the Triwizard Tournament came rushing back: fear of the unknown, the anxious faces watching him, the feeling of not being evenly matched for a challenge that would happen whether he liked it or not.

He swallowed, steeling himself. Whatever was coming, he would face it; he only wished the others
didn’t have to be out there with him. This was his fight, not theirs.

He strained to look for the others, and Snape gave way, allowing him to. Draco was just a couple of metres to his left—his own father, Lucius Malfoy, was by his side, gripping his arm. Draco turned his head, his eyes locking with Harry’s. No words needed to be exchanged, Harry could see the fear in Draco’s eyes, but he also saw something else—unwavering solidarity. Whatever was about to happen, they would endure it together and that left Harry feeling both anxious and grateful. He tried to look farther down, but couldn’t see Hermione or Ron, but Harry knew they were there all the same.

A wave of whispers broke, and Harry looked around himself and then to the distant hills, where a tall figure seemed to be gliding down towards them. The man was wearing a heavy black robe with the hood was resting low over his head, but the bone-white hands and lower half of his face were visible—a face with hardly any nose.

As Voldemort entered the pitch and drew closer, Harry’s mouth drew into a tight thin line.

The Dark Lord stopped only a few feet in front of him.

“Harry Potter… once again, we meet.” Voldemort glanced up at the star-lit sky, a strange, blissful smile on his face. “Beautiful night, isn’t it?”

Harry scowled and pulled forward only to feel Snape’s grip tighten.

“I’ve waited a long, long time for this. How satisfying it will be to destroy you in front of a captive audience,” Voldemort said, motioning his wand towards the stands, where everyone sat watching: his classmates, teachers, and Death Eaters alike.

“Before the night is over, my power will be indisputable, as well as your incompetence, especially in the absence of your great defender.”

Harry grimaced, biting back a curse. The anger and heartache at the mention of Dumbledore was enough to make him want to take action. If only he had his wand.

Voldemort’s red eyes seemed to dance in the moonlight. “You want to fight me, Harry?”

“Yes,” Harry hissed.

Voldemort chuckled. “You’ll have your chance soon enough, and you will fail.”

“No, you will. Just like you always do.”

Voldemort’s eyes narrowed to slits as he glided nose to nose with Harry. Harry coughed, the foul stench nearly suffocating him. Slowly the tip of Voldemort’s wand traced Harry’s cheekbone before moving up his nose to part Harry’s hair and tap against his scar.

“You’ve been very lucky, guarded by the magic of your mother, your dead parents and friends, and of course, your great defender. But he’s not here now… You’re all alone. Tonight, I will show everyone just how weak the great Harry Potter is. No one will be able to protect you this time.”

Harry didn’t flinch or waver under his stare. He wanted more than anything to be released so he could challenge the monster.

Before Harry could respond, Voldemort walked on, towards Draco.
Harry twisted his head to the side to see as much as he could. Voldemort’s eyes glowered, his sharp reptilian teeth bared as he leaned in to peer at Draco.

“Well, well… Thought you had me fooled, didn’t you, boy?”

When Draco didn’t reply, Voldemort clicked his teeth. “Lucius, you must be very disappointed.”

Lucius sighed, bowing his head slightly. “Yes, my Lord, but I take heart that I was the one to discover this treachery.”

Voldemort raised one eyebrow. “Well done, Lucius… well done.” He turned his eyes down to Draco. “I suspected you were lying. That is why you were not included in the assignment. I knew better than to trust a blood traitor who thinks with his cock. You bear my mark, not because you are worthy, but because you are mine to destroy or let live and suffer as I see fit,” he said, pressing his wand into Draco’s throat.

Draco made a choking noise that had Harry twisting in his restraints.

“Leave him alone!” Harry cried.

The gagging noises grew louder until Hermione’s voice cut through. “No! Please stop!”

Voldemort pulled back his wand, leaving Draco panting for breath.

Harry still couldn’t see Hermione, but he assumed she was on Draco’s immediate left because Voldemort’s eyes were set in that direction. He heard a struggle and Hermione’s wretched cry. It was followed by the most hideous cackle. Harry became incensed at the thought of Bellatrix hurting Hermione.

“Isn’t this touching?” Voldemort said, laughter in his words. “A Mudblood in love. It is love, isn’t it? How else can you explain your concern over a pure-blood who bears my Mark? But do you think he loves you?” Voldemort asked with a nasty leer. “Did he tell you what he said right before he swore to help me rid the world of Mudbloods like you?”

“He said you were mildly attractive, and that it was sometimes easy to forget you were a Mudblood. It almost sounds romantic, really.”

Harry listened for Hermione to protest or retort but there was only silence. Beside him, Draco’s head hung in shame.

“Nothing to say? Surprising. For the brightest witch of her age, I am utterly underwhelmed.”

“I’ll waste no words on the likes of you,” Harry heard Hermione say. He smirked, his resolve swelling at the coolness of her voice and words.

“You’ll pay for your insolence, Mudblood! Soon you will be bowing before me and begging for death,” Voldemort hissed.

There was weeping coming from the stands above. Harry looked to his right to see several of his classmates staring back at him with fear and question in their eyes. Why were they looking to him? How was he supposed to fix this?

The weight of his prophecy was pressing down on his shoulders, and his previous doubts about whether he would be able to live or even kill Voldemort seemed to dangle before him. He forced himself to look away.
“Ah, and last, and most certainly least… the Weasley blood traitor. I think I’ll kill you first.”

“No!” Hermione cried out.

“No?” Voldemort repeated, laughing at Hermione’s pleas.

There was laughter from the stands from the other Death Eaters, joined by Bellatrix’s high cackle. Harry scowled, pulling from Snape. He was jerked back hard.

“The Mudblood says no, so naturally I will let the boy live.”

More laughter, this time louder.

“Stop calling her that, you freak!” Ron shouted so clearly it echoed over the field. Harry froze as an audible scuffle began to take place. Two Death Eaters ran from the stands to the far end of the line.

“I’m tired of this boy,” Voldemort said in a bored tone, raising his wand.

“Then let him go!” Harry yelled, channelling his fear for Ron’s life and his rage. “Let them all go! It’s me you want, isn’t it?”

Voldemort paused and turned, sweeping quickly back down the line towards Harry. “Why, yes, Harry. It is you that I want the most. Especially since you seem so eager to die.”

“I’m not afraid of you or death,” Harry replied.

Voldemort narrowed his eyes. “You lie. I can smell your fear, Harry, and I can see it in your eyes.” He extended his wand. “Severus, let the boy go. I do believe it’s time for a duel.”

“My Lord,” Snape interjected, drawing everyone’s attention to him. Harry held his breath, hopeful the man was about to enact some grand miraculous plan.

“I should warn you: the four are protected by some sort of mysterious magic.”

Harry groaned and Voldemort’s eyes moved from Harry to Snape sceptically.

“That is why we had to restrain them by vine and hand,” Snape continued. “It seems, at least for the moment, they are impervious to wand magic.”

“Impervious?” Voldemort asked in disbelief.

“Yes, an invisible magical shield of some sort covers their bodies.”

“Nonsense! This so-called shield cannot withstand my magic!” Voldemort exclaimed, pointing his wand at Harry’s chest. “Crucio!”

A wide jet of red light shot from Voldemort’s wand, only to dissipate over Harry’s body like dying fireworks.

“What is this magic?” Voldemort demanded. Snape seemed to be at a loss for words. Harry was almost impressed by Snape’s show of ignorance.

“My Lord—” Snape started.

“Oh, never mind! There are many ways to kill… and inflict pain,” Voldemort said with a nasty sneer.
“*Diffindo,*” he said, cutting the vine restraints wrapped around Harry’s torso and wrists.

As the vines fell away from Harry’s body, he thought of how he might rush at Voldemort— but the man lifted his hands high in the air, and the still night air suddenly moved, first as a light breeze but quickly growing into strong gust of wind. There was a great rumbling as the earth began to shake. Harry tried to look as he heard the distinct sound of something erupting through the ground. He turned his head left where the sound repeated time and again.

Fear and dread began to grow as Harry gaped at the wooden stake immediately to his left. He had no doubt that there was one for each of them: Harry, Draco, Hermione, and Ron.

“*Incarcerous!*

Ropes sprang out of the stakes like snakes and Harry flinched when one whistled past his ear, right near his eye. In the next second, several Death Eaters surrounded him, assisting Snape in pulling up his arms to tie his wrists to the wooden pole behind him. As they secured Harry’s ankles, he heard shouting from down the line. Several Death Eaters ran down to the far end. He heard a series of loud groans.

“String that one up extra tight,” he heard someone say.

The rope was strung up impossibly high, raising Harry onto his tiptoes so that he gasped from the strain on both his arms and legs.

Struggling only made it worse, so he stopped, listening for sounds from the others.

Another wave of movement began as loud ripping sounds filled Harry’s ears. Jolts of pain shot through his arms as his chest was pulled forward by the effort to tear away his clothing. Bit by bit, the night’s air chilled his flesh and sounds of gasps and shocked cries of his classmates punctuated each humiliating exposure until, at last, every shred of his clothing was gone.

“Oh, look!” Bellatrix shrieked. “The Mudblood is pierced… everywhere!”

There was a great deal of murmuring and laughter. Harry tried to move his head to see Snape, but it was very painful to move at all.

Although the coolness of the night caused goose bumps to cover his body, it was the sight of Voldemort grinning wickedly at his naked form that made Harry shiver.

He jerked at the sound of four distinctive pops and looked to his right to see Snape brandishing a whip. Another round of gasps from the bleachers sounded.

“Make them beg for death,” Voldemort ordered.

Harry froze as something sliced through the air and snapped beside him. Draco screamed.

There was another snap, this one much closer, too close. Harry cried out as something as sharp as a knife cut across his naked chest.

He didn’t have time to process or recover for another strike gashed his arm and then his thigh before moving to his right side to cut him across the hip.

Harry searched for the source, and his mouth fell open when he found it. Snape came into full view as he crossed in front of Harry, striking him hard across the chest. Harry stared back at him, hoping for some shred of humanity to impart mercy, but Snape’s eyes remained focused on his work, his
rearing back to deliver another blow. A strangled cry escaped Harry as he twisted in anticipation for the assault. The lick of the whip was sharp, like teeth biting him. And it bit again and again. Snape appeared to be relentless, pausing only to judge where to strike next. Harry’s eyes began to blur with tears as lashes struck his thighs, arms and chest. His whole body flinched with each stroke. As whipping continued new stripes struck open wounds, leaving Harry’s feeling as if a dozen hornets had stung him, and the rest of his skin was warmed by the blood now freely running down his body.

His vision was blurry like it was when he wasn’t wearing glasses, and his whole body felt like a gaping wound. All thought about the world around him, and what Snape was doing became an incoherent jumbled mess. There was only pain now. And Harry only wanted it to end. Surely death was close.

There was screaming and crying coming from his left and right. His own voice had gone hoarse, leaving him nothing but choked sobs and grunts.

And then it stopped.

Harry tried to raise his head and peer through the tears clouding his vision. He could make out Voldemort standing before him with a look of satisfaction on his marred face. Finally, Snape entered his view, holding a bloody whip; his face had paled considerably.

“What do you have to say now, Harry?” Voldemort goaded. Harry fought to hold his head up, to meet the fiend’s eyes, but his entire body was aching, and spasms of pain made it hard to hold a stoic disposition. He didn’t dare look down at his body. He didn’t want to see how bad it was.

Voldemort moved on to Harry’s left.

“You must feel foolish,” he said to Draco. “Before I put you out of your misery, I want you to tell me why you did it. What did you hope to accomplish by aligning yourself with Potter?”

There was no reply.

“Were you plotting against me or not, boy? Answer me! And if you lie this time, I will have your whole family’s heads for it.”

“Just leave him alone!” Harry cried hoarsely with a measure of inner strength that surprised even him. “Draco has nothing to do with this! None of them do!”

The Dark Lord glided back over to Harry. “Really? Let’s see, shall we?”

Panic burst in Harry’s chest as he realised what Voldemort was about to do. In spite of the blinding pain coursing through his body, Harry forced himself to pull his head up and clench his eyes shut as he tried to remember the Occlumency lessons Snape had tried to impart on him. But all he could recall were the shouting matches and horrible hours spent being violated by the man below him. He opened his eyes, looking down at Snape helplessly.

But Snape stood staid, the bloody whip still in his hand as stared at Harry. “It’s no use, Potter. We both know your Occlumency skills are pathetic. He’ll be able to see everything, even your pathetic attempts to plot against him.”

Harry gaped back at Snape, shocked and baffled as to why he felt the need to mock him and rub his face in the fact that he had poor …

Harry swallowed. For the first time that night, he saw the slightest glimmer of encouragement in the man’s face. Snape was telling him something,


Harry’s eyes widened in realisation. Was Snape really encouraging him to reveal exactly what the Dark Lord wanted to know? That would be suicide. If the Dark Lord managed to penetrate Harry’s mind, he’d see everything, not just the sexual prophecy, but Snape’s involvement in orchestrating it. Surely that would result in Snape’s execution. So why would Snape encourage such a thing?

Harry opened his mouth but nothing came out.

Snape revealed no sign of trepidation. He turned his eyes away from Harry to watch the Dark Lord approach.

A glimmer of hope arose as Harry remembered the shielding potion protected him. But Voldemort lowered his wand, moving even closer until he was only a few inches away.

“Are you sure you want to take a trip through my mind again?” Harry asked. “It didn’t work out so well last time.”

Voldemort’s barely existent nose twitched and he raised his hand. Harry winced as one long white finger pressed into his scar, sending agonising vibrations through his head.

“You can’t keep me out, Harry…” Voldemort whispered.

Harry took a deep breath, waiting for the monster to invade his thoughts. His eyes fluttered as a familiar presence reached inside his mind, like a thief scavenging for valuables.

Some primal part of Harry tried to seize the thief, to push him out, but Harry’s thoughts and memories were too many in number and they lay scattered everywhere. The intruder seemed to have multiple hands, prodding and searching, and Harry couldn’t block them all.

He gasped as a cyclone of desire, anger, confusion, and love stormed through him with each new keepsake Voldemort found. And then there was nothing. Voldemort withdrew, leaving Harry feeling tired and violated. They stared at each other for a suspended moment. The genuine shock in Voldemort’s eyes should have been satisfying, but Harry knew it would be short lived. He knew there was retribution to be dealt out.

Voldemort stepped back, his head snapping to glare at Snape. He raised his wand, and snarled.

“Crucio!”

Harry watched in agony as Snape collapsed onto the ground, writhing in pain. He could tell the man was trying to maintain his dignity but the curse was too powerful, and within a minute, Snape was howling.

“Stop it!” Harry shouted, wincing as the pain from his injuries became more pronounced.

But Snape’s howls continued, growing louder as he began to claw at himself.

“Please stop!” Hermione screamed out.

But the torture went on for several minutes until finally, Voldemort appeared sufficiently pleased.

“Finite Incantatem.”

Snape’s writhing slowed, until he stilled completely, his breathing audible in the stunned and horrified silence of the pitch.

Voldemort raised his wand once more, levitating the man in the air. A strange garbled sound escaped
Snape as his arms were stretched out taunt on each side by an invisible force.

The earth shook once more as another pole broke through the ground in front of Harry. They all watched in horror as Snape was lifted higher, towards the pole and then above it, his legs spread just far enough to welcome its pointed tip through the centre of his body.

The entire pitch seemed to be holding its breath, waiting for Snape to be impaled. But Voldemort simply held the man in midair, just out reach of death.

“You almost got away with it, Severus…” the Dark Lord said, his face twisted in anger. “Almost. I should have known. You’ve been around that meddling old fool for far too long. But as you have already learned, he is not who he presents himself to be. He’s a charlatan, twisting the truth and seeking his own glory, just like you. And like him, you have failed.”

Harry felt new tears forming in his eyes as he stared up at Snape. He felt guilty and he didn’t know why.

“You see, what Harry didn’t tell you, Severus, is that they have already attempted the ritual, and it produced nothing. They did everything you told them to… and failed.”

Snape’s jaw was tight but he held his eyes steadfast as he stared back at Voldemort.

“And do you know why, Severus?” Voldemort grinned triumphantly. “Because it was not meant to be. Either you’ve assembled the wrong four, or this prophecy was not meant to destroy me. But it will be the death of you…”

Snape remained silent, closing his eyes in wait for his death.

“Open your eyes, Severus. You’re not getting off that easily. Before I grant you the mercy of death, you’ll have to suffer a little more. I want you to witness the humiliation of those you’ve foolishly entrusted, and then all of your hopes and dreams of defeating me will be destroyed… one by one.”

With a flick of his hand, Snape’s body collided with the pole, and ropes sprung from the wood, snaking around his body until he was covered from shoulder to toe. For the first time, Snape’s face showed emotion. He gave Harry the tiniest of smiles as Harry stared back at him apologetically.

Voldemort swept past Harry and Snape, and Draco towards the end of the line. “The Mudblood’s enthusiasm for her lovers is quite compelling. You should have seen it. It was quite a vision.”

Bellatrix began to laugh and clap. “Oh, Master, please… may we have demonstration?”

A smile twisted Voldemort's features. “Why, yes, Bellatrix. What an excellent suggestion.” To Hermione, he said, “Why don’t you show your classmates some of your special talents.”

An audible gasp swept through the bleachers and there were more claps from Bellatrix as she began to giggle maniacally.

Outraged and afraid for Hermione, Harry growled, struggling in spite of the pain that raked his body in hopes that his magic or the ropes would break him loose.

“You evil bastard! Leave her alone!”

“Oh, Harry, don’t pretend you care about her virtue now,” Voldemort called out. “I’ve seen what you four have been up to. You’re all quite… kinky.”
A shiver cascaded down Harry’s back.

“Let’s see what makes this Mudblood so special,” Bellatrix taunted.

“Cut her down then,” Voldemort said. “And bring her out before me.”

Harry heard curses and his heart raced, fearing what Bellatrix would do to her. A slap rang out over the pitch, echoing in the night like the start of a thunderstorm. Harry’s heart felt like a great stone had been placed on it. The anticipation and fear was too much—he had to stop it.

“It’s me you want, isn’t it? So, let’s do it—you and me!”

Voldemort did not move. “You will wait your turn, Harry… I am in control here. Your challenge means nothing. You have already been defeated and captured. You are at my mercy now and the end of your life is imminent, but only when I decide to do it.”

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Hermione couldn’t stop herself from shivering. She wasn’t sure if it was from the pain of the whipping, the shock and force of Bellatrix’s hand, the cold air hitting her bloody body, or sheer terror for what Voldemort had planned. The evil witch in front of her seemed much too happy considering the circumstances. Hermione watched as Bellatrix pulled out a long Scottish dirk; it glimmered in the moonlight. She inhaled as it pressed against her bonds, causing the ropes to fall like string.

“If you even try to run,” Bellatrix warned. “I’ll gut you and then I’ll gut your ginger. Now be a good hussy and walk out there to meet my Master.”

Hermione looked to her left and right at Ron and Draco; both of them looked just as incensed as she was. If she was going to die, she’d die with a fight.

“I said move, Mudblood!” Bellatrix screamed in her face, pushing Hermione forward so that she fell on her hands and knees onto the wet grass.

“Leave her alone or I’ll kill you myself, you crazy bitch!” Ron shouted.

Hermione looked up, fearful for him as Bellatrix turned and laughed as if he had just told the funniest joke.

“Kill me?” She laughed again. “Aw, isn’t that sweet! The blood traitor is protecting his little Mudblood.” She skipped happily as she approached Ron. “You think you can kill me?”

Ron scowled, pulling at his binds.

“Then let’s see you try,” she yelled suddenly. “Cut him down, dear!”

Rodolphus gaped back at his wife, looking confused and unsure about the course of action his wife was taking.

“I’ll kill you, blood traitor, I’ll kill you and your Mudblood right now,” Bellatrix said, pulling out her dirk once more. “Rodolphus, I said cut him down!” she commanded.

Rodolphus looked past Bellatrix towards Voldemort, and Hermione turned her head to see the Dark Lord approaching.

“Enough Bellatrix!” he snarled.
Bellatrix froze and turned around to face her Lord, her eyes wild and fearful. “But my Lord—”

Voldemort drew closer and Bellatrix immediately bowed low in submission.

“Have you lost all sense of reason, Bellatrix? Stand up.”

Bellatrix straightened, and Hermione could see the slightest tremble in her hands.

“I will deal with you later.”

“Yes, Master,” Bellatrix said softly without looking up.

“Rodolphus, cut the boy down, and bring him to me,” Voldemort ordered, glaring at Ron.

Two Death Eaters pushed Ron towards Voldemort.

“Your brave and foolish outbursts have earned you the honour of dying first.”

“No!” Hermione shouted.

“But first, you will help me put the Mudblood in her place.”

“I won’t,” Ron protested.

“You will, or you will be to blame for her suffering. I can kill her quickly, or very slowly.”

Ron’s eyes shone tears as he stared back between Hermione and Voldemort.

When he said nothing else, Voldemort gave him a curt nod. “Good choice, boy…”

“Take them all down,” Voldemort ordered. “And move them in front of the stands. I want everyone to have a proper view of this.”

Hermione winced as Bellatrix grabbed a handful of her hair and pulled it back to whisper in her ear. “I’m going to love watching you being used like the filthy whore you are before I slice you up into little pieces.”

Hermione became more aware of her nakedness than ever before as they approached the stands. She tried not to look at the faces of her classmates and teachers, instead focusing on the back of Draco’s head as Lucius pulled him along.

Finally, they stopped about twenty feet in front of their classmates, who wore looks of horror and shame.

“You sick freaks!” Seamus shouted. There was a brief scuffle before the Death Eaters holding the Gryffindors tightened their grips on all of them, securing them to their seats, some holding their wands on the throats of their classmates in warning.

“Another outburst like that and everyone here will suffer their fate,” Voldemort warned.

A chill went through Hermione as she looked to her right. Voldemort’s eyes were red and bright, canvassing her body in cold assessment before his gazed turned to Draco.

“Turn and face the Mudblood you betrayed your family and bloodline for.”

Lucius pushed Draco to face Hermione, and she had to fight back tears as she met Draco’s eyes.
They were sad but defiant and steady. And even though she could see him shaking from pain and cold, he mouthed the words ‘I love you.’

Hermione held his gaze, trying to find comfort there.

“Now, it’s time to show everyone how well you take a good stuffing,” Voldemort said to Hermione.

There was another collective gasp and more murmuring as Hermione looked behind her at Ron, and past Draco to Harry. They were all staring at her with trepidation.

“My Death Eaters will release their hold on all of you, but if you try to run or fight back, I will not only kill you, but each and every one of your classmates.”

Slowly, one by one, the Death Eaters let go of them, and Hermione breathed a small sigh of relief as Bellatrix loosened her stronghold on her hair.

“Come here, Harry,” Voldemort beckoned with his hand.

Harry’s glare was murderous as he slowly stepped forward to stand beside Draco. His eyes would not leave Voldemort, and Hermione felt proud and hopeless as she watched his determined face.

“Turn around and face your admirers… Now!”

Harry’s fists balled at his side, and he jerked to face the stands, holding his head up despite his pain and complete nudeness.

“Look at him!” Voldemort commanded everyone in the stands. “This is your great Saviour, the legendary Harry Potter… a boy who can’t even save the lives of the ones he loves, let alone himself. Let it be remembered that he had little magical ability of his own. In fact, the only thing remarkable about Harry Potter is that he enjoys being used just as much as enjoys using his Mudblood. Well, tonight, Harry, you can do both.”

“Stop this… please,” Harry said softly.

“On your knees, Mudblood,” Voldemort ordered.

Harry shook his head, but Hermione found herself bending until her knees hit the wet grass. There was a catcall requesting a specific lewd act, followed by a whistle and laughter. Hermione didn’t want to scan the crowd to see who was mocking them.

“Step aside, boy,” came another order. Draco’s legs began to move, and Harry stumbled as he was pushed in front of Hermione and then forced to his knees.

“Touch her,” Voldemort ordered.

Harry’s eyes rolled up to glare at the fiend, his face red in anger, but Voldemort’s expression was resolute with the promise of his previous threat.

Harry sighed in resignation, his hand reached up to rest on her breast. Hermione inhaled, staring back into his green eyes. There were tears and an apology there, and then someone pushed him so that his body hit hers. He wrapped his arms around her protectively and there was a jeering ‘awww’ sound from a few Death Eaters. Hermione buried her face into Harry’s shoulder, closing her eyes as she held onto him tight.

“Blood Traitor, move over there! Malfoy, get behind her.”
She could hear and feel movement all around her. When she dared to open her eyes, blue eyes were looking down at her. Ron was standing over her and Harry, his face contorted in anger and disgust.

“Lay down, boy,” she heard Voldemort order from somewhere behind her. She froze, wishing in silence that by some miracle would happen, that someone would intervene. Instead, she heard Draco moving behind her, his slender pale legs falling to either side of her and Harry as he lay down in the grass.

“My Lord, this may prove difficult. The Malfoy boy is as limp as a noodle,” Bellatrix mocked.

There was laughter and then a sudden hush. “Perhaps you could assist him in rising to the occasion, Bellatrix.”

Hermione pulled back from Harry in disgust to glare up at Bellatrix, who was grinning widely. Determined not to let his aunt go anywhere near him, Hermione placed her hands on Draco’s thighs and scooted back until she felt his soft cock against her backside.

She gasped as it immediately stood up at attention. It wasn’t the quickness of Draco’s arousal that shocked Hermione, but surge of magic she felt between their bodies. It was as if someone had infused a bolt of static energy into his cock and it had transferred straight into her blood stream. She tried not to show alarm or curiosity on her face as the meaning of it swirled in her head.

“There’s enough blood there for you to prepare yourself, Mudblood, I hear taking it up the arse can be quite painful without a bit of lube.” Hermione looked up at Bellatrix in disgust and noticed that several Death Eaters had gathered around them to watch. Hermione looked back at Draco, whose jaw was set in a look of disgusted anger. She scooted back further and felt another jolt of power shoot through her as Draco’s cock pressed harder against her. Their eyes locked as the meaning of it sunk in, and then Draco nodded.

Slowly, Hermione’s hand reached back and glided over Draco’s bloody chest. He let out a shaky breath as she covered her hands in the mess there before sliding it over his cock.

“That’s enough, now sit,” Voldemort directed.

The murmurs of disgust and outrage from her classmates, the chuckles and catcalls from the Death Eaters around her faded as she moved over her lover’s cock, positioning herself to slide down.

Draco’s hands found her waist, holding her steady as she did it, and another surge of energy glued his flesh to hers. Hermione closed her eyes and moaned, not from pleasure but because of the current running through them. It was like a hypnotic spell drumming with magic, and she almost forget about everything around her as her body began to respond, compelling her to ride Draco as if they were all alone. Her hand covered his on her waist, and she held on tight, riding him in a timeless state until she felt another body closing in between her legs.

She slowly opened her eyes to find Harry staring back at her. His green stare was glassy with tears, his soft cock hanging limply as he moved in closer.

“I’m sorry, Hermione…” he said against her cheek.

“It’s not your fault, Harry,” she said. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” he said.

Hermione leaned back, impaling herself completely on Draco as she tried to accommodate Harry. His arms were shaking as he tried to brace himself above her before falling forward. They both
gasped in unison as his erection awakened, poking at her mound. Hermione reached up to hold Harry’s shoulders as the current between her and Draco grew stronger. The addition of Harry seemed to only strengthen the surge flowing through her. And as he entered her, there was no need for lubrication, it was as if her body was separated from her mind and had its own life.

“That’s bloody disgusting,” someone said.

“Let’s see how Potter takes it up the arse. I wager he enjoys it more than the Mudblood,” someone else said.

Hermione’s mouth opened in protest, and Harry shook his head and kissed her full on the lips.

She couldn’t stop herself from crying against his lips as they continued to move in unison, the current so strong she could almost feel it buzzing her ears. When she opened her eyes, they were blurry, and she tried to discern whether Voldemort could see the magic flowing through them. She found his red eyes, but no concern, only perverse amusement in the scene taking place before him.

“Shouldn’t you be chanting or something?” one Death Eater taunted.

There was laughter.

“Yes, go on, call out to the heavens—perhaps someone will come and save you,” Voldemort chuckled as his eyes flickered to Ron.

“My, aren’t you equipped. It will be fun watching Potter taking you,” Voldemort said with a leer. “Assume the position, Blood Traitor!”

Ron’s mouth curled, but then his eyes found Hermione’s. Angry tears fell as he slowly positioned himself behind Harry. Hermione watched as his mouth dropped open and his eyes grew wide in understanding as he made contact.

“Get on with it,” Voldemort ordered.

Ron stared down over Harry’s shoulder at Hermione as he moved and Harry’s eyes nearly closed and his mouth thinned as Ron pushed forward.

Laying against Draco, with Harry on top of her, and Ron on top of him, Hermione spread her legs wider, her thighs gripping Harry, her feet brushing Ron’s body. The stream flowing between them grew more powerful, pulsating pure energy that drew them tighter together like magnets. Hermione could feel Draco and Harry, but she could also feel Ron. Not just his flesh, but his magic, his thoughts.

“Harry, what’s happening?” she said without speaking.

“I-I don’t know, Hermione…”

“Yes, you do.” She could hear Draco’s voice as clearly as if he were speaking in her ear, even though she knew he wasn’t.

“This is barmy… is this really happening?” she could hear Ron asking.

“Yes,” Harry said.

“Oh, my God… oh, my God,” Hermione began to say over and over as their magic began to warm, squeezing them tighter together.
She moaned, staring up at Ron as Draco and Harry moved back and forth inside of her. The rings in her cunt and nipples were vibrating on their own as if controlled by the sheer force of their magic. It was the most non-erotic situation possible, yet her entire body felt alive with sexual energy, and they all may as well have been fucking her as the core of their magic connected through their sex.

Draco’s tongue slid along her ear, and Harry's mouth found its way to her neck, suckling as Ron leaned in to kiss her.

The energy flowing between them widened into a wave, its current washing through her, back to Draco, through her again, crashing into Harry before settling in Ron… and then building and coming back again.

As the wave continued to move, Hermione felt the familiar sensation of going under, unable to breathe or see. A kaleidoscope of grey, blue, green, and red began to colour her vision, and then shouts rose above her.

An explosion of light fell and broke over their bodies. Hexes of white, red, and green. Whether from the protective shielding potion or the power of their collective magic, they all failed to penetrate, disintegrating on the invisible barrier covering them.

She could hear Bellatrix’s screeching in the background, and shouts from the monster to pull them apart, but every Death Eater that approached them was repelled by some invisible force.

Hermione stilled as a heated coil began to grow inside of her belly. The centre was so warm and growing hotter. She felt radiant and powerful, like she had swallowed the sun. She looked up into Harry’s eyes to see him looking down at her in awe. The sun inside of her had risen now, and it was very hot, warming her body inside out. Perspiration broke out all over her, and Draco’s body grew slicker under her.

Ron’s face was red and his hair was wet and matted to his head, while Harry’s brow dripped, large droplets falling onto her face.

“So warm,” Harry said, without moving his lips.

Over her, she could see people pushing and kicking, clawing to get at them, all in vain.

The light surrounding them glowed in a steady tempo like a heartbeat: grey, green, blue, red.

“What’s happening now?” Ron asked in a frightened voice.

“I don’t know,” Draco replied, sounding scared as well.

Hermione stared up at Harry, trying to listen for his voice, but Harry’s stare was no longer green. His eyes glowed red and Hermione felt panic overtaking her. “Harry… Is that you?”

“Yes, Hermione, it’s me, but… he’s here with me as well.”

“Where?”

“Inside my head…”


“A piece of him… is inside of me. I wasn’t sure before, but now I am. I can feel him…”

“I don’t like this, Harry, it’s too hot… we’re going to burn!”
“I don’t want to burn,” Ron yelled.

“It’s all right, Ron,” Harry tried to reason.

“Don’t tell me it’s all right, Harry. We’re going to die!”

“We were going to die anyway,” Draco said in resignation. “Maybe now at least it’ll be worth something.”

No one replied, but they kept moving against each other. Hermione tried to focus on the pleasure of feeling all of them. Her entire body had become like some sort of conduit and every inch of her flesh felt touched. The ring in her cunt and the rings in each of her nipples may as well been moving, the nerves there quivered, sending bolts of their own through her.

As the sun inside her centre began to grow, Hermione became feverish. Her arms, legs and mouth felt like heat rays shooting out of her body as the heat began to consume her.

Harry’s red eyes glowed almost orange, his face red.

“Harry, you look like you’re going to explode,” she shouted in her head. “We have to stop this…now!”

“Hermione…”

“Yes?”

“Are you really mine?”

“What?” Hermione asked frantically as she began to feel the beginning spark of a flame between their bodies, the tips seemed to be licking her belly, scorching her skin.

“I said, are you mine?” Harry voice echoed more forcibly.

“Yes… yes, of course.”

“Completely?”

“Yes, Master… but you’re hotter than the rest of us. I can feel it!”

Harry’s eyes flickered to Draco and she felt hands tightening around her waist as he moved more deliberately under her.

“You’re ours… correct?”

“Draco—”

“Answer me.”

“Yes…”

“We’re not asking you,” Draco said.

Hermione’s eyes found Ron’s; he was staring down, but not at her—at Draco.

There was a flicker of uncertainty and fear and then it was gone. He nodded. “Right…Hermione, do what they say, give in and just let go. Whatever happens, happens.”
She gaped back up at Ron in disbelief at his acquiescence, at his lack of fear in the face of imminent death.

Her eyes found Harry’s again; they seemed to be glowing in his skull as he moved inside of her with more vigour and purpose.

The heat wasn’t just inside her now; it was on top of her, underneath her, and all around her. They were on fire, only she couldn’t see the flames, but they were burning her all the same. She cried out in pain.

“We’re burning, Harry!”

“No… I’m burning,” he said, his open mouth leaking black smoke.

“Please, make it stop,” Hermione cried inside her head.

“This is the only way to end it, Hermione. Let me burn.”

There were screams above her now, and loud wailing sounds, but Hermione couldn’t see—black smoke blocked her vision and began to fill her lungs.

She coughed and felt Draco’s body heave with coughs as well. Over her, Ron’s body shook them all as he choked for breath.

Hermione closed her eyes against the smoke and the burning in her eyes. The screams were dying, replaced by shouts, and calls to cut Snape down. She gripped Harry’s arms tighter, concentrating on the feel of Draco’s arms encircling her, and Ron’s hand on her leg.

The earth beneath them felt alive, its pulse irregular as footsteps fell all around them.

Hermione tried to hold her breath against the smoke, until she was drifting between what was and what may have been. She imagined she could hear Bellatrix screaming in agony and then weeping hysterically. And then she heard Neville’s voice calling for action with an authority and self-assurance she would have never dreamed possible. It was followed by shouts and cries of outrage and justice. She imagined she heard Hagrid’s voice, as the earth shook with the force of an earthquake or army. Hermione knew she was dreaming because not only was Snape giving orders but so was Lucius Malfoy, and their orders were followed by shouts of support from what sounded like her classmates. She imagined a blanket being dropped over them even as she heard bodies hitting the ground. There was more screaming, and in the distance, what sounded like a series of loud explosions. It couldn’t be real… no; Hermione had to be dreaming, because the last thing she heard was someone shouting that the castle was burning.

When she finally opened her eyes, Hermione was drenched in sweat, but her skin was unscathed by fire. The stinging in her eyes was gone, replaced by wetness from tears and perspiration. Draco’s arms were stuck to her abdomen, and Harry’s lay limply against her. Ron’s face was nuzzled in the crook of Harry’s neck, as if still shielding himself from fire.

“Harry,” she croaked. “Harry…”

Slowly, Ron raised his head, his eyes cracking open.

“Draco?” she called.

“I’m here, Hermione,” he said softly, giving her a soft squeeze.
She looked up around herself to see many faces hovering over them, worried and curious. But none of them were Death Eaters—except for Snape and Lucius Malfoy.

Hermione coughed as she realised she was not imagining things. That she was, in fact, naked, bloody and lying between her lovers on the ground under peering eyes… but still very much alive.

“We’re alive,” she whispered.

Ron let out a shaky breath, raising his head higher to look about. “Is this real?”

“Yes. It’s real,” Draco said. “We’re still here.”

“Harry, did you hear that?” Hermione said, relieved and excited. “We’re still alive.”

But Harry didn’t move or reply. Hermione held her breath, trying to feel his heartbeat or his chest rise and fall. But there were no sounds or movement, just cold clammy skin stuck to hers. His body’s full weight rested on top of her like a great stone.

“Harry, don’t do this… talk to me… please,” Hermione urged, running her hands over his wet hair to smooth it back so she could take a look at his face. But he was face down, his nose pressing into her chest.

“Hermione,” Ron said in a shaky whisper. “Tell me he’s all right. Tell me he’s okay.”

“He is,” she replied quickly with assurance she did not feel. “He’s just out of it… like before, he always comes out of it.”

The arms around her waist tensed as Draco tightened his hold. Ron’s mouth seemed frozen in horror as he stared down at the back of Harry’s head.

“Harry! It’s time to get up!” Hermione said louder. “Wake up, Harry.”

She could hear crying now, and whispers all around her.

Looking up past Ron, Hermione found Snape, his face drawn into a deep frown as he stared down at the four.

“Harry,” she said again, shaking him. Her hands trembled as she finally lifted his head.

Harry’s head lolled back, his eyes open wide. There was no red glow there, they were barely emerald green—all light had faded, his pupils were black and hugely dilated. An eternity passed as Hermione stared at her reflection in the dead irises of the boy she loved before, finally, she began to scream.
New Beginnings Part II

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dragonfly out in the sun you know what I mean,
Butterflies all havin' fun you know what I mean.
Sleep in peace when day is done,
That's what I mean.
And this old world is a new world,
And a bold world,
For me.

Stars when you shine you know how I feel,
Scent of the pine you know how I feel.
Oh freedom is mine,
And I know how I feel.

It's a new dawn,
It's a new day,
It's a new life,
For me.

And I'm feeling good…

“Feelin’ Good” by Nina Simone

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The burning sensation was gone. In fact, Harry couldn’t feel any pain at all. Not the sting from the gashes on his body, or the chill of the cool spring air hitting his blood soaked skin. But he could feel, he was certain of that, because his body was pressing against something hard. He opened his eyes, surprised at how clear his vision was without his glasses. He was dressed in the same clothing he’d had on earlier, only they were clean and intact; his skin bore no evidence of torture or burns. There was nothing but whiteness and mist surrounding him, its tranquility punctuated by a faint wheezing sound. Looking down into the mist, he saw glimpses of a charred body. There was no doubt it belonged to the thing that had pulled him here. It was almost dead, and what was left of its uncooked flesh, hung from its body like melted candle wax.

Harry shuddered, repulsed.

“Let it go, son,” he heard a voice say.

Harry’s head turned in the direction from which the voice came and froze. It was like looking at a mirror; only his reflection had aged by five years. His eyes widened as the reflection took a life of its own, offering a friendly smile.

Momentarily stunned, Harry studied the image of his father a little while longer before shaking the thing clinging to him. Finally, with a thump and a soft cry, it fell to the floor.

Harry stared at it, disgusted.

“What is it?”
“You already know what it is, Harry,” James said. “And there’s nothing you can do to help it.”

Harry pulled his eyes away from the thing to look back at the vision before him. His eyes grew misty as he grappled with the possibility of who this person was.

“It’s good to see you. You’ve grown into quite a man,” James said with proud approving eyes.

“Dad? Is that really you?”

“Yes, son, it’s me.”

James held his arms open, and before Harry could think, he was falling against the man he had been dreaming of since he was old enough to dream.

He closed his eyes, trying to commit every detail of the moment to memory, just in case it really was a dream, or worse, a hallucination.

“Where are we?” Harry asked at last.

His father whistled and smiled. “Now that’s a rather complicated question.”

Harry smiled, heartened by his father’s relaxed and playful demeanour.

“Alright, how about a different question then? Why are you here?”

“We?”

Harry leaned over slowly to peer past his father. His breath nearly left him as his mother’s face came into view. Lily stood a little ways behind James, looking just as young as the pictures Harry had seen of her. Her hands were clasped before her, and there was a warm smile on her face.

“Oh Harry, it’s so nice to hold you again,” she said.

Harry could barely feel the tears falling from his eyes; he was engulfed by the smell of her, the softness of her auburn hair falling against his skin, and the warm comfort of her embrace.

“I can’t believe you’re here, both of you,” he whispered.

“We needed to be here when you arrived,” Lily said.

Harry pulled back, a dozen questions coming to mind. “How did you know I’d be here?”

Lily looked up at James, who had come to stand beside her.

There was a moment of silence, and Harry swallowed as uneasiness crept into his belly. How much did his parents know? Was he really about to discuss the sexual prophecy with them? This was weird.

Lily smiled in understanding. “Don’t be embarrassed, Harry, you have nothing to be ashamed of. We’re very proud of you.”
Harry braced himself. “You are? So, you actually saw what we did?”

“Not in the way you understand,” Lily said. “But we knew it was happening.”

Harry could feel shame heating up his whole body. His parents exchanged a knowing glance.

“Let’s have a seat,” James offered.

Harry nodded eagerly, and followed them to the white wooden bench by the tracks.

“Son, we know all about the prophecy,” James said reassuringly.

“You do?” Harry asked.

“Yes,” Lily said. “It was revealed to us, when we met the others.”

“The others?”

“Wizards and witches who’ve attempted the prophecy before.”

“Before? So it’s true,” Harry said. “Snape told us that others died from trying.”

“Yes. He’s correct,” Lily said. “Either by misfortune or deceit, something has always gone wrong, until now.”

“Then you know? That it could have been yours, I mean.”

“Yes,” James answered.

“Dumbledore confessed that he sabotaged it,” Harry said, lingering resentment colouring his words. “He tried to keep it hidden from you.”

“And he succeeded,” James said. “Because of him, we had no knowledge of the prophecy. But in all of his wisdom, Harry, Dumbledore failed to realise one important thing…”

“What?” Harry asked.

“Trying to prevent fate only changes the course for arriving at it.”

Harry’s brow furrowed. “I’m not quite sure I understand, Dad. Are you saying that we have no control over anything? That everything we do, is determined by fate?”

“No,” Lily replied, “and yes.”

Harry frowned.

Lily leaned in. “What I mean to say, is that you always have a choice, Harry, over your actions and your words. Free will works in harmony with fate, not against it. The choices we make are our own, but they only take us on a different path to our destiny.”

Harry bit his lip, hesitant to voice his doubts. He didn’t want to argue with his mother; he was just meeting her for the first time.

She gave him a sympathetic smile. “You don’t believe me.”

“I want to, Mum. It’s just that… it’s just sort of hard to accept, the idea that everything that happens is destined to be. If everything is already planned out, what difference would our choices make?”
“Yes, it is a difficult thing to accept at first,” James replied. “because our free will is very important to us. It’s what makes us human. But you must understand, Harry, that it holds just as much power as fate. Not more, not less. And the best example of that is you.”

“Me?”

Lily nodded. “Yes, while Dumbledore was able to keep us from learning of the prophecy, his actions helped your father and I come together in an entirely different way. Without his meddling, we may have eventually married, but perhaps we wouldn’t have. Who knows what would have come of our relationship if things had been allowed to carry on the way they were? I may have even married Severus.”

James snorted, giving his wife an amused smile.

She swatted his arm. “The point is, that because of Dumbledore’s interference, we were able to reconcile when we did, marry, and have our first and only child — you.”

An old and reoccurring guilt rose up within Harry. “And it’s because of me, that you were murdered.”

Lily reached over and squeezed his hand. “Don’t say that, darling. Don’t even think it. It’s simply not true.”

“It is, Mum. You were set up. Dumbledore confessed that as well. He made sure that Snape heard prophecy. And he also made Peter the Secret Keeper, even though he knew he’d betray you.”

James nodded. “Yes, that’s all true. But as you know, Snape regretted what he did, and immediately tried to set it right. He’s been a very valuable ally to you on this journey. And while Peter’s betrayal led to our murders, it also led to you being marked as Voldemort’s equal. And look what came of it, Harry. You’ve saved the wizarding world, you and your friends. Not only was the first prophecy fulfilled but so was yours as well.”

“That may have been the design all along,” Lily said. “It’s possible your father, Severus, Sirius and I were never meant to fulfil the prophecy. Perhaps everything that happened in the past was meant to shape the present so that you and your friends could fulfil it.”

Harry gaped back at his parents. “So, you’re saying that even when someone does something bad, like Dumbledore, Pettigrew, or even Voldemort, that they’re playing a part in some greater plan?”

James smiled. “Now you’re getting it.”

It was overwhelming, what his parents were telling him and their presence, too. Harry could see a part of himself in both of them, and it meant more than words could express. There was so much he wanted to ask and tell them. And he wanted them to meet Hermione, Ron, and Draco. As he recalled the last time he had seen his lovers, Harry tore his eyes away to look around the empty train station and a painful awareness struck him—he was somewhere the other three could not follow.

“Where am I exactly?” he asked quickly, startled by the panic in his voice. “Am I dead?”

“No. You’re somewhere in between life and death,” Lily said.

“Is that normal? Does everyone come here?”

“No,” James said. “The sacrifice you made protected all of you from death. Just like your mother’s sacrifice saved you many years ago.”
“I don’t understand. Mum sacrificed herself, but she still… died, right?”

Lily nodded. “Yes, but I sacrificed myself for you, Harry. To protect you. You sacrificed yourself to destroy something that should have never been a part of you. In doing so, you actually protected the part of you that was truly yours, as well as the lives of your friends.”

“But if we were all protected, then why am I the only one here?”

James and Lily looked at each other and then their gaze moved to the charred creature behind Harry. It’s wheezing was growing fainter by the minute.

“That thing brought me here,” Harry said. It wasn’t even a question. He already knew.

“It’s been trying its best to survive by clinging to you,” James said. “But it’s time is at an end, just like Voldemort’s.”

“I can’t believe he’s been inside me all this time…” Harry whispered.

“Harry, ever since you consummated your bond with your friends, it’s been struggling to live,” Lily explained. “As your bond with them grew, it became weaker. Surely you must have felt it?”

Harry nodded slowly. “Yes. It started right after we all were together at Snape’s. And then yesterday, I passed out during a Quidditch match. I’d been feeling weak ever since when we made up with Draco.” Harry knew he should have been blushing, but all of his former shame was gone. His parents’ faces were calm and understanding and discussing this suddenly felt much easier, almost natural.

But even as he sat basking in their presence, the absence of his lovers remained strong.

“So what does this mean? Will I ever see Hermione, Ron, and Draco again?”

Lily squeezed his hand again. “If you choose to return.”

“I get a choice?”

“Yes,” James said.

Harry covered his mouth, stunned. “And, if I choose to stay, will the both of you stay with me?”

“Yes,” James answered.

A heavy pang swelled in Harry’s chest as he stared back at his parents. The possibility of being able to spend the rest of eternity with them at his choosing was both exciting and terrifying.

“But if you decide to go back, Harry,” James said. “We promise to meet you when you return, whenever that may be.”

“But I’ve waited so long to talk to you,” Harry said. “I have so many questions, and I want you tell you so much.”

“We’ll always be around Harry,” James said. “We always have been.”

Harry shook his head. “Not like this.”

“If you like, we can talk for a little while,” Lily said. “But not for too long. You’ll have to make a choice soon.”
It seemed unfair, he had waited so long for this moment and it was being snatched from him.

He looked down at his mother’s hand covering his own, and tried not to blink as tears threatened to fall.

“Don’t be sad, darling,” Lily said softly. “If you choose to go back, just remember you can speak to us anytime you like. Just listen in silence. Listen with your heart, and we’ll always answer.”

The strong aroma of peppermint tickled Hermione’s nose, causing her to sneeze so hard that she propelled herself forward into consciousness.

“Move back, give her room to breathe,” she heard Pomfrey shout.

The Healer was looking down at her gravely, as were Ron, Draco, Snape, and Hagrid. Their focus was so intense that it made Hermione feel self-conscious. To her relief, someone had covered her with a blanket.

Pomfrey tried to wave the open vial under her nose once more, but Hermione pushed her hand away and struggled to sit up fully. It hurt terribly; she could feel almost every cut on her body. The smell of burning flesh quickly assaulted her sense of smell, and she started. Pomfrey put a steady hand on her shoulder to keep her in place.

“Easy, Miss Granger, we don’t want you fainting again,” she warned.

“Where’s Harry?” she asked, hoping that her last vision had been a horrid nightmare.

“Just relax dear, everything is going to be alright,” Pomfrey said in an unnaturally sweet voice.

“Where is Harry?” Hermione demanded.

Pomfrey glanced nervously at Snape, and Hermione watched as the ever-stoic man grimaced and then took a deep breath. Hermione held hers. Snape looked far too hesitant to speak, almost regretful. Her heart sank.

“Miss Granger, unfortunately Potter succumbed to the magic the four of you produced,” Snape explained.

Hermione looked to the others. Besides being soiled by sweat and blood, both Ron and Draco looked as if they had aged overnight. Next to them, sad and pitying faces stared back at her. Hermione looked past them out to the pitch, and saw several Death Eaters bound by rope held by two giants. Beyond them, dozens of bodies lay scattered throughout, mostly Death Eaters, and a few of her classmates. Two giants were making neat piles of them in the centre of the pitch. Looking further to her left, she finally found what she was looking for. Harry’s body lay in the grass approximately ten feet away, covered by someone’s robes.

Draping the blanket around her, Hermione struggled to stand before stumbling towards him.

“Hermione,” Draco said, as he and Ron moved forward to support her.

Hermione pulled away from them, breaking into a painful stride until her legs gave out. She fell to her knees besides Harry’s still form.

A Scourgify spell had been performed on his face. It was clean and fresh looking. His eyes were no
longer open, and his arms had been carefully placed at his sides, giving him the appearance of someone in deep sleep.

It still didn’t seem real. Harry was supposed to survive. Hermione had always had faith he would; this was wrong. She tried to fight back the tears welling in her eyes. She wouldn’t cry, not with everyone watching her like this. She needed to be alone with Harry one last time. There were things she needed to say. But not here. They had already been forced to bare their bodies and souls before their classmates and professors. Hermione tried to ignore the rest of the world as she leaned over to give Harry one last kiss on the cheek.

Strange. His skin was warmer than she last remembered.

A nagging hope compelled her to check his body for vital signs once again. She laid her head against his chest, listening for faintest sign of life. But there was none. A tremendous sob threatened to burst inside of her, but it was interrupted when Harry’s chest collapsed with a sharp intake of breath.

A series of coughs shook them both, and Hermione pulled back to stare down as if seeing a ghost. “Harry?”

Footsteps rushed towards them, but immediately shuffled to a halt when Madam Pomfrey shouted, “Back away!”

Hermione gasped as Harry’s eyelids fluttered. And then they opened fully. Harry’s eyes were glassy, but as green and full of life as Hermione had remembered. He coughed once more as his gaze fell to her.

“Hermione,” he croaked.

A chorus of shouts and cheers erupted as the crowd began to close in against Mrs. Pomfrey’s protests.

“You’re alive!” Hermione exclaimed, throwing herself on top of him.

“Please Miss Granger, get a hold of yourself!” Pomfrey shouted, pushing Hermione gently. “Off of him, now!”

Hermione gave the woman a bothered glare but that didn’t stop Pomfrey from continuing her task. She began feeling Harry’s forehead, neck, and arms, scanning his body with her wand.

“I don’t believe it!” she said. “Potter, I felt your pulse myself—you were dead!”

Harry coughed once more as he raised himself up on his elbows. “Well, I’m alive now.”

“I don’t understand,” Hermione said.

The crowd fell silent, waiting for an explanation.

“I’m not really sure I do either.” Harry said, looking up and around at his classmates and professors.

“But, I do know one thing,” Harry said, looking to Hermione, Ron and Draco.

Hermione tilted her head as a curious smile grew on his face.

“You three look terrible.”

They all exchanged a puzzled look at Harry’s smile and light-hearted words, but it soon spread like
an infection, from Ron to Draco, and finally to Hermione, who found herself grinning in spite of everything that had occurred, or perhaps because of it.

Pomfrey wouldn’t allow any conversation to take place until they had all been bathed and healing spells had been performed on their most critical wounds. After they had been properly bandaged, with much pouting and whinging, Pomfrey reluctantly allowed them to pull their beds together, giving the illusion they were all laying in one giant bed.

Once she walked away, Ron rolled over on his side, wincing as he as propped himself on one arm. “Thought she’d never leave. Harry, I can’t tell you how good it is to see you alive. We thought you were gone for sure. What the hell happened to you?”

Draco and Hermione both struggled to turn their bodies towards Harry to listen.

“I’m not sure really, but—” Harry started.

Before he could continue, the curtains were drawn back, revealing Snape and Lucius Malfoy.

There was an awkward moment of silence as the four watched the two men approach. Draco struggled to sit up, grimacing from the pain.

“Father…”

“Draco, please, lie back down,” Lucius said. “You need your rest.”

“What are you doing here?” Ron asked in bewilderment, glaring at Lucius.

“Settle down, Mr. Weasley,” Snape said in a warning tone. “Lucius Malfoy is not your enemy. He was very helpful in supporting your efforts, and he assisted us in battle tonight.”

Ron looked to Harry in shock. Harry sat up quickly, ignoring the pain that shot through his side. Hermione also rose to prop herself on her pillow.

“Battle?” she asked. “Sir, if you don’t mind me asking, what exactly happened out there?”

Lucius and Snape exchanged a glance.

“Not one of you witnessed the events that occurred?” Lucius asked.

“No,” Hermione said. Harry, Draco and Ron all shook their heads.

“I see,” Snape said, sighing, looking down the line of infirmary beds. “Accio chairs.”

Snape and Lucius took their seats and exchanged a strange hesitant look before Snape began. “While you four were…engaged, something extraordinary happened.”

“Yes, it was really quite peculiar,” Lucius added. “Even in light of the bizarre circumstances. Miss Granger…”

Hermione raised an eyebrow at Lucius.

“You were literally glowing.”

“Glowing?” Hermione repeated. “Is that what I looked like?”
“Yes,” Snape said.

“Well, I certainly felt like a ball of fire,” Hermione said with amazement.

“You were definitely transmitting heat,” Snape confirmed. “Everyone around you could see and feel it.”

“That’s when we know something was wrong,” Lucius said. “Or shall I say, very right. The Dark Lord issued an order for you to be separated immediately, but no one could carry it out. It was as if the protective shield on each of you had somehow connected to form a formidable shield of its own.”

Hermione’s eyes widened. “Yes, of course, the potion is designed to fuse with our magical centres! When we were engaged, as you say, it felt as if Draco, Harry and Ron had somehow become a part of me.”

“Yes, well whatever happened,” Lucius said. “It sparked a chain reaction that is both incredible and baffling.”

“So what happened exactly?” Harry asked.

“When they couldn’t tear you apart,” Snape said. “They tried to penetrate the shield with hexes. Of course, all of them failed, and that’s when the first fire broke out.”

“Fire?” Ron asked. “I thought we were the only ones burning.”

“We observed no fire amongst the four of you,” Snape said. “The Dark Lord, did however, burst into flames.”

Harry’s mouth dropped open.

“At first, no one could really believe what we were seeing, but then it was irrefutable,” Lucius said. “He was actually burning, right before our eyes, and flailing around like a wounded animal, only he made no sound. It was quite eerie.” Lucius paused, putting a hand to his mouth as if still trying to process what he had seen.

“Yes, and then his snake, Nagini, burst into flames as well, setting a trail of fire in the grass,” Snape continued. “Immediately, some of his followers rushed to put them out, including Bellatrix.”

“I heard that!” Hermione exclaimed. “I couldn’t actually see anything, but I heard Bellatrix screaming and crying.”

“Yes,” Lucius said. “That was right before she threw her body over the Dark Lord’s in an effort to stamp out the flames.”

“But it only consumed her,” Snape said. Harry could see the glint of satisfaction in his eyes.

“Once it was evident the Dark Lord was dead, mayhem ensued,” Snape said. “Longbottom managed to break free of his captors, rousing the others to rebel as well. You obviously shared the potion with your housemates.”

“Of course we did,” Ron said.

“Well, as it turns out, that worked in our favour,” Snape said. “With the aide of the protective shielding potion Longbottom and a few others were able to cut me down while the rest fought. Once I was freed, Lucius and I were able to disarm several others. Still, despite our efforts, we were still at
a disadvantage. Luckily, help arrived.”


A rare smirk appeared on Snape’s face. “No—Rubeus Hagrid. He arrived with several giants and they helped us stamp out the rest.”

“But I heard explosions,” Hermione said. “and someone shouting that the castle was on fire. What happened here?”

“We’re still not entirely sure,” Lucius said quickly.

“But,” Snape interjected. “The Room of Requirement was severely damaged by an explosion powerful enough to break through the ceiling, and set off a series of other explosions on the seventh floor. The most logical explanation is that perhaps the Dark Lord had hidden a dark artefact there, something that held some sort of magical connection to him or perhaps a piece of his very being.”

“You mean, like the diary I destroyed second year?” Harry asked.

“Yes. Exactly like that,” Snape said, pausing before speaking much more slowly. “There is an obscure type of Dark Magic, known as a Horcrux.”

Harry could see his Lucius’ grip tighten around his cane, which piqued Harry’s curiosity.

“It’s a splitting of the soul,” Snape continued. “Designed to preserve a piece of one’s self in an object so that one could live on, if death befalls the owner.”

“But it requires murder,” Lucius said swiftly. “And with that many, we can’t be certain that that is the cause of the explosions.”

“Lucius,” Snape started.

“We’re talking about multiple Horcruxes, Severus,” Lucius said argumentatively. “So far, at least three by my count. It’s simply unconscionable that someone could make so many!”

“It should be, yes. But this is the Dark Lord we’re talking about. You’ve seen what he’s capable of.”

Lucius shook his head slowly in incredulity.

“Besides,” Snape continued. “Lupin and Moody have reported a similar explosion in the city, inside of Gringotts. So right now, the Horcrux explanation is the only one that makes sense.”

Harry chewed the inside of his lip, hesitant confess to Snape or Lucius what he had seen.

“Our ritual did all of that?” Ron said in wonderment.

“Sexual magic is very powerful, Mr. Weasley. I’m not sure anything else could have destroyed multiple Horcruxes simultaneously. It is the only form of magic that unites one with another mind, body, and soul. The Dark Lord’s soul, although split into several pieces, was not immune to its power. Especially when the main conduit is very powerful. And it appears Miss Granger was the perfect conduit.”

“In what way, sir?” Hermione asked.

“I thought perhaps the book you retrieved from Knockturn would offer you that explanation,” Snape replied.
“Well, it did say that Muggle-borns were extraordinary witches and wizards,” Hermione said.

A faint snort came from Lucius’ direction, and Hermione sat up straighter, her voice becoming louder and more confident as if to counter him.

“It referred to Muggle-borns as ‘Magic Manifest’.”

“Ah, yes,” Snape said. “The notion that the existence of Muggle-borns is the manifestation of the essence of magic itself.”

“And what is the essence of magic, sir?” Hermione asked.

“The ability to make the impossible possible, Miss Granger,” Snape replied.

Lucius scoffed. “I’ve never heard of such a thing.”

“And you probably will never hear of it again, Lucius,” Snape said. “History has shown us that those who speak of such things are shunned and discredited.”

“But that’s not right,” Hermione protested. “If it’s the truth, people need to hear it. They need to know that Muggle-borns are not inferior, that we are special and very valuable to the wizarding community.”

“Miss Granger, the truth is rarely simple, or easy. I suggest that all of you keep this bit of information to yourselves, at least for now. If notions about Muggle-borns are to change, this will not be the way to do it.”

Hermione frowned. Sensing her frustration, Harry took her hand into his.

“At any rate, it appears that your magic not only absorbed the magic of the other three, but of the Dark Lord himself, in all of his forms, near and far.”


“Yes, it’s quite remarkable,” Snape said. “It appears this bit of dark magic has its own special light, one that cannot be contained. That’s probably why sexual magic is currently banned.”

“But what we did wasn’t really dark magic,” Ron said. “We destroyed a monster!”

“Dark magic can be used towards good ends, Mr. Weasley,” Snape replied, and Harry couldn’t help but give Ron a smug smirk.

“Sir, do you mean it’s banned like an Unforgivable?” Hermione asked anxiously. “Will we get into trouble?”

Snape and Lucius looked at each other as if they hadn’t considered that possibility.

“I wouldn’t concern yourself with that at the moment,” Snape finally replied. “I’m sure there will be many who are sympathetic to what you have done.”

“Father…” Draco started but then paused. They all looked to him, waiting for him to finish, but he seemed to be at a loss for words.

Lucius adjusted himself in his seat, trying to retain a dignified pose, even as his face softened.

“Draco, we will speak of this later. Suffice it to say, I am very pleased this worked itself out, and that you’re alive…”
Draco stared back at his father, as if expecting more, and all eyes turned to Lucius in silent support for him to continue. He cleared his throat, glancing around self-consciously, before forging on, keeping his eyes steady on his son. “For many months now, I’ve been working with Severus to conceal your efforts. I couldn’t tell you because I didn’t want to risk your life or that of mother’s. You were already taking a huge risk consorting with Potter and his friends. Maintaining a show of loyalty to the Dark Lord was quite difficult, to say the least, especially tonight,” he said, pausing.

“I understand,” Draco said with quick reassurance.

“Well, I don’t,” Ron said. “How could you and Snape lead an attack on the school? How could you let so many people die?”

Harry couldn’t help the spark of anger and pain that Ron’s words incited. He set his eyes on Snape, who looked rather irritated with Ron.

“Mr. Weasley, sometimes, in order to save many lives, a few must be sacrificed. If we had refused the assignment, we would have been killed immediately, and I assure you, many more lives would have been lost.”

Harry wanted to rebut, and his mouth was fixing to, but he couldn’t articulate what was bothering him, fortunately, Hermione could.

“But what if it hadn’t worked?” she asked. “What if Draco had never been caught? And what if Voldemort hadn’t decided to force us into the act? He could have just killed us all instead. You can’t tell us that you were sure that the prophecy would be fulfilled tonight.”

“You’re right, Miss Granger, I wasn’t sure.”

“Then that was completely nuts!” Harry exclaimed, unable his confusion and anger. “You were practically egging him on. Especially when he performed Legilimency on me. He could have killed you right then and there!”

“Yes, he could have, Potter, but he didn’t,” Snape said quickly. “Do you have any idea how long I’ve been working under the Dark Lord?”

Harry shook his head. “No.”

“Long enough. For years, I’ve delivered information to the Order right under his nose. I’ve been able to survive because I became proficient in understanding his motivations and needs, so that I could anticipate his actions. He rarely surprised me. So while it was a great risk, it was also a very calculated one based on years of observation. For instance, I knew that if he did not discover Draco’s betrayal during the invasion, he would surely discover it when he performed Legilimency on you. And I knew that he would perform Legilimency on you because he had an insatiable need to know everything about you. He was obsessed. He didn’t just want to defeat you, Potter, he needed to display his power by taking away yours. Therefore, I surmised that he would use the knowledge of your failed attempt of the ritual to humiliate you in the worst possible way. I had hoped it be in the form of a forced arrangement between the four of you. Fortunately, I was right.”

“But how did you know about the failed attempt?” Hermione asked. “We told no one.”

“Miss Granger, how did you learn that the bartender at Hog’s Head was in possession of a portkey?”

Hermione looked to Harry and Ron and then Draco, who shrugged.

“I don’t quite remember. I believe we heard some older students talking about it.”
“Yes, and what curious timing for you to hear of such a thing, right before your only Hogsmeade trip,” Snape said.

Hermione gasped. “You? You arranged the portkey so we could go to Knockturn and find the ritual?”

“It was the only assistance I could provide at the time,” Snape explained. “I knew you would take advantage of the opportunity. I could only hope you would be successful in locating it. It seems fate truly was on your side. Now, what I’d like to know is: what happened to you, Potter?”

Harry glanced around as all eyes turned on him. “I’m not entirely sure.”

“Harry, you were dead,” Hermione said. “I was staring right into your eyes.”

Harry nodded. “I suppose that’s half-true, I mean, I did see my parents.”

Snape tilted his head, his eyes squinting as if he had heard incorrectly. “What did you just say?”

“I said, I saw my Mum and Dad. They said hello by the way.”

Snape raised one eyebrow sceptically. “Hello?”

“Yeah, both of them. And Mum told me to tell you,” he blushed and shook his head. “I’ll tell you later.”

Snape gave a sideways glance to Lucius who was looking at him with curious interest.

“So, you actually believe you spoke to your parents, Potter?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I see,” Snape said slowly. “And did they manage to impart any knowledge about what occurred while you were…where exactly were you?”

“Honestly, I don’t know, but it looked a lot like King’s Cross.”

“King’s Cross? Are you serious?” Ron asked.

“Perhaps, you were simply unconscious and dreaming, with very slight vitals,” Snape said. “Pomfrey may have declared you dead too soon.”

Harry shook his head. “Maybe I wasn’t dead, but I definitely wasn’t alive either, because my mum said I had a choice whether I wanted to come back or not.”

They were all staring at him dumbstruck.

“When we started doing it,” Harry began. “Whatever magic we created began to heat everything inside me. Then I felt a presence inside my head, and I knew it was him. Only, I had never felt him like that before. He was screaming. Whatever heat you were giving off Hermione, it was hurting him. That’s when I knew it was working, and it needed to be completed.”

“So, what happened after that?” Draco asked.

“It began pulling at me,” Harry explained. “Grabbing at my…my soul, and then everything went black. When I arrived at King’s Cross or wherever I was, my parents were there waiting for me. And that thing, the part of him that was inside of me was still holding on, but it was all burnt up, barely
alive.”

“So you really had a piece of You-Know-Who inside of you? Blimey, that’s freaky,” Ron said.

“And it burned like everything else,” Hermione said. “Everything except for us.”

“Thanks goodness for that,” Ron said. “But why weren’t we affected by the fire?”

“My dad said that my sacrifice protected us, just like my mum’s protected me the first time Voldemort tried to kill me. But that thing managed to pull me away somehow…” Harry said, his voice trailing off.

“So how were you able to come back, Harry?” Hermione asked.

“I was given a choice, and I chose to come back.”

Harry’s last words hung in the air, their meaning giving everyone several moments of silent reflection.

“Alright, let’s say all of this is true,” Draco finally said. “There’s still one thing I don’t quite understand…”

“What?” Hermione asked.

“The ritual. Why did it work tonight, but not before? We didn’t even do it the same way.”

“I believe I know the answer to that,” Snape said. “I wasn’t absolutely certain at the time, but I had a strong feeling that if you found the ritual, it would be only a simulation of the kind of act that would be needed to fulfil the prophecy. I was concerned that something would be missing.”

Lucius narrowed his eyes. “Such as?”

“The answer to that,” Snape said. “lies in the prophecy itself. It explains everything that is required for it to be fulfilled.”

The four exchanged looks before Hermione began to repeat the prophecy slowly, pausing on particular words as the meaning and implications set in.

She clapped her hands. “It was right there, all along.”

“It was?” Ron asked.

“OK, listen,” Hermione said. “The ritual was a good start. It tested our ability to conjure magic together, and we did, remember?”

The boys nodded.

“But, that’s all it was, a test, and a start. It allowed us to experiment with many of the elements mentioned in the prophecy such as blood, lust, and passion, but other things were missing…”

Snape nodded. “Correct, Miss Granger. The prophecy required that a sixth year Muggle born fully submit herself to three wizards, but the type of submission required was very particular. It had to be given in sacrifice, in the face of pain and great suffering. It was never meant to be done in curious exploration or for pleasure, but for something greater—for love.”

“Suffering, complete submission, sacrifice, and love,” Hermione repeated.
“Huh,” Ron said.

Draco still appeared uncertain. “Alright, that makes sense, but something still doesn’t figure,” he said. “What about Harry’s parents? If Dumbledore hadn’t meddled, how would they have pulled it off? It’s not like Harry’s father had a piece of the Dark Lord inside of him.”

Harry nodded. “Right, my mum and dad tried to explain this to me. They said they believed that the other attempts at the prophecy failed because they weren’t meant to happen.”

“Does that mean the prophecy was really ours all along?” Hermione asked.

“Yeah, I think so,” Harry said.

“But if your parents, and Sirius and Snape weren’t mean to be a part of the prophecy, why would Dumbledore try so hard to prevent it?” Ron asked.

“Dumbledore had no idea who was supposed to fulfil the prophecy,” Harry explained. “No one did. But Dad said that his interference may have actually helped ours to come to true. He said everything, even failure and trickery, plays a part in some greater plan.”

“Like fulfilling your prophecy, Potter,” Snape said. “More than one prophecy was fulfilled tonight.”

“I still can’t believe it,” Harry said.

“Yes, well, fate has a funny way of using our choices towards its own ends.”

“My mum said the same thing,” Harry said.

There was an awkward silence as Snape and Harry locked eyes, until Snape tore his eyes away.

“Did your parents say anything else, Harry?” Hermione asked.

Harry smiled sheepishly. “Yeah…”

“Oh,” Hermione said, giving him a small smile.

Snape uncrossed his legs. “Well, Potter, this has certainly been one for the books. I believe this time you have earned your notoriety. Now we just have to figure out how to explain it to others.”

“Yes,” Lucius said, with concern. “This must be handled with delicacy, so as not to cast a bad light on everyone involved.”

“How could destroying Voldemort cast a bad light?” Hermione asked.

“It’s how he was destroyed that concerns me,” Lucius said.

“If you don’t mind me saying,” Harry said. “We just killed the monster who killed my parents, and I nearly died while doing it. I don’t really care what people think happened. I’m just glad it’s over.”

“Harry, that’s all well and good,” Draco said. “But we’ll have to craft a proper response to the questions people will have about us. We don’t want to draw any more attention than we’ll already receive.”

“Well most of the school was there,” Hermione said. “They witnessed the entire thing. And Pomfrey pronounced Harry dead, and everyone saw him come back, so it’s all a matter of public record now. Besides, we have nothing to be ashamed of, Voldemort is dead, Harry is alive, and the world is
better for the magic we produced.”

“I suppose when you put it that way, there is little recourse other than the truth,” Lucius said gravely. “I only hope that the Aurors and general public will be as understanding. Dark magic, especially sexual magic, involving three wizards and Muggle-born witch may be regarded as rather unsavoury business.”

“I’m sure Skeeter will find a way to twist it into something dirty,” Harry grumbled.

“Well it was rather nasty, wasn’t it?” Draco said.

“Oh no, my parents!” Ron exclaimed.

“Ron, your parents are the least of our concerns!” Hermione said. “I’m sure once everything is put in perspective, they’ll understand.”

“Easy for you to say…”

“Ron, eventually I will have to tell my parents about this relationship as well. Besides, what’s important is that everyone is fine and everything turned out alright.”

“Yes, it did,” Snape said, turning to Lucius. “Are you ready?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be,” Lucius said with a sigh.

“Ready for what, Father?” Draco asked.

“The Aurors are here, along with the Governors,” Lucius said gravely.

“As a formality, we will have to turn ourselves in. They’re waiting for us inside the Headmistresses’ Office,” Snape explained.


“Yes, I will send them in to see you before they leave.”

Harry gave Snape an appreciative nod.

“Draco…” Lucius said, standing up. They all watched as he walked over to Draco’s side of the bed. While he projected his usual aristocratic grace, his haunted eyes told another story.

Draco stared up at his father, appearing unsure as what to say or do, until Lucius bent down on one knee to whisper something in his son’s ear. Harry watched as they clasped hands. Draco closed his eyes as if fighting back tears.

Aware he was witnessing a rather intimate moment, Harry looked away, but not before seeing the corner of Draco’s mouth break into a small smile.

And then they were gone, leaving the four in contemplative silence.

“What a night…” Ron said at last. “I don’t know about the rest of you, but I’ve never been so happy to be stuck in Pomfrey’s infirmary.”

“Agreed,” Draco said. “I could stay here for the rest of the year.”

“You know, I think they’d let us if we wanted to,” Harry said.
“Well then, let’s see how long we can keep it going,” Draco said with a smirk.

“That’s out of the question,” Hermione said. “Finals are approaching, and there’s no way I’m missing them.”

Draco and Ron groaned.

“Hermione, there will be plenty of examinations waiting for you, whenever we get out of here. For now, we should rest,” Harry said, lying back down.

“And celebrate our victory,” Draco said, scooting in to nuzzle against Hermione’s back.

“Ouch!” she winced.

“Uh, sorry,” he said, withdrawing his arm from around her waist.

Hermione turned to smile at him over her shoulder, and pulled his arm back into place. They both scooted closer to Harry and Ron. Another round pained groans and soft curses followed as they all tried to get comfortable against each other.

Once they settled, Harry found himself smiling in contentment. In spite of his injuries and pain, he was alive. He’d gotten a chance to meet and talk to his parents, and best of all, the three most important people in his life had made it out alive as well, and they were all here, together.

“This is rather cosy,” Hermione remarked. “I could definitely get used to sleeping like this.”

“See, told you,” Ron said. “You’ll forget all about finals soon.”

“Don’t push it, Ron.”

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Two Months Later, since the night of Voldemort’s defeat, things inside and outside of Hogwarts, had changed dramatically.

After considerable clean up, the country began to rebuild and the Ministry had begun the task of holding trials for those who had supported and aided Voldemort. The remaining Death Eaters were tried, convicted, and sentenced to Azkaban. However, both Snape and Lucius had received full pardons, and Snape was awarded the Order of Merlin First Class.

As for Hermione, Harry, Ron, and Draco, public opinion was mixed. Although the initial news of Voldemort’s defeat was met with celebration and praise, once the details of how he was defeated leaked, disbelief, shock, and outrage followed. While the quartet had many supporters, there were still a fair number of people who considered it distasteful and too scandalous to speak of. There were also many disgruntled parents who were upset that such a relationship had an opportunity to bloom at the school, and worse, that it was orchestrated by a professor under the Headmaster’s nose.

Dumbledore’s leadership immediately came into question, and after a lengthy investigation and review, he was formally removed as Headmaster. Subsequently, he was also kicked out of the Order. McGonagall was immediately promoted from interim Headmistress to official Headmistress. She praised Snape for saving her life by knocking her unconscious during the attack. As Headmistress, her first formal task was offering Snape a post as Defence Against the Dark Arts professor. Unfazed by the rumours that the position was cursed, he accepted immediately.

Meanwhile, after attending several funerals and memorials for their classmates, the students at
Hogwarts had taken it upon themselves to change the order of things. While house loyalties still existed, new loyalties had formed, and it was not uncommon to see students eating at house tables that were not their own. Inter-house courtships increased exponentially, and there was even talk of petitioning McGonagall for the creation of a new house that represented all of the other four combined.

Inside of Slytherin, things were the same, with a few exceptions. Both Crabbe and Goyle had been sentenced to home schooling with heavy monitoring by the Ministry. And since Draco now spent most of his time with Hermione, Harry, and Ron, Blaise Zabini became the new unofficial leader of Slytherin House. Since the night of the battle, he, Draco, and Pansy had resolved their differences, and were all on much better terms.

In Gryffindor House, things for Hermione, Harry, and Ron had completely changed. No longer the subject of suspicion and rumour, they now they had an entire House rallying in support of their relationship. Even Seamus became a staunch ally.

On the last day of classes, just a few hours before they were set to board the Hogwarts Express to go home, Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Draco took some time apart to say their respective goodbyes to classmates, professors, and staff.

Harry had just finished a rather lengthy discussion with Flitwick about his summer make up work in Charms when he turned the corner and bumped into something, sending his papers spilling onto the floor.

He looked up into cold black eyes peering down at him over a crooked nose.

Harry shuffled to collect the papers that had gathered around the man’s feet. This was not the way he had pictured running into Snape again.

“There are spells for that task, Potter. Perhaps you should learn them,” Snape drawled.

“Right, good idea,” Harry said, straightening. “What are you doing here…sir?”

Snape pursed his lips. “I am employed here, Potter.”

“Yes, but I thought—”

“Just because I haven’t officially started my new post doesn’t mean I am not working. There are many preparations that need to be made, and the Headmistress has requested that I help the new Potions instructor transition into her role.”

“Of course,” Harry said in a pleasant tone that sounded strange even to him.

They stood before each other, a pregnant silence growing.

“I suppose you’re preparing to go home, for the summer?” Snape asked stiffly.

“Uh, no, actually I’ll be spending my summer with Ron, at the Burrow.”

“I see. Well I trust you will not let your renewed fame go to your head. You are still woefully under prepared in potions. I suggest you use the summer to try and catch up, that is if you are still planning to take your N.E.W.T in that subject next year.”

Harry nodded deferentially, not sure of what else to say. Of course, there was plenty to be said, but he didn’t know how to say it, especially to Snape.
Snape appeared to be just as uncomfortable. “Take care, Potter. I’ll see you next term,” he said as he began to turn.

“Ah, Sir…”

Snape paused, turning around slowly, his eyes daring Harry to speak.

“Oh, well… I never did get to tell you what my parents said, about you, I mean.”

Snape jaw tightened. “Don’t.”

“But—”

“Are you really going to stand here, Potter, and deliver sentimental musings from James and Lily? Tell me, are you that determined to make things even more awkward than they already are?”

Harry swallowed. Snape had a point. What his mother had told him wasn’t exactly the sort of thing a professor would want to hear coming from a student, especially one who shared their bad history.

“No, I suppose not. I just wanted you to know that… well, they appreciate everything you’ve done for me.”

Snape took a breath, and blinked once while Harry stood, waiting for a response. He almost expected Snape to say something kind or gracious.

Instead, “Feel better?”

Harry thought about it for a second before nodding. “Yeah. I do.”

“Good. Now, I have work to get back to.”

“Right. Well, I don’t want to hold you up,” Harry said quickly.

“Very well. Good day, Potter.”

“Good day, Professor.”

As Harry watched Snape walk away, a strange peace settled over him. No more words needed to be said; he knew things between them would be different now. A little awkward and weird sometimes, yes, but much better.

In fact, everything was going to be better. At least he hoped. There was one last difficult conversation he needed to have. Harry glanced anxiously up at the clock. Only a two hours left until the Hogsmeade train boarded to take them all home. He took a deep breath and fingered the charmed coin in his pocket as he turned towards the dungeons.

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When Hermione came downstairs, Parvati was right on her heel. As she approached the couches, several girls scooted over, hoping that she’d take a seat next to them.

Ginny gave the swarm of new admirers a bemused headshake and stood to greet her friend. “You’d think they would be over it by now.”

Hermione looked to the gathering of smiling faces staring back at her.
“Well it’s better than being called a slag behind my back,” she laughed.

“No one can call you a slag now,” Ginny said. “Since you four saved the world with your sex magic, half of the girls in this school have either tried to organise an orgy or they’ve been involved in one.”

“I most certainly am not to blame for that!” Hermione protested.

“Right,” Ginny said with a smile.

“Hermione, I heard that there’s even talk of putting together a summer orgy in honour of your victory,” Parvati said excitedly.

Hermione gasped. “You can’t be serious? That’s absolutely—”

“Exciting?” Parvati giggled. “Not that I would ever participate in such a thing, of course. I mean, there’s nothing wrong with having multiple partners, it’s just that—”

“Parvati, it’s alright. I understand,” Hermione said with amusement.

Parvati gave her a relieved smile.

Ginny shook her head. “The entire world has gone mental.”

Hermione couldn’t have agreed with her more, but if the world if it had gone mental, it was much better than before.

She was about to sit down when something hot warmed her thigh.

“Oh!” she exclaimed.

“What is it?” Ginny asked.

“Ah, I almost forgot…McGonagall wanted to see me before I left. I’ll see you two at the train.”

“Alright,” Ginny and Parvati said, not giving her a second glance.

Hermione walked briskly to McGonagall’s office. Once she arrived, the Headmistress formally informed Hermione that the Head Girl’s position was hers if she wanted it. Surprised and ecstatic, Hermione jumped up out of her chair, reaching over McGonagall’s desk to give the woman a firm hug. The stunned Headmistress embraced Hermione back, offering a vague apology for any earlier misunderstandings. Elated to have the acceptance and apology of her favourite professor, Hermione hugged McGonagall once more, until the heat on her thigh made her excuse herself in haste. She offered a flimsy explanation about needing to say goodbye to others before the train left and hurried down to the dungeons.

Hermione’s heart began to race as she rounded the corner towards Salazar Slytherin’s chamber, her mind trying to work out exactly what this meeting was to be about.

She knocked on the thick black wooden door, and it opened with a creak. She could feel her entire body tensing, and her breath was coming in short. Perhaps because things had returned to the way they were at the beginning of the year. None of the boys had really touched her since the night of the battle. They had been treating her delicately, giving soft kisses, gentle hugs, and a light caress here and there. It was both confusing and maddening.

Even now, she could feel a deep longing awakening as a dozen scenarios of what they had planned
sprang to mind.

But as she entered the chamber, all of her sexy thoughts evaporated. The boys were gathered near the bed looking tense and sullen. Harry and Ron sitting down, Draco leaning against the bedpost.

“Hi,” she said, growing anxious at the serious looks on their faces.

“Hi,” they replied.

She looked between them, waiting for one of them to say something; both Ron and Draco were looking to Harry.

“What is it?” she asked.

Harry was staring at Hermione like one about to make a difficult speech.

“We need to talk,” he said.

“Alright. Let’s talk then,” she said, trying to lighten the mood with her smile.

Harry and Ron exchanged a nervous glance.

“Do you want to sit down?” Ron asked.

Hermione frowned. She didn’t like the nervousness in his voice. “No. I’m fine standing.”

Harry swallowed. “Alright then. Here goes. Hermione, ever since the night I saw my parents, I’ve been thinking a lot about everything that’s happened. This has been a very strange year. We were all caught up in fate and as it turned out, everything we did served some greater purpose, even when we didn’t know it.”

Hermione crossed her arms, trying to figure out where exactly Harry was going with this.

“We were trying to fulfil the prophecy, and now it’s done. So…”

“So?” she asked.

Harry sighed. “So, the whole master/slave thing—”

Hermione’s eyebrows rose.

“I mean Master/submissive thing, well, we don’t have to do it anymore.”

“Are you saying you don’t want to?” Hermione asked, unable to keep the disappointment out of her voice.

“No, what I’m saying, Hermione is that we just went through something really traumatic. We were forced to have sex in front of the entire school…”

“I know, Harry. I was there, remember?”

Harry looked frustrated as if he were struggling with his words. He ran his hand through his hair, looking up to Draco and then to Ron for help.

Draco straightened. “What Harry is trying to say, Hermione, is that if you no longer feel comfortable being in this sort of relationship, you’re free to walk away.”
“Oh really?” Hermione asked Draco with a challenge. “And you’d be fine with that as well?”

She could see his jaw working as he grit his teeth, but he managed to nod and grit out a response. “Yes.”

Ron swallowed as he looked between Draco and Harry and then up at Hermione.

She stared down at him. “And you as well, Ron?”

He nodded reluctantly. “I just want you to be happy.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Oh for God’s sake. I can’t believe this!”

“What?” Ron asked anxiously.

“You three should know better by now! Yes, the prophecy brought us all together, but that’s not why I agreed to be owned, or pierced. I thought it was a symbol of our love. It’s what I want, and I thought you did too!”

“We do,” Harry, Draco and Ron said.

“Well then, what’s the problem?”

Draco nudged his head in Harry’s direction. “Now that the prophecy has been fulfilled, Mr. Do-Gooder here didn’t want you to feel obligated.”

“And you agreed with me, Draco! And so did Ron,” Harry protested.

“Harry…” Hermione said.

“I just wanted you to be happy, Hermione. I love you,” Harry said.

Hermione smiled. “And I love you. I love all of you, very much. And I’m sure this is what I want.”

“Yeah?”

“Definitely,” Hermione smiled.

Harry sighed in relief, and then a smirk crept onto his face. “Say it properly, then.”

Hermione dropped to her knees before him, trying to control her smile. “Master, I am absolutely certain this is what I want.”

Ron smiled in approval.

“I was hoping you’d say that,” Draco said, withdrawing his wand and casting a spell on the torches.

The room darkened, with only one torch left lit, casting their shadows along the wall.

In the next moment, she felt herself being lifted off the floor and thrown onto the bed. Hot full lips crashed against her mouth as Harry pinned her arms up over her head. Hermione pushed back just a little, enjoying the resistance and feel of the strength he was exerting to keep her in place.

She gasped against his mouth as a new hand slide between their bodies. The hand was skilled, lifting her robe expertly to find the hem of her skirt. She shifted as the hand insisted on entry between her thighs. Eager fingers began to slip into the wetness that had formed down there, and Hermione open
her legs wider to grant them access. She knew whose talented fingers those belonged to, and writhed
against them as Draco continued to stroke her. His hot wet mouth pressed against her ear, sending
tingly shocks to her nipples.

Hermione squirmed as a third body closed in on her left. A palm covered her breast as familiar lips
pressed against her other ear.

“Would you like a proper send off?” Ron asked, before lightly nipping her earlobe just as Harry
broke their kiss for air.

“Yes, of course,” Hermione breathed.

“Hmm, I’m not sure she deserves one. Have you been a good girl this year?” Draco asked, his
fingers sinking deeper inside of her.

“Aah, yes. Yes, Master, I’ve been very good,” Hermione moaned. The sensation of having Ron and
Draco nibbling at her ears and neck while Harry attacked her mouth was exhilarating.

Harry broke the kiss once more, gazing down at her with lust in his eyes. “That’s too bad. I was all
set to punish you.”

“Well I suppose there were a few infractions, if you feel you must,” she said with a cheeky smile,
suddenly feeling adventurous. “Actually, more than a few. I haven’t been very good at all.”

Harry shook his head, rolling off her to stand at the edge of the bed.

“You’re going to regret saying that,” Draco said, “Remove everything and turn over on all fours so
you can take your punishment properly.”

Hermione glanced at Harry and up at Ron who was making a turning motion with his finger.

“Yes, Master,” she said, rising up on her knees to undress. Watching their eyes follow her every
moment as they fumbled to take off their clothing, made Hermione feel even sexier. They were
completely naked by the time she had stripped, and just looking at their hungry eyes and erect cocks
made her eager to turn over and obey. She positioned herself as Draco had instructed her to, trying
not to appear completely wanton as the air titillated her exposed cunt. A smooth cool hand stroked
her bottom, its tender caress deceptively beguiling.

“Infraction number one, Granger. You were not wearing the proper undergarments.”

“We’re still following the contract? But I thought—“

She gasped as the hand pulled back to deliver a swift sharp slap.

“Oh! I’m sorry, Master!”

“No you’re not. That’s why you’ve been so naughty, isn’t it? Because you love this,” Draco said
again, smacking her arse three times in succession.

It stung like hell, but it also roused the sleeping desire she’d been holding onto for the past two
months

“Don’t you?”

“Please what?”

“Please, may I have another, Master?” Hermione begged.

A hand reached into her hair, pulling her head back as Draco delivered another series of smacks to her now tender arse.

Hermione found herself staring up at Ron, who looked amused. “Hermione, punishment isn’t supposed to be fun.”

“Make it harder for me then,” she goaded with a dare in her eyes.

Ron raised one eyebrow as he scooted closer to her, his hard cock pushing against her lips.

“Is this hard enough for you?”

Hermione’s mouth watered as the pre-come on Ron’s cock coated her lips; she slid her tongue out to taste it. Ron groaned his grip in her hair tightening as he pushed it against her lips. Hermione opened her mouth wide to accommodate him, taking as much of him in as she could.

Her entire body stirred as Draco resumed an incessant tirade on her enflamed arse cheeks. She moaned and whimpered around the cock in her mouth, her body involuntarily trying to move in anticipation of his next blow.

“Oh no you don’t,” Draco said, holding her hips in place with one hand, as he continued to assault her backside with his other hand. “Take your punishment like a big girl.”

Hermione gripped Ron’s thighs, bracing herself against the blows as he began to fuck her mouth.

Her arse was on fire, but she could feel her arousal soaking the insides of her thighs.

A few more sharp blows and the spanking ceased. Slightly relieved to have a reprieve, Hermione concentrated on the cock in her mouth, until something old but familiar struck her sore flesh.

Before Hermione could pause and turn to see what it was, the soft leather strips of Harry’s flogger fell against her thighs, and then her arse again, and although Hermione’s body flinched with each strike, she could feel herself becoming more excited as the whipping continued.

“How much more can you take?” Harry asked, pausing from his ministrations.

Hermione wiggled her arse in invitation for Harry to do his worst. He chuckled in amusement and then set out to call her bluff, alternating between medium taps and hard stripes.

It didn’t matter how hard or soft the lashes fell, as Harry continued to deal out ‘punishment’, Hermione could feel her body becoming more pliant and needy. She felt wanton, and special, to warrant such attention, and began to twist her hips more with every blow.

“God, you should see your arse when it’s marked up like this,” Harry whispered.

“Lovely, isn’t it?” Draco said.

She heard the flogger fall to the floor, and then cool hands gripped her hot flesh, pulling her apart.

She sucked in what little air was available and more of Ron’s cock as a hot tongue circled her forbidden hole, and then slid down to her cunt.
“You greedy tosser,” she heard Draco say, before the bed sunk with new weight. One of Harry’s hands dropped, and was replaced by another. When Hermione felt another tongue join Harry’s, she crooned over Ron’s cock, and spread herself to make room for both of them.

As Harry’s tongue went deeper, Draco’s slid down to join his. She could feel their tongues moving over and against each other, as they took turns lapping and penetrating her. She whimpered in response, and whimpered when Harry’s tongue moved down from her slit to the ring over her clit. He playfully licked and teased her piercing, while Draco’s mouth remained in place, sucking and slurping like a starving man cleaning a plate.

Harry kissed her cunt one last time before twisting himself to sliding between her legs and lie underneath her.

Draco’s long tongue gave her one last swipe, before pulling away, leaving her aching from its absence. She paused, and both of Ron’s hands sunk into her hair, insisting that she continue her task.

Two calloused hands cupped her breasts, tenderly tracing her nipple rings, while two smooth hands gripped her hips from behind.

Ron paused and Hermione glanced up at him. He was looking straight ahead, his eyes silently communicating with Draco.

She felt soft pressure on her hips as Draco guided her down onto Harry’s cock.

Ron relaxed the hold on her head as she positioned herself over Harry’s hardness. She squirmed over it until he was completely sheathed inside her. But before she could get too comfortable, the hands on her hips were pulling her back. She tried to adjust, moving up on Harry a little while sticking her arse out to accommodate Draco.

A soft whispered spell later, her arse was slick with lubrication, and Draco’s slender fingers were slipping in, probing her narrower entrance, first with one finger, and then two before she felt the head of his cock pressing against her.

“Are you ready to be completely filled, Hermione?” Draco asked

“Mmm-hmm.”

Harry paused as Draco pulled her hips back a little so he could he slowly work himself inside her narrower entrance.

The feeling of having two cocks inside of her while a third was in her mouth wasn’t new, but after months of playing chaste, it certainly felt new again. Apparently satisfied that everyone had found their place, Ron gripped Hermione’s head, resuming his previous rhythm. Hermione tried to concentrate on giving him pleasure but it was hard to concentrate on one thing as Harry pushed his hips up to fill her again and again, while Draco began a slow steady thrust behind her. She tried to move between them, but they were controlling the dance, pushing back and forth against her.

Every nerve in her lower half was awake as their cocks slid against each other, separated by only a thin membrane. The feeling of fullness tickled her very core, and the ring in her clit trembled with every movement Harry and Draco made. Before long, Hermione found herself keening from the tremors of her approaching climax.

Ron looked down, running a hand over her hair. She looked up at him. His face was flushed, and his eyes were half hooded.
“Oh, Hermione, if you keep sucking like this, I’m going to—Uugghh.”

Hermione prepared herself as Ron’s hot come hit her tongue. She continued to suck, taking all of it, even as Harry and Draco thrusts grew more frenzied and the pressure inside of her threatened to explode.

As Ron backed away, the pressure became too much, and Hermione cried out.

She came once, and then again, when Draco called her name, her arse clenching around him as he came inside of her. She didn’t think she had any more orgasms in her, but by the time Harry reached his peak, she had come once more, and her whole body trembled from the tiny little aftershocks that followed.

They lay there spent and messy for several minutes before Draco finally got up and did a Scourgify on all of them. When he was done, Hermione crawled to the head of the bed, to lie down. Ron moved up to lay on her left, Harry moved to her right. Draco waited for all of them to settle before sliding up Hermione’s body, to rest his head on her belly.

“That was a quite a send-off,” she said.

“Yes, it was,” Draco said. “You know, I’m really going to miss this room.”

“We’ll be right back here in a few weeks,” Harry said.

“Yes, but with McGonagall in charge, and Filch no longer under the Imperius, I doubt we’ll be able to get away with sneaking about the way we did this year,” Draco replied.

“Oh, I don’t think McGonagall or Filch will be bothering us much,” Hermione said with a wink. “If they can’t trust the Head Girl, then who can they trust?”

Ron’s head shot up, Harry’s eyes grew wide, and Draco smiled.

“I knew it. You made Head Girl. Congratulations, Hermione,” Draco said, placing a soft kiss to her belly.

“Congratulations, Hermione,” Harry said, leaning over to give her a kiss.

“Thank you.” Hermione tried to contain her smile. She didn’t want to look too full of herself, but she was very proud.

“I always known you’d make Head Girl, Hermione,” Ron whispered, kissing her on the cheek.

Hermione beamed as she stared up at the ceiling. “I know it’s only six weeks or so, but I’m not sure I want to go that long without seeing all of you.”

“You won’t have to. We can meet up anytime you like,” Draco said. “Diagon Alley…Knockturn…”

Hermione raised her head to look down at him. “Knockturn? Draco, I hope you aren’t suggesting we meet up at that brothel again.”

Draco shrugged. “At least we know we’re always welcome there. Besides, don’t we have at least twelve more of your fantasies to explore?”

Hermione chuckled, shaking her head at him. “Draco, nothing, not even the promise of fulfilling one of my fantasies will convince me to ever set foot inside that place again.”
Draco sighed. “Fine. I suppose you’ll just have to visit me at the Manor then.”

Hermione raised an eyebrow. “Are you sure your father won’t mind?”

“No, of course not,” Draco said, but his voice was much less confident than his words.

Ron sat up, a sceptical look on his face. “Can Harry and I visit you there as well?”

Draco’s eyes darted from Ron’s to Harry’s. “Uh…yeah, sure, just give me some notice before you all drop by, alright?”

Harry sniggered. “Right. I think you and Hermione should just plan a trip to the Burrow. Ron and I will already be there.”

“Harry, you saw the letter my Mum just sent me. They’re going to be acting bizarre enough as it is,” Ron said. “If Draco shows up, it’d send the whole house into a tizzy.”

“It’s not like we’re going to be shagging there, Ron,” Harry said. “It’s just an innocent visit.”

“Nothing we do is seen as innocent now that everyone knows about us,” Ron said.

“Well if they already know, then what’s the harm?” Draco asked.

“You’ll see. Just wait until Fred and George start in on you.”

“I can handle your brothers, Ron, probably better than you can,” Draco replied.

“We’ll just see about that,” Ron challenged.

“Ron, if we can stand the rubbish *The Prophet* prints about us, we can stand a little ribbing from Fred and George,’ Harry said.

“I think meeting at the Burrow this summer a wonderful idea,” Hermione said. “We all could use a good laugh.”

Harry nodded in agreement, and Hermione’s smile faltered as the sombre memory of the not so distant past crept into the room.

“What a year,” she said. “And we actually survived it.”

“Yes, we did,” Draco said, covering Hermione’s folded hands with his own. They shared a moment of silent appreciation for what they had, and how far they’d come. When Harry reached down to cover their hands with one of his, Ron did the same, resting his hand on top.

As they lay in stillness, their hands joined a little looser than their hearts, Hermione thought she felt a faint tingle of magic flowing through them.

They had forged a bond out of duty, and it has been tested time and time again, growing stronger after each trial. As she reflected on all they had been through, Hermione realised just how much of their lives they had left to live. With Voldemort gone, and their relationship made public, so much of the future was uncertain. She held no naive notions that their bond would never be tested again, but Hermione was certain about one thing: she loved each one of them, and they loved her and each other. Whatever future lay ahead, the bond and love they shared would always remain.

“Hey, can I ask you guys something?” Ron asked, breaking the tranquil silence.
"What?" they all responded.

"Do you think that maybe you’d be up for another round? I mean, before we head out?"

"What?" "Ron!" "Weasley!"

Ron pouted. "Well, everyone has had a go at being the centre of attention, except for me. Just once, I’d like to be the centre."

"We have one hour, Ron," Hermione reminded.

Ron sat up eagerly. "That’s plenty of time. I don’t even think I could last that long with so much attention."

Draco chuckled and sat up as Hermione moved to switch places with Ron so that he lay in the middle of the bed. Harry gave Ron an amused headshake as he leaned in over him.

"OK, Ron, now you’re the centre. Are you ready?" Harry asked.

"Oh yeah. Bring it on."

As Snape climbed the stairs towards the second floor where his new living quarters were located, his gaze fell to the corridor leading down to the dungeons. Although he was quite pleased to be the newly appointed DADA instructor, he was less than elated about the location of his new rooms. The dungeons suited him. They were much darker, and offered a great deal more privacy than the highly visible second floor. Still, he did have a knack for sending students scurrying whenever he appeared, so perhaps it wouldn’t be so bad.

The stairway shifted to the first floor instead, and immediately Snape’s eyes found the DADA classroom. He was about to order the staircase to move to the proper floor but the DADA classroom had a magnetic attraction he couldn’t ignore. Slowly, he walked towards it, and then opened the door to peek inside. It was just a classroom. Nothing to get excited about. Yet, Snape could feel his heart beating wildly in his chest as a long buried excitement rose to the surface. Quietly, he stepped inside. Although he had been here many times, on many nights, it had always seemed out of reach like so many things in his life. But now, as he walked around its perimeter, taking in the décor, books, and various instruments, Snape realised he’d have to do a complete inventory. It was up to him to decide what fixtures and equipment were to be used here. As the reality of his new position began to sink in, Snape stopped at the front of the classroom, casting his most imposing glare at the empty seats before him.

"You are here to learn the complex and mysterious discipline of Defence Against the Dark Arts. While many of you will leave with a rudimentary understanding, the more advanced practice of this art will elude most of you. Only the most skilled wizards and witches with a sharp eye and quick mind are fit to master this type of magic. Those of you who possess the potential and talent, will be revealed shortly. As for the rest of you – beware."

The sound of his voice reverberating through the room as he pictured anxious and frightened first year faces brought a satisfied smile to his face.

He left the classroom, and made his way up the stairs towards his new quarters. He removed his robes and loosened his collar before making his way over to cabinet in the corner. Over the past two months, Snape had received several gifts and owls of praise, mostly from admiring witches. Although it was nice to be wanted, his favourite gifts to date were the Order of Merlin First Class,
Minerva’s appointment, and the case of 18-year old imported Scotch and silver decanter set Lucius and Narcissa had given him. He poured himself a drink from it, and took a seat at his desk.

There on top of it, sat a new owl. He opened it, reading it twice in bemusement. It was an invitation for drinks with Lupin and Tonks. The thought of balling it up crossed his mind, but he decided to set it aside instead. Perhaps a drink with Lupin wouldn’t be so bad. They had managed to endure each other’s company in the last year. And their chats were always interesting, to say the least. Snape almost smiled, as he considered that he and Lupin could actually become friends. The world had indeed changed.

As he took a sip of his drink, he began to think about his last interaction with Potter.

Did he want to know what James and Lily had said about him? Of course.

Did he want to hear it from Potter? Absolutely not.

But that didn’t stop Snape from speculating. He briefly wondered what James Potter could possibly want to say to him after all this time before deciding it didn’t really matter.

However, Lily did.

Snape closed his eyes, trying to imagine what message she had delivered to her son about him.

But just as quickly as he had closed his eyes, Snape forced them open again, determined not to indulge in old fantasies. Instead, he reclined in his chair, exhaled, and raised his glass.

“Goodbye, Lily, wherever you are.”

He took another swig, allowing the weight of the past to dissolve like the liquor on his tongue.

It was a new day, and he felt like a new man. James and Lily had offered their gratitude, that was all Snape needed to know. The absolution he’d been chasing for nearly sixteen years was his at last.

He was truly free now. Free from guilt, free from servitude, free to love again.

And for the first time in two decades, Severus Snape had the smallest measure of hope that one day, he would.

The End

Chapter End Notes

If you made it this far, I really want to thank you for sticking with it. I hope you found the end satisfying, but if you did not, please let me know where I could have improved so that I can learn and grow as I continue to write. Also, if you see any significant grammar or spelling mistakes, please let me know so I can correct it.

Thank you so much for reading!
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