Choosing Destiny

by AkashaTheKitty

Summary

Hermione is missing a year of her life, and nobody knows what she did during that time. Nobody, that is, except him. And he is a Death Eater.

All the evidence point to her willingly erasing her memory and covering up all the evidence.

So what did she do?

Notes

Prompt:

When one of her friends turned dark, Hermione was left reeling. Angry and broken-hearted, she turned to an unlikely source of comfort. Playing with the darkness, however, has consequences. The question now remains, what will she do for love?

Hermione/Death Eater

A world of love to my alpha, beta and banner maker! You are the best!
Chapter 1

It was dark, too dark to properly see anything. The trees were looming, the forest eerily silent. Waiting. Watching. Hungering. Hermione forced herself not to consider any of that and to ignore the burning pain of every gasping breath she drew. She kept running.

Her hand snatched on something and she heard a sickening crack. Cursing to herself, Hermione clutched the useless arm, blocking out any thoughts of what might have broken and what pain would come later. She needed to keep up. To catch him. He had the artefact.

He might also have answers. She’d sensed it. The way he’d hesitated for a moment when he’d first seen her. The way his eyes had flickered. The way his jaw had tensed as he’d levelled his wand at her.

She clutched her arm closer, desperately hoping that the spell she’d almost but not quite dodged wouldn’t wear off too soon.

Her own reaction to seeing him had startled her, too. Her breath had caught, her eyes stung. She’d wanted to speak. The emptiness she’d felt inside herself for months had threatened to swallow her.

That’s why he’d got her first.

There had been no reason for her to react that way or for him to hesitate. There was no reason to be surprised, no reason for any emotional response.

Unless…
Hermione narrowly dodged another branch and thought she might have caught a glimpse of him ahead. They were almost at the edge of the boundary. If she didn’t catch up before then, he would be gone. Both with the artefact and with her answers.

The answers that might make her life make sense again.

A couple of months ago, Hermione had woken up as if from a prolonged daydream. She’d been in a strange town by the sea, surrounded by strange people, with no money and no recollection of how she’d come to be there. When she’d finally made it back, she’d found all the Order hideouts abandoned, all her friends gone. She’d looked for them for weeks before they’d finally revealed themselves to her, distrustful. They’d told her she’d been gone almost a year. They’d told her she’d left willingly. They’d showed her a letter, written in her own hand, telling them not to look for her and to pack up and burn all bridges between them.

They’d thought she’d defected and joined the Death Eaters.

They’d shown her a later letter, also in her hand, telling them not to trust her, not to let her into their confidence. It said she’d found something she loved more than their sense of justice. Something she’d choose over them any day.

Why on earth would she have written that? What could she possibly have found?

She’d asked that very question and the only response she’d received was hard stares.

Then she’d remembered. Someone dear to all of them had turned his back on his friends, his family, his fiancée. He’d said his eyes had been opened to a truth he’d never seen before. A truth that had made him despise them.

She had no defences left.

After that, the only one willing to give her a chance was Harry. Poor, weary Harry. He’d believed her when she’d said she didn’t remember anything. He’d said the two words that had stuck with her ever since.

\textit{Friends forgive.}

Yet here she was, already betraying the trust Harry put in her by letting this man get away. This man, holding a very powerful artefact she was supposed to protect. This man who might have her answers.

This man who was definitely a Death Eater.
She broke through the woods and into a clearing.

There he stood, facing her. The innocuous-looking necklace in one hand and his wand in the other.

Hermione doubled over, trying to catch her breath, gagging with the effort.

“D-don’t…” she managed to get out.

“What a compelling argument,” he said.

His face was hidden behind that dreadful mask now. Perhaps he’d realised she’d seen something back there.

“If you take that, it could cause so much damage. So many innocents could die. Please.”

She’d managed to stand up straighter, but she was still clutching her numbed and broken limb.

He didn’t respond.

“Please,” she repeated. “Lives depend on it.” It didn’t even occur to her to draw her wand.

The gloved fingers holding the artefact tightened. “That they do,” he softly said. “I am sorry.”

And then in a flash, he was gone.

Sobbing, she fell to her knees.

“I’m so sorry.”

It was probably her millionth apology, but Hermione couldn’t seem to stop herself. She was sitting on her threadbare sofa next to a tight-lipped Harry in the shabby little house she’d been delegated as her home, and the place for Order Members to contact her. They still didn’t trust her with their own locations. Everything considered, she couldn’t blame them.
“I know,” Harry replied. “You did everything you could. We were quite surprised actually.”

Hermione felt quite stung. “Of course I did my best!”

“No, that’s not… You don’t remember the true function of these artefacts, do you?”

Hermione had to admit that she didn’t. Her memory loss extended from some time before she’d disappeared until that day in the Muggle village. She had no idea why.

“Maybe I could have done better, maybe I could have—”

“Hermione!” Harry made a gesture towards her arm. It was supported by a sling and her hand had been splintered. She had received the best healing available outside of a medical facility, but everything was still incredibly tender. “You were partly paralysed and hurt yourself going after him. Nobody doubts your effort. Truly.”

“I know, but…” Hermione bit her lip and looked away. “I hesitated, Harry.”

“You were surprised.”

“No. I mean, yes. Of course. But… I think…”

“You think it was him?”

Hermione jolted, her cheeks inexplicably heating before she even realised who Harry was talking about.

Their very own traitor.

“No!” she hurried to say. “No, it wasn’t. I’m sure of that. But I think that he, that this Death Eater,—she couldn’t even bring herself to say his name—“knew what happened to me when I was gone.”

Harry’s jaw clenched and his eyes hardened. “Careful, Hermione. You know what you might be saying now.”

“I do.” Hermione swallowed, blinking as her vision blurred. “Harry, the way I felt—”

“Stop. Don’t say another word.”
“But—”

“We don’t know anything for certain. They could be playing mind games with you, for all we know.”

“I suppose that much is true.”

“Listen to me, Hermione. You cannot confess to anything unless you know without the shadow of a doubt that it is true. I’m your friend. I will always be your friend. But right now, my responsibilities are far greater than our friendship. Do you understand?”

“Of course I do.”

Of course she did.

If she confessed to consorting with Death Eaters, he’d have to take action. For everyone’s sake.

One time he might have been her champion. One time he might have gone to battle for her, no matter what she had done. Not now. He didn’t have that luxury any longer.

Not after Ron had betrayed them all.

Stumbling as he landed on the dark perimeter of what used to be Malfoy Manor, Draco grasped the artefact tighter.

Was this another test, then? Was the Dark Lord playing with him?

The guards shifted, sending him suspicious looks. They were lowly followers that hadn’t been honoured with the Mark, so Draco easily drew himself up and glared down his nose at them through his elaborate mask.

They returned to their skulking.

Taking a deep breath, he walked confidently and without hesitation past them and towards the Manor. Once inside, though, he faltered once more and instead of going directly to the Dark Lord’s audience room, he turned to go down a side hall.
A junior Death Eater stepped out of the shadows to block his way. Whether it had been a test or not, they still didn’t trust him completely, and lowly little pissa...
Other Death Eaters stood silent around the room as Draco had his head bowed in front of the inhuman form of their leader. Some of the more favoured lackeys huddled closer to their master and smirked in Draco’s direction. Disgust and fear roiled in his stomach, but he kept his mind a careful blank.

Some things were far more important than dignity, or even humanity. Some causes were worth any kind of humiliation.

“Show us the artefact then,” the Dark Lord said, and Draco dutifully held out the necklace.

A few of the other Death Eaters shifted, but they still didn’t utter any sounds.

“Did the Order give you any troubles?”

“No, my lord. There was one guard. I managed to disable her and get away without any problems.”

One of the lackeys sneered. “You mean you ran away?”

“I secured the artefact as I was tasked to do.”

“Yes, why do more than you have to?”

Draco’s spine stiffened at the sound of that particular familiar voice. A quick glance showed that Ron Weasley wasn’t even wearing a mask. Arrogant git. He didn’t even seem to know his true place here. “Seems to me, Weasley, that you’re all talk. Haven’t seen you actually do anything yet.”

“Well…” Weasley leant back, smirking. “You aren’t privy to many things these days, are you?”

Draco bared his teeth, no one could see it behind his mask, but he knew better than to take the bait.

To think that he now ranked beneath a bloody Weasley in the Dark Lord’s confidence.

The Dark Lord was toying with the artefact, appearing deep in thought.

“I’m sure our young Malfoy acted after his best conviction… did you not?” he finally asked.
Draco nodded curtly. “The guard was Potter's longtime friend, Hermione Granger. Much as I’m sure Weasley would like to see his ex dead before she reveals his most embarrassing secrets, like how he wet his bed right up until he joined us, killing her would only make her into a martyr and a rallying point for the Order of the Phoenix, whereas right now she failed her task and people will doubt her abilities.”

The Dark Lord bared his teeth in a malicious grin. “A celebrated strategist should have seen that.”

The scowl on Weasley’s face was a delight to see. “I didn’t say he should’ve bloody killed her. But ostracised or not, Harry still treasures her. She could be useful in many ways.”

“Miss your old girlfriend, then?”

“I swear, Malfoy—”

“Enough! You dare squabble in front of me like school children?” The Dark Lord ended his question on a hiss that had Draco flinching.

He couldn’t afford to get on his master’s bad side.

“My apologies, my Lord. Am I granted a reprieve?”

“A reprieve…” The Dark Lord once more looked at the artefact. “Yes. Yes, I believe you have been useful to me. Go be with your womenfolk.” He dismissed Draco with a wave.

Holding back a relieved breath, Draco nodded and left the room with firm confident strides. Once he was out of sight, he sped up and widened his steps to a near run, taking two steps at a time on the stairs and half-running down the carpeted hallways.

Finally he stood in front of the right door. He put his palm on the cool handle and took a deep breath, just barely remembering to vanish his mask before entering.

Inside, his mother turned to him.

“Draco! Finally! I haven’t slept a wink since you’ve been gone!” The dark circles under her eyes lent truth to her statement.

Without replying, Draco closed the space between them and took the bundle from her arms.

“She won’t eat when you’re not here. She fusses right until you’re at the door.” She sank down on the bed in the middle of the room. “I don’t know what we’ll do if you’re ever away for longer
Neither did he.

The first smile in days graced his lips as he looked down at his daughter. “Why, hello there, Sweetheart.”

Hermione stood gazing at herself in the mirror. It was like looking at a stranger. The familiar features were there, but there were also little changes. A line here, a small scar there, a haggard look, and a sadness that she couldn’t account for.

Something was missing. Something very dear to her. She wanted it back more than anything else, but at the same time she was afraid to look for it. She was afraid to know what it was.

What she hadn’t told Harry or any of her old friends about coming to her senses in that Muggle village was that while she’d been surrounded by strangers, she wasn’t a stranger to them. They said she’d lived there for a few months. Alone. She’d gone about her daily business, and she’d told them…

She’d told them she suffered from a neurological disorder that sometimes made her lose her short term memory.

At the time she’d known she was about to have her memory wiped, and she’d prepared her surroundings for it.

She hadn’t fought it. She had planned for it.

From the way he’d looked at her, Draco Malfoy knew something. Perhaps it was tied to Ron somehow. Perhaps she’d gone to try and get him back.

No, somehow she knew that wasn’t right. Ron had hurt them all deeply by leaving and revealing some of their most valuable secrets. As bad as it might sound, considering she’d once loved him, she hadn’t wanted him to come back.

But then what?
Chapter 2

“You have to be nicer to your nan, little one. She takes such good care of you.”

Draco was gently rocking his baby daughter while feeding her and chattering about nonsense.

“Ugh, don’t call me nan. Makes me sound old.”

His mother was trying to soothe the wrinkles in her dress with her hands, but soon had to give up. Instead of reaching for her wand, she went to the window and stared out at the dark.

“No older than ‘grandmother’, I suspect.”

She winced. “Thought I’d have another few years to get used to the idea. And then you suddenly show up with her in tow.”

“Yes. So sorry for taking responsibility for my child.”

Carefully, Draco set aside the bottle, put a burp cloth over his shoulder and began walking back and forth with the baby nestled against him.

“How can I be certain when you won’t even tell me who her mother is or why she isn’t here?”

“I told you everything you need to know, Mother.”

“Yes, yes, I know.” His mother sighed irritably. “Her mother was a Pureblood girl you sneaked out to see. She couldn’t take responsibility for the child though, so she had it in secret and gave it to you.”

“Seems like you know everything, then.”

“No, it just doesn’t make any sense, Draco! Not unless she was married or underage or—”
“Such faith in my ethics.”

“And even then, how would she manage to carry a child to term in secret? A nine month glamour? Well, I suppose that could work…”

“Mother! Stop guessing. Please. There’s a reason for everything and I—” Draco abruptly stopped talking as a loud burp sounded near his ear and he could feel something warm trickle down his back. “She missed the cloth, didn’t she?”

His mother glanced at him. “Yes.”

“What a talented girl you are. Every single time!” He put the baby down in her cradle and went over to his chest of drawers to get a clean set of robes.

“You’re using the baby to avoid my questions.”

“No,” Draco sighed, pulling off his soiled clothes. “I simply don’t have anything new to tell you.”

“Then how about this: Why won’t you name the child?”

Draco’s motions paused. He supposed he couldn’t have expected his mother to never notice that tiny little tidbit. “I’ve named her.”

“Oh? You didn’t tell me. What is it?”

He slowly finished putting on his robes before he said, “I think her mother should be the first to know.”

“But you yourself said she’s not likely to come here.”

“No. She won’t. Not as things stand. But whether it be in one day, one month or one year… She’ll be the first to know.”

Draco looked over at his daughter, already fast asleep.

He would be with his child’s mother again or he would die protecting the thing that was dearest in the world to the both of them. There were no other options.

He felt the corners of his mouth twitch into a smile.
Who would have thought?

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_A little over a year ago…_

Draco found himself in a dark forest with nothing but the moonlight to guide his steps. Damn woods. He was sick and tired of them. Couldn’t the Order for once hide in a nice beach resort or something? He was half certain that this information was useless anyway.

Trusting a Weasley for intelligence. There was a contradiction of epic proportions. He’d now officially tried it all.

A soft sound caught his attention.

What was this? Was the information good, after all? Damn it. He hated when the lanky git got points with the Dark Lord.

He began moving towards the sound, careful not to step on any branches. The forest gave way to a clearing with a lake, and by the lake, sitting on a rock, was a woman. With no trees to obscure the moonlight, he could see her face almost as clear as day.

Hermione Granger.

Hiding behind a tree trunk, Draco watched as she pulled off her robes and, naked as the day she was born, walked into the lake.

It was a balmy summer night, but the lake had to be freezing, even at this time of year.

Before he knew what he was doing, he was moving closer.

She looked up and spotted him. With easy strokes she moved closer to the edge.

Naked. Unarmed. Easy pickings.

He hesitated.
“He sent you, didn’t he?” Her voice was calm and steady.

Draco crooked his head. “I’m sure I don’t know what you’re talking about. I was just out for a stroll.”

Her smile was brittle. “That foul bubble of flobberworm flatulence told you about our private place. So now what? Are you going to kill me?” She opened her arms wide, her body still hidden by the darkness of the water. “Just go ahead and do it. Fucking. Go. Ahead.”

After dealing with double meanings, backstabbing and internal politics for the past few years, Draco had a difficult time parsing how easy this was. The clearing was wide and well-lit. No one else was near.

“I’m alone,” she confirmed. “I knew the risk, but I didn’t honestly think he’d send some lackey instead of doing the honours himself.”

That’s when Draco remembered he was still wearing his mask. Slowly, he removed it.

She pushed away from the edge in surprise. “You.”

“Hello, Granger.”

“You’re not here to kill me.” It wasn’t a question but a statement of fact.

“Not quite the reaction I expected.”

“We have our own intel. You’re not a murderer.” She crooked her head. “And you hate Ron. How does it feel to be demoted to his errand boy?”

He smiled sardonically. “It’s everything I always dreamed of.”

“I suppose we finally have something in common, then. Our hatred of him.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Would you like to kill him, then? Because I’d be fine with that.”

She snorted. “I’m not a murderer either. Besides, his mother would never let me hear the end of it. But why are you here?”

“To see you.”
“Then by all means…” She found her footing and rose. The water sparkled like diamonds, and her skin took on a cool, glowing, ethereal tone under the moon as she moved closer.

She was like a piece of art. A goddess of the night. A thing of beauty in a world that turned increasingly more ugly with each day.

“Stop gaping and hand me that towel.”

His jaws snapped shut. Merlin, that was embarrassing. “You’re not afraid of me at all, are you?”

She went over and grabbed the towel herself, and started drying off, not even attempting to hide anything in the process. Her build was slight and had seemed boyish to him before, but the round, firm breasts, and the subtle flare in her hips with the sweet nest of curls at the juncture at her thighs told him she was all woman.

He wondered if her skin would feel cool to the touch, if she would be warm and welcoming right below those curls.

“No.”

He blinked in confusion and it took him a moment to remember that they were having a conversation.

“You should be afraid. I can still hurt you, and you’re… quite defenceless right now.” His eyes roved over her, drinking in the way her nipples puckered at the soft breeze, and the way her nicely rounded arse was presented to him as she dried off her legs.

Merlin help him, he’d need some alone time soon. This was far too much naked woman for his peace of mind.

She turned towards him with a bitter smile. “You know what the one thing Ron always really wanted was?”

Draco blinked, trying to pull his mind away from her body. “Uh, no?”

“Me. This body.”

He cleared his throat. “That’s not terribly surprising.” Who wouldn’t want her?
“You want me too, sexually, don’t you?”

For a moment he was taken unawares, and embarrassment coloured his cheeks. Then he remembered he was supposed to be dangerous. “Be careful or I might actually have you.”

She laughed. It was an almost sinful sound, as she stood there, naked in the moonlight. “Silly boy. You’ll have nothing that I’m not freely giving you. But you know that already, don’t you?”

Finally something clicked in his lust-addled brain. “You’re doing this on purpose. You mean for me to take you.”

“Well…” She pursed her lips and let her gaze travel down his robed form. “You don’t seem to mind terribly.”

“Why?”

“Just a little bit of revenge, that’s all.”

“Weasley. You’re doing this because of Weasley. You think he’d even care?”

She laughed again. “Of course he’ll care. He’s jealous and petty and possessive. He’ll hate that any other man had what he’s considered his to have for so long, and he’ll hate it even more if it’s you.”

“You’ve gone mad.”

Still smiling she walked up closer to him and put her hands on his shoulders. “Quite probably. Yet this whole world is nothing but madness, so I fit right in, don’t I? How about you? Have you gone mad as well?”

“No mad enough to tumble with the likes of you.”

Her eyes twinkling, she leant in closer to him, her bare breasts brushing against his clothed chest, and whispered in his ear, “But it’s the best kind of madness.” She drew back, but only far enough to look him straight in the eyes. “Or are you afraid, Malfoy? Afraid of actually liking it with a Mudblood?”

Lust mingled with embarrassment and annoyance at being goaded. To hell with it. He bent to kiss her, but she turned her head away.
“No reason for that, though. I only kiss people I _like._”

His annoyance changed to anger. If she thought to tease him or call all the shots, she’d soon realise her mistake.

“And tonight you’re kissing someone you don’t like!” He grabbed her face, forcing her to stand still as he pressed his lips against hers.

The stirrings from earlier immediately jolted into a flare, and he was angry enough that her struggle to turn her head only gave him a dark sense of satisfaction.

He parted her lips with his thumbs and let his tongue enter her mouth.

The flare turned into a blaze.

She, however, tried to nip him. He only barely avoided her sharp little teeth.

“Kiss me or give up on your revenge,” he growled.

“Asshole.”

“Bitch.”

“Glad to know where we stand.” She glared at him, full of fire and defiance and probably disgust for feeling his mouth on hers.

He wanted her all the more for it.

Then a shiver ran through her.

“I’m cold,” she said at his questioning look. Then she smirked. “Seems you’re not that gifted at warming a naked lady.”

Was there even a way to separate annoyance and lust at this moment? If there was, he didn’t know it.

“I don’t see any ladies around here.” He pulled off his cloak and tossed it on the ground. “But _you_ may lie down on this.”
She arched an eyebrow. “A gentleman would have put it around my shoulders.”

“A gentleman wouldn’t be planning to fuck you in about thirty seconds.”

She laughed again. “I do like that about you, Malfoy. You give as good as you get. Hopefully that goes for… other areas as well.”

Her gaze dropped to the bulge in his robes.

He took that as his cue to pull them off, so she could see better. As his cock emerged, her lips parted in an adorable little o, and she seemed almost hypnotised.

“Like what you see, darling?” he drawled.

She snapped out of it. “I’m not your darling.”

“Lie back,” he ordered.

She did as told, stretching out and smirking at him as his gaze caressed her the way his hands wanted to. Then she let her legs fall open and his breath caught. Never had he seen anything more erotic than what was on display for him right now.

“Come on, then,” she purred, and she didn’t have to tell him twice.

He covered her body with his, feeling her coolness against his heat. This time when he kissed her, he was coaxing her for the response he craved. She froze at first, resisting, but then reluctantly gave in.

He could feel her breasts pressed against his chest, and her hot entrance just below his erection, and it was driving him mad, turning his kisses hard and frenzied.

She squirmed against him and he groaned. Was she enjoying herself or did she simply want him to get on with it? But then, what did it matter? He’d give her what she was asking for and he’d give her plenty of it.

He placed a hand on her hip to keep her still, and moved his lips down her neck. So tasty. She tasted like fresh water, moonlight, and forbidden fruit.

“Stop playing around,” she hissed.
Lips still tracing her skin, he replied, “What good is this revenge if you’re not screaming my name?”

She chuckled. “How about you scream my name instead?” She wrapped her cool fingers around his hot cock and squeezed. He almost finished right there.

Fed up with her teasing—or perhaps simply too randy to hold back—he grabbed her thigh, spread her wider, and entered her in one long, searing thrust.

She cried out.

He faltered. That hadn’t sounded like pleasure. His brow furrowed and he stared at her pained face.

“Did I… Did I hurt you?” He couldn’t stop himself from asking, even though he was fully prepared for a sarcastic response.

She looked like she was biting the inside of her cheeks and she shook her head. Yet when he began moving, she gasped and grabbed his shoulders.

“M-maybe just wait a second. Just a second.”

Realisation dawned on him. “You’re a virgin? You’re a bloody virgin?”

“But of course I’m a virgin!” she snarled back. “You think this would really work if he’d already had me?”

“But there could have been… others…”

He heard just how dumb that sounded. When exactly would there have been others?

“Are you quite finished gaping? I’d like to get on with it now. Unless you already finished? In that case, I’d say it was rather underwhel—”

He didn’t have to listen to that. He mashed his lips against hers, and began moving inside her.

In spite of himself, his movements were careful. He hadn’t particularly enjoyed the cry of pain.
She nipped his lip in annoyance, and he could’ve purred with bliss.

His lips traced hers, then her jaw, her cheek, and over to nuzzle her ear… before he nipped her there. She cried out in surprise and… maybe something more? He drew back, but her lips were firmly closed and she gave him another defiant stare.

He couldn’t keep himself from smirking.

She was enjoying herself. Quite in spite of herself, too.

Feeling emboldened, he began kissing, nuzzling and nipping his way down her throat to her breasts. She entwined her fingers in his hair and then yanked his head back.


He grabbed her wrists and pulled her hands from his hair and held them down on each side of her head, and then he began fucking her in earnest.

Hard, deep, satisfying thrusts.

She struggled against his grip, but he only held on tighter, and fucked her harder.

A whimper escaped her lips, and it sent delicious chills down his spine. That was how a woman should sound when you pounded into her. No pain, just pleasure.

When her eyes rolled back, he couldn’t help himself but kissed her again. He was close, so close. But maybe, just maybe, he could…

With a gasp, her eyes flew open and she bucked against him.

“Yes,” he rasped. “Oh, yes, just like that, darling…”

“Shut up,” she panted.

He managed a breathless laugh, before his own muscles tightened and he had to give in to the bliss.
“What are you thinking about?”

Draco blinked, realising he’d been sitting there, staring at an old portrait of a dark forest for an unknown amount of time as his mother had taken the chance to bathe and change.

“How my daughter was made.”

His mother made a face. “Really.”

Draco couldn’t help but grin. “Get your mind out of the gutter, Mother. I meant, the events that led to it.”

“I’m sure I know exactly what you meant.” She went to check on her sleeping granddaughter. “You really ought to let me take her away from here. There are too many things happening under this roof.”

“You know you’re unofficial hostages.”

“I’m not stupid. But I also know that you could get us out of here.”

“I suppose.”

“So why won’t you?”

“Because I have to protect her.”

“Could protect her.”

“Not like I can.”

His mother drew herself up to her full height and looked down her nose at him. “Excuse me, young man. You seem to forget who you’re talking to. I am not just some silly old woman. I’m perfectly capable with a wand.”

“I know you’re capable, Mother. I just don’t think you’re motivated enough.”
“You think I’m not motivated to defend an innocent baby? My own… flesh and blood?”

There was a slight hesitancy in her words and Draco didn’t miss it.

No, she would not do as a sole protector.

“Are you motivated enough to sacrifice yourself? Me?” he asked. “Would you do it even if she turns out to be a Squib? A Blood Traitor? Married to a Muggle? Because I would. I will set the world and everyone in it on fire to keep her safe.”

“You probably shouldn’t voice those thoughts too loudly around here.”

“No, Mother. I know. But that’s why she’s staying. You can go, but she stays. With me. I promised to keep her safe and I will.”

His mother sighed. “All right, then. You’re her father. I just wish you’d have chosen a better time to have a child.”

Draco smiled, once more lost in thought. “It was destiny.”

A year ago...

Draco found himself flung against the wall with a sexy witch eagerly divesting him of his clothes.

“Really, Granger,” he drawled. “You went through all the trouble of finding a secure location just for this? I’m quite flattered.”

“Shut up.”

“You know, I could set up a little cabin. Would be more convenient.”

She snorted. “Like this will become a habit.”

He held back his sigh. That statement might have held some weight the first time or even the second. The third time it was wearing thin, and by now… “I think it already has.”
“A bad one,” she agreed, nodding.

He swung her around and hiked up her robes. “And yet you can’t quit me.”

“I can and I will. After today.”

He hoisted her up and she threw her legs around him in response. She was more than ready for him. ‘Mm, yeah. I can feel just how eager you are for that.”

“You did this to me.”

He smirked. “Yeah, I did.”

“Shut up.” She grabbed him by the hair and forced him into a deep, scorching kiss.

“There’s a bed behind us,” he muttered.

“No,” she responded, and before he knew what was happening, she had manoeuvred him inside her.

Damn, but she felt good, and his hips started moving of their own accord.

He had no idea why she was even doing this anymore. She didn’t like him at all, and there had to be other men out there willing to scratch her itch.

“I’m coming,” she gasped.

He shot her a surprised look, but true enough, she was bucking against him, her sex squeezing him tight.

He groaned with the pleasure, but wasn’t nearly there yet himself.

“Damn, Granger,” he muttered, amused. “Did you start without me?”

“Keep going,” she instructed.

Like he had any attention of stopping. This was what he was here for. That deliciously wicked
feeling of taking her, a witch he shouldn’t want, a witch who loathed him, wherever he came across her.

She never screamed his name, but sometimes she did scream.

And sometimes she begged.

Sometimes she even looked dazed afterwards. That was his favourite look on her.

“Oh… Oh!” She clutched his shoulders harder, and there it was again, that gripping feeling around his cock.

He barely had time to move his hand to make sure she didn’t hurt herself before she threw her head back against the wall.

Damn.

“Don’t… stop…” she panted.

His eyes widened. He’d managed to get her off a few times before he followed in the past, but if she was already nearing her third orgasm…

His own excitement grew to unbearable levels just from having her squirm and come on him like this, but he supposed he couldn’t disappoint her.

He grabbed her thigh and shifted his hips to change the angle.

“Oh, MERLIN!”

There it was. Her third orgasm. He supposed she’d called a name.

He couldn’t hold back any longer though. The enticing ripples around his cock were relentlessly beckoning him to come and so he had to give in.

With a shout, he entered her as deeply as he could and let go. Completely.

Merlin, but this was good.
She was addictive like nothing else he’d ever encountered.

After he’d caught his breath, he realised he was still gripping her thigh tightly and let go. There were red marks from his fingers.

“Sorry,” he muttered.

She merely shrugged and began tidying up.

“So… you missed me, huh?” he said with a cheeky grin.

She tensed up. “I need to ask you a favour.”

A favour? That was new. So far they’d both carefully avoided talking about affiliations.

Maybe that was why she had sex with him. She hoped to infiltrate the Death Eaters.

She would be disappointed. So would he.

“What is it?”

“I need…” She sighed. “I need you to get me a potion.”

“A potion? You mean a dangerous and illegal potion that will bite me in the arse? I don’t think so.”

“No…” She shook her head emphatically. “I need a Regret potion.”

“A… You need the Angel Maker? You’re… you’re pregnant?” He gaped at her.

“Please don’t call it that. It’s anti-use propaganda. And yes. For now.”

“You know only witches can get that legally, right?”

“Since when do you and yours care about legalities? Look, I can’t get it myself without too many people finding out. I need you to do it for me.”
His heart was pounding and the room had begun spinning. “It’s mine, isn’t it?”

“It’s nobody’s. Just get me the potion and we’ll never have to discuss it again.”

He sat down heavily on the bed they hadn’t used. “Or we could discuss it,” he said slowly.

“What’s there to discuss?”

“We could have it.”

“Have it?” She barked a disbelieving laugh. “Right. And what exactly will I tell my people? What will you tell your people? Or, wait, is this a thing where you simply expect me to have it and suffer all the consequences of sleeping with the enemy on my own?”

“Oh course not!” He jumped back up to his feet and began pacing. She was right. Of course she was right. And even he could see she didn’t exactly relish having to make this decision. The world was a terrible place right now for any child to be born, especially one born across the lines.

He abruptly turned to her. “We could run! I have a safe place. Nobody knows about it, nobody can find it. We could stay hidden for months.”

“We can’t just run.”

“Why not?”

“Why do you want this child so much?”

“Because…” he grappled for words. “Because it’s ours! Maybe… maybe it’s destiny.”

Hermione drew the hood forward to protect her face better from the cold mountain winds. So this was it. This must be the place.

She’d been trying to retrace her own steps for months now. There had been plenty of leads, yet every time she’d found one, she’d had to work out whether it was real. Had Past Hermione missed this clue? Had she left it on purpose? Did she want Present Hermione to find out? Or was she trying to hinder her?
More than one clue had turned out to be manufactured.

By her own hand.

She had wound up in the most outlandish places and had had to turn back and try to work out what the false clue was trying to hide and go from there.

Yet some of her leads had been authentic. Like she’d either missed them or left them just to confuse herself.

At her last location, she’d found an encrypted note. After wasting days trying to break the magical encryption and very nearly triggering a safeguard that would have burned it to a crisp, she’d finally been able to read it.

In her own writing, it had said,

*Turn back now. If your memory returns too soon, the people most important to you could get hurt.*

*You would get hurt.*

*Please trust yourself. You did not do this lightly, and you did nothing wrong.*

*You are not a traitor.*

Yet the note had done nothing to assuage Hermione’s doubts. Trust herself? How could she trust a past self that had disappeared and was keeping secrets that might hurt people, a past self that had deliberately set out to keep herself from finding this place?

It was not a special place. Just a simple cabin, hidden away from the world. Oh, the cabin was magically concealed, but Hermione was no fool. Once she’d been led to this area, she’d scried every millimetre until she’d found it. And then she’d spent another good few hours checking for traps.

Now here she was, looking at the place that might finally give her some answers.

And she was terrified.
Almost a year ago…

The cabin was small and cosy with vintage furniture and a fireplace just waiting to be lit. It was the perfect little getaway place if someone, say, wanted a romantic place to take their lover.

Or a hiding place for their baby’s mother.

Hermione looked around, her eyes wary as ever. “I still can’t believe I went with you,” she said, dumping her bag on the floor.

Draco hauled in the two bigger cases that he’d refused to let her carry and closed the door behind them.

“I still can’t believe it either,” he admitted.

When he’d stood before her with the Angel Maker in one hand and his offer for protection in the other, he had thought his chances were slim at best. Yet something had made her hesitate.

“Merlin, do you realise how irresponsible we are?” She ran an aggrivated hand through her wind-tangled hair. “Simply running away like this. Leaving our… Well, I suppose I’m glad you’re leaving your friends to their own devices, but I’m turning my back on so much. What if… What if…” She was unable to find the words.

“What if they lose because you’re not there?” he offered. “Are you that arrogant, Granger?”

“It’s not arrogance to know your own value. And we’re all valuable.” She shot him a haughty glance. “Unlike your people, we don’t find anyone disposable.”

“You’re right. We are disposable to him. My father was sent overseas on some ‘mission’ that I’m quite sure he’s not meant to succeed at. My mother refuses to leave the Manor in case he comes back, and I can’t… couldn’t… leave my mother. Perhaps in my absence something bad will happen to her.”

“I’m sorry.”

She actually looked sincere.

He shrugged. “We all make our own choices. You, me, my parents, Potter, Weasley… We all do what we feel we have to do.”
“I suppose. But it’s going to make for some awkward family dinners, you realise that, don’t you? I sincerely hope you’ll keep that awful mask away from her.”

“Her? It could be a boy.”

“No…” Hermione sighed and shook her head. “It’s a girl.”

“How do you know?”

There was a slight hesitation, before she said, “This pregnancy is… not how I imagined it would be. I dream things. I see her. I know exactly what she’ll look like. I know she’ll hate mushy peas.” She shook her head. “Maybe it’s all in my imagination. It just feels so real.”

Draco looked down at Hermione’s belly. There wasn’t much to see yet.

“A little girl,” he said with a soft smile. “And I’m with her on the peas. Nasty things.”

The cabin was abandoned, but Hermione had assumed as much. Judging by the thin layer of dust, they’d left a while ago, and the neat order suggested they’d had plenty of time to pack.

She sighed and sat down in a comfortable overstuffed chair. Lost in thought, she twirled her wand between her fingers.

What had she expected, really? A hastily cleared den with evil plans laid out on the table for her to see?

All she got from this place was a feeling of home. A good place to sit by the fire and read a book or tell stories. A place where you could be alone or together uninterrupted by the world, wars, death and politics.

At some point she’d been here, and she knew she hadn’t been alone. Among her final clues, there had been mentions of a man. A man dressed all in black and keeping to the shadows. A man who’d seemed very protective, but always silent and somehow nondescript. No doubt a light glamour had obscured his features.

Honestly, the silence pretty much ruled out Ron.

Was it Malfoy, then? He seemed to know something.
She frowned at that thought, and in her distraction dropped her wand. When she bent to retrieve it, her eye caught on something under the low, overstuffed sofa. Something small.

She pried it out of its hiding place.

The shock quite literally knocked her on her arse.

In her hand, she held a tiny white sock.
Almost a year ago…

“Really, Malfoy? Live chickens? I hope you don’t mean for us to kill and eat them, because I’ll pass.”

They were standing in the spacious cellar of the cabin, which Draco had worked tirelessly to fill with food. Barrels of potatoes and apples, sacks of rice, flour, grains and nuts, shelves filled with jars of preservatives, far more food than anyone could consume in a year. And, in a corner, a chicken coop.

“Of course not!” he said, rather offended. “But it occurred to me as I was purchasing eggs that I wouldn’t be able to keep us supplied for any length of time. The farmers said it should be fine as long as we emulate sunlight sixteen hours a day.”

“So… you have a few cows down here too?” she drawled.

He pointed to the rows of cheeses. “That and powdered milk will have to do.”

“I have to admit, you’ve certainly done your part in keeping us fed.” She picked up a jar of honey, turning it over in her hands to survey the colour, and then went over to the fresh food shelves and fondled the tomatoes. “Too bad you couldn’t set up a vegetable garden down here, huh?”

“I… didn’t even think of it. But I suppose if we can get hens to lay, then we could also—”

“I was joking! Really. This is far more than I expected.”

“Oh. Well, I also set up a frost chamber for meats.”

“You really didn’t have to do all that.”

“You think I’d let you starve?”

“You mean the child inside me.” She smiled as she said it, but the smile didn’t reach her eyes.

“I meant either of you. You’re mine to protect now, and I vow that I will.”

Their eyes met, and while she didn’t say anything, her next smile was softer and far more genuine.
“You’re spoiling her.”

“She’s an infant, Mother. You can’t spoil an infant.”

Draco picked up the fussing child and bounced her around a bit for her amusement.

“If you keep picking her up every time she makes the tiniest sound, you most certainly can.”

“Don’t be absurd,” he scoffed. “What did you do, then? Leave me in my cot all day?”

“Of course not. I picked you up at the tiniest sound. And look how you turned out.”

Draco glanced over at his mother and caught her smirk before she could hide it.

“Oh, very funny. Haha. I thought I had nannies.”

“Not at first. When we first had you, we were very idealistic.”

“What happened?”

“We discovered we liked to sleep more than thirty consecutive minutes at night.”

“Ah, sleep. I wonder what that feels like.”

Draco sighed and put his daughter back on the blanket where she continued to flail her little arms around. Then he finished dressing.

“Do you know when you’ll be back this time?”

“No. Don’t wait up.”

“What is it this time?”
Draco pasted on a smile and feigned ignorance. “Another magical item. It’s like he’s hoarding them.”

“Is it really *that* bad?”

“One of the others swore up and down that he had to go pick up a magical nail clipper. It’s not verified, but at this rate I’m inclined to believe him.”

“What do you think he wants them for.”

“Honestly? Nothing good.”

“But we’re still staying here?”

Draco hesitated. As the tension around them increased, he had begun to waver in his faith that he could best protect his daughter in the eye of the storm. But this was what he’d decided on.

It was what *they* had decided on. She’d told him that it was the only way to protect her.

His jaw set with determination. “Kill anyone that tries to move you.”

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*Eight months ago*

Hermione groaned as she tried to get comfortable on the bed. Draco knew better than to help her. Instead he withdrew the arm he’d slung around her expanding waist and waited out her tossing and turning.

“I can’t believe people do this on purpose,” Hermione grumbled. “And several times, even! What are they thinking?”

Draco smiled. Her bad temper was half-hearted and only born from discomfort. He had caught her more than once, stroking her belly with a distant smile on her face.

She finally settled in with a deep sigh.
He carefully put his arm around her again, and she snuggled into him. Such a small gesture, but between the two of them, it meant a lot more than words could express.

Early on she’d sometimes burst into tears and he’d been at such a loss what to do about it.

“I know you despise me,” he’d said to her on one such occasion, “but please don’t cry. I hate that carrying my child makes you so unhappy.”

“You… imbecile…” she’d sobbed. “You think I’d be here if that were the case? You got me the Regret potion. I could have had her without you. I chose you.”

He’d been afraid to ask what she’d meant by that, but he’d often thought about it when she’d let him kiss her, touch her, make wild and passionate love to her, and—like now—simply hold her.

She’d chosen him.

For some reason that thought made him ridiculously happy.

Hermione was shocked to the core and her thoughts seemed to be stuck on the same word over and over again.

A baby.

She’d had a baby.

There was no doubt in Hermione’s mind that the baby must’ve been her own. It explained so much. It explained why she’d tried so hard to keep herself from finding out. Of course she’d do whatever she had to in order to protect her own child.

But who was the baby’s father?

Could it really have been… Malfoy? The idea seemed ludicrous, but he’d known something and she’d reacted emotionally to him.

“Please. Lives depend on it.”
“That they do. I am sorry.”

Had he meant.. No, probably not. She was reading too much into it.

But if there had been a baby and she didn’t have it now, where was it? Was it with its father? Was it okay?

Did it cry for its mother? A mother who couldn’t even remember it?

“I’m sorry,” she whispered, tears running down her cheeks. “I’m so sorry.”

Seven months ago...

Once again, Hermione was just sitting there in the overstuffed armchair, staring out the window. Her book had long since been forgotten. Last time Draco had checked on her, hours ago, she’d been on the very same page.

For days she hadn’t eaten properly, and it might be his imagination, but her face was beginning to look more gaunt.

He was worried about her. He didn’t know nearly enough about pregnancies and childbirth, but he did know that many things could go wrong, and right now she didn’t look right to him.

“What do you want for dinner?” he asked. “I could make something with eggs and rice and some of the last of the vegetables we froze…”

She didn’t respond.

“Hermione.” He put his hand on her shoulder and she flinched. Crouching down, he asked, “What’s wrong?”

She stared at him as if she wasn’t even seeing him. Then she blinked, and her eyes focused on him. The first contact he’d had with her all day.

“You have to go back,” she said.

Draco didn’t have a clue what she meant. “I have to what?”
She looked away again. “You have to go back. To… to your people.”

“No. I’m not doing that.”

“You have to!” She stood so suddenly that her book clattered to the floor, but she didn’t seem to notice. “If you stay here, we’ll all die!”

He straightened as well. “I can’t just leave you here alone! What will you do when the baby comes? Will you give birth all alone?”

“If I have to.”

“Do you have any idea how dangerous that is?”

“Of course I do! But it’s a lot less dangerous than you staying here.” Her eyes were shining with unshed tears. “Please, Draco…”

“What exactly do you will think will happen?”

“We will have her, and she will grow, but one day they will come to our door and they will make us watch as they kill her first.”

“Then we will move. I’ll find us another safe place.”

“Same scenario, different setting.”

“Hermione, you’re worried. I understand that. This is just—”

“No, you don’t understand! Every time I make a new plan, she gives me another glimpse of what will happen, and the only chance we have to keep her safe is if you go back. Now. Before our disappearances are linked.”

He ran his hands through his hair. “This can’t be,” he muttered. “All I wanted to do was protect you both…”

“And you can. By going back and acting as if nothing happened. Make up a believable story for your absence. Say you were following an important lead… Here!” She slid off her bracelet.
“Take this. It’s… It’s an important artefact.”

Draco stared at it. “But you wore it every day, I thought it was just…”

“I know. I hid it right under your nose. I was appointed its guardian. It’s said to be a horcrux.”

“A what?”

“A horcrux. Made by Merlin himself.”

“And you’ve been wearing it here? With our child inside you?”

“Don’t worry. Its seal is so powerful that no one even knows how to even break it. There… there are more of these out there. The Order is protecting them. By giving this to you…”

“You’re committing a terrible treason against the Order.”

“No. No, I’m saving you.”

“And the child.”

She bit her lip. “The child and I could live even if your story wasn’t credible. But you wouldn’t.”

“You’ve seen that too?”

She nodded, her exhaustion more apparent than ever. “Just take it.”

“Are you telling me never to come back? To just leave you here? To take this horrible thing to save my own hide and stay away to save yours?”

“Once they trust you again, you can visit. You can bring me books and baby clothes. It won’t be so bad.”

“And what will I have to do to regain that trust? What about giving this to him?”

She shook her head. “Do whatever is necessary. For her.”
He looked down at the simple golden bracelet, his fingers tightening on the warm metal. “You really care if I live or die?”

“Oh, of course I do!”

“But to this extent?” He looked her directly in the eye. “My life might cost countless other lives. Your friends’ lives.”

“I’d like to think they’re more competent than that.”

That sounded so much like the Hermione he knew, that he couldn’t prevent himself from smiling.

“All right, I’ll go… On one condition.”

“And what is that?”

“That you’ll marry me first.”

She merely blinked in response.

“Oh?” he teased. “You didn’t see that one coming?”

She slowly shook her head. “But why? I mean…” She stroked her protruding belly. “It never seemed to matter to you before that she was born out of wedlock.”

“It doesn’t. But if I leave here, I want to make sure there’s a tangible bond between us, something that no war, no treason, no death can tear apart. I want you to vow to me that you’ll always be mine. Now and forever.”

“Some might say a baby is a stronger bond.”

“We’ll both be bonded to her, but there’s nothing to keep you with me.”

“Why do you want that? I mean, if it’s for her sake, I promise that—”

“It’s not! It’s for my sake. I love you. The thought of losing you is driving me mad.”
She gaped at his passionate interruption, but then snapped her mouth shut. “Well, that changes a few things.”

“Like what?”

“Like whether I’ll—hold on. Aren’t you supposed to be down on your knees?”

“Really, Hermione?”

She crossed her arms and raised an eyebrow at him. For all her haughty posture, he saw the smile teasing the edge of her lips and it made him feel hope like he’d never felt before.

“Fine,” he said with a sigh, playing along, and knelt down. “But you’re not going to be able to see me down here over that thing.” He pointed to her belly.

“Off to a rocky start, Malfoy.”

“Are you quite certain we’re not having twins?”

“All right, that does it!”

She made to leave but he grabbed her hand and kept her in place.

“Hermione Granger, will you give me a beautiful baby daughter, and eventually learn to love me just a fraction of how much I love you? Will you forgive my past, present and future transgressions and affiliations and the fact that I thought it would be a good idea to install a chicken coop below our bedroom? Will you be my wife?”

“I’ll have to give the chicken coop issue a think.”

“Merlin, yes. That was bad.”

“But yes, Draco. Of course I will. And I will even forgive that you didn’t realise that I was willing to give you that artefact because I love you, too.”

A slow smile spread on his face and then he jumped to his feet and embraced her. “That’s settled, then. We’ll get married as soon as humanly possible.”
Gently she pushed her hands against his chest. “And then you have to go.”

“And then I will go. I promise.”

Less than a week later he kept his promise.

Standing outside on the dirty street, Draco felt inside his robes for the chain with the two plain gold rings. He always wore them close to his heart, but made sure no one else never saw them.

Feeling bone-weary, he sighed. All he wanted was to be home with his daughter, and here he was, tracking down some lowlife that had supposedly attempted to steal from the Dark Lord.

Draco couldn’t care less if this person had stolen or not, but Hermione had been adamant. No matter what, he could not waver, he could not turn. He had to stay loyal to people and causes he didn’t give a shit about or he’d fail his daughter.

He’d already failed Hermione by not being able to offer her a better, more viable alternative.

That look in her eyes when she’d seen him for the first time after he’d Obliviated and left her. The confusion. The loss. The sorrow.

She’d said that she wouldn’t remember anything, that to her it would be as if they’d never met. As if that didn’t hurt enough, she’d been wrong. Clearly part of her remembered. She was hurting and there was nothing he could do to alleviate that pain.
Chapter 5

Five months ago...

Something was wrong. He felt it the very second he stepped into the cabin. He carefully set down the bag of books and other necessities. It was dark, far too dark, and there was a chill in the air. Nobody had lit a fire today.

Panic seized his chest.

“Hermione!” he called out. “Hermione, where are you?”

“In here.” It was little more than a whimper.

He rushed to the bedroom and saw her sitting in bed in her white linen nightgown. Her hair was matted, and she had sweat beading on her forehead.

“What is it?” he asked, rushing to her side. “Are you hurt?”

“Of course not! She’s coming, you… you… n ngh.” She clenched her jaw shut and stiffened for a moment, and then relaxed. “I don’t have the energy to cuss you out. Since you’re here, you might want to help me. Could you light a fire and put some towels by it so they’re warm in case she ever arrives? Oh and heat up some water. I could use a hot water pack. Nobody told me how much my back would hurt.”

The baby was coming? It was time? Already? He was feeling lightheaded and his first impulse was to panic. His second impulse was to wish he’d come a day later.

Then he gave himself a mental kick in the arse. What kind of husband and father was he if he couldn’t be here for his wife and daughter at a crucial time like this?

“Oh course,” he said as calmly as he could. “What about food? Did you eat today?”

She’d tensed up again so it took her a moment to respond. “No. These… These have taken longer than I thought. Mothers aren’t joking when they talk about being in labour for days. I’m exhausted. I swear, she’ll hear about it for the rest of my life.”

He fought down a smile. “When did they start?”

“The day before yesterday. I made sure to put extra sheets on the bed, feed the fire, eat,
everything… but it’s taking so long. I-don’t know if I can do this…”

Draco had retrieved a cloth from the bedside table and dipped it in a basin with cool water. Gently he dabbed her forehead before instructing her to hold it herself.

“You can, and you will. I’ll get the fire going, and then you will try to eat.”

When he was out of the bedroom, he allowed himself a moment to sag against the wall.

The baby was coming. He was actually going to be a father. In spite of waiting for this for months, he felt completely unprepared for it.

Then he took a deep breath and got to work.

Many traumatising hours later, Hermione was resting while he was holding his beautiful newborn daughter. She was perfect. Everything about her was perfect. Her little fingers, her little toes, her adorable little nose, the black downy hair on her head, even the little tufts of hair on her ears.

“Little troll, huh,” he whispered at the sleepy bundle. “That must come from your mum’s side of the family. It’s okay. You’re still beautiful, even with hairy ears.”

“It’ll fall off,” Hermione muttered.

“Oh, she’s awake. Wanna go to mummy for a bit?” He carefully sat down on the edge of the bed and handed the infant to her mother.

Hermione accepted her with a yawn and held her close. “I have to say, I’m happy with your timing, Draco.”

“Me too.” Now that everything was said and done, he wouldn’t have missed the birth of his daughter for the world. “I’m only sorry I couldn’t come sooner.”

She shook her head. “We knew that’s how it would be.”

“I suppose.” He sighed and held out a finger to the baby who took firm hold. “Did you decide on a name for her yet?”

Hermione shook her head. “Every time I tried to decide, I had dreams. It became too taxing.”
“Then I’ll name her.”

Hermione nodded. “But nothing horrible like… Amalthea or Norma. Or Sappho or Aspasia.”

“You’ve given some thought to my family’s naming traditions.”

“I have.”

“We don’t have to follow them, you know.”

“I thought that too. But your family is not just your family. They are her family too. My family doesn’t have much of a tradition. I was named Hermione because of my mother’s love for an old play called The Winter’s Tale.”

“We could start our own tradition. Maybe I’ll call her—”

“Stop!” Hermione held up a hand. “I know I’ve given birth now, but I don’t want to risk having another dream.”

“So when can I tell you?”

“When this is all over.”

“What do you mean? Don’t you want a name to call her by?”

She shook her head, tears glistening in her eyes. Draco felt a heavy sense of foreboding. This wasn’t just weariness making her tear up.

“I’ve been both looking forward to and dreading the first time you’d visit after she was born.”

“What do you mean?”

She took a deep, shaky breath. “You have to take her with you.”

“What do you mean?” He knew he was stuck on repeat, but he couldn’t seem to find other words.

“I… I didn’t tell you this, but… The dreams. You going back was only part of it. The only place
she’ll be safe is in the eye of the storm.” She bent to kiss her baby’s soft forehead. “You’ll protect her and tell everyone she’s Pureblood. By now, they should trust you enough to believe you or at the least give you the benefit of the doubt. Nobody in the Order would ever harm a baby, no matter their blood. So no matter which way the battle goes, she’ll at least be fine.”

“What battle?”

“There’ll be a battle. In a few months, I think. I tried to dream the outcome, but I couldn’t. All I know is that to keep her safe, we have to stick to our own sides, and she has to be with you.”

“And what about you?”

She sighed again, hugged her daughter closer, and then reluctantly put the infant down on the bed next to her, placing some pillows around her, so she couldn’t roll off.

Then she turned to Draco.

“Here’s what you have to do to make sure I do my part. And you have to promise me you’ll be with me every step of the way for this. I can’t do it alone.”

“The perimeters have been breached! Call in reinforcements!”

From his window, Draco could see the chaos ensuing as the Order attacked. He’d been waiting for this day for months, and now that it had finally arrived, he had a tight coil of dread and anticipation in his stomach.

Tonight… tonight their fates would be decided.

“What’s happening?” his mother asked. “Are we under attack? What do we do?”

“Stay here. I’ll Obfuscate the bedroom door. Don’t let anyone else in, you hear? Not anyone.”

“But Draco, will that really be enough? What if she wakes up? What if she cries for you?”

“It has to be enough.”
He drew up his hood and opened the door, carefully checking the hallway before he went out. Then he Obfuscated the door as promised, and hurried to the stairs.

Time to play the consummate pre-Hermione Death Eater.

At least he still wasn’t a murderer.

Unfortunately, he was surrounded by murderers.

As soon as he reached the ground floor, he heard a giant crash from the direction of the audience chamber. He swirled around and followed the sound cutting through the entrance hall, but he’d only made it halfway before his path was blocked.

By Ron Weasley.

Had the git forgotten they were on the same side now?


Weasley only raised his wand in response.

“Really? Now is the time you choose to have a pissing contest?”

“I’ve been watching you, Malfoy. Your skulking around is highly suspicious. I think you’re a traitor.”

Draco made a wide gesture. “Welcome to Malfoy Manor as ruled by the Dark Lord. Here skulking around and looking suspicious is part of the job description. Anything else?”

Weasley sneered and sent off a hex that Draco narrowly dodged, ducking behind a pillar. Damn it. He hadn’t counted on his own attacking him. Quickly he procured his wand and launched a counter-attack.

“Perhaps you’re the traitor,” he called out. “After all, you’re the one attacking your own side.” He was rewarded with another hex hitting the pillar. “Oy, mind the ancestral home!”

“You brought back a mysterious baby. Just how dumb do you think everyone is?”

“Apparently dumb enough to attack me just when we have a common enemy to fight?”
Another hex, this one had plaster raining down on Draco. Draco blindly sent one back.

“You had it with a Muggle, didn’t you? After everything you’ve stood for for so long.”

“I did not have her with a Muggle. Her mother is a perfectly respectable witch.”

Draco chanced a glance out from the pillar, and he saw Weasley dodging behind another pillar. Looking up, Draco noticed a chandelier. He sighed, it seemed a pity to drop such a splendid chandelier on the git’s arse.

“Respectable witches don’t have babies out of wedlock and then turn their backs on them!”

Draco saw red and with a flick of his wand dropped the chandelier.

The crash was very satisfying.

Alas, Weasley managed to escape unscathed.

“Well, can you blame her for not wanting to be here?”

“No, I’d never blame a woman for not wanting to be with you.”

Draco popped out to throw another hex for that, but Weasley had expected it, and Draco narrowly escaped the spell aimed at him with nothing but a few singed hairs on his head.

He glanced out to see Weasley crouching at the end of the big ugly granite side table that had somehow been a fixture for generations. The thing literally weighed a tonne. Slowly, Draco grinned. Weasley would soon regret putting his trust in such a monstrosity. With a flourish he flipped the table over, sending the ugly old vase with the dried flowers flying. He was quite certain he heard a crack before Weasley’s high-pitched scream.

Draco took the chance to disarm Weasley while he was distracted by his legs being crushed by thousands of pounds of ugly, unyielding stone.

“Here’s what I don’t understand,” Draco said, coming out from his hiding place. “Why you would even switch sides in the first place? It makes sense for you to attack me, and I must admit, I was a little disappointed to hear that it was because you thought my daughter had a Muggle mother.”
“True words of a traitor,” Weasley ground out.

Draco sighed, leaning on the table that cut into Weasley’s legs. Unfortunately, it was so heavy already that it hardly made a difference.

“You had it made before, you know. Big loving family, girlfriend that adored you, best friends with the fucking hero of the decade. And then you go and blow it all for this.” His sweeping gesture encompassed the whole manor. “If people wear masks when spreading their message that’s usually a big clue that it’s not a very good message. And if your leader doesn’t mind killing his own to set an example, that usually means he’s not a very good fucking leader.”

“Keep talking, traitor.”

Draco knelt. “You don’t know what I’d give to be a traitor. But not tonight. Tonight I’m a loyal dog. I have no choice. You had a choice and you blew it. That’s pretty fucking disgusting. So I have to ask… why?”

Weasley’s forehead was starting to have little beads of sweat and his jaw was clenched so hard it looked like he might pulverise his own teeth. Yet after a minute, he replied, “You don’t fucking know what it was like, Malfoy. I was the sixth boy, born right before the only girl. You don’t get more ignored than that. I never had anything new, never received any particular attention, never —”

“Oh, it’s all so sad, I think I’m about to cry.”

Weasley snarled. “And then Harry befriended me, and it was just more of the same. Living in his shadow wasn’t just coming in second. It made me invisible. When I asked Hermione to marry me, I thought that at least to her I’d be number one, but no. It was always Harry this, Harry that, and her books and her causes and her. It drove me mad. She wouldn’t even let me touch her.”

“So what you’re saying is, you became evil because you wanted to get laid?”

Weasley laughed a strained laugh. “When Pansy came to me, at first I didn’t listen to her. I didn’t even sleep with her for a while. I wanted to stay loyal to those idiots. It took some time before I realised to how they all truly were, how they treated me. Everyone just took me and my work for granted and they gave me nothing in return. They used me. All that… All that, she made me see. Because she truly loved me and saw my special talents.”

Now it was Draco’s turn to laugh. “Wow, you really are a moron. She loved you? By now you must know she was sent by the Dark Lord.”

“Liar,” Weasley hissed.

“No? Really? You thought she simply popped up for no reason at all? It never occurred to you to
question why she was marked _after_ she brought you back, either? Wow… to be that trusting.”
Draco shook his head and chuckled. “I suppose that means you don’t know that lately she’s been sleeping with half the other Death Eaters around here…”

“Liar!” Weasley shouted, struggling against the table, making Draco flinch as he saw the broken limb give.

“I’ll give you one more heads up, but then I really have to go—battle to fight and all that—the only tactical value you have, is the value of taking you from the Order and upsetting the balance. The subsequent hurt and distrust have helped us tremendously, and your information was a nice little bonus. Any other talent you imagine you might have… Well, it’s not that great really. Your new master wouldn’t cry any tears if you were to fall tonight. Fortunately for you, I’m not a murderer. Unfortunately for you, I also don’t care if you live or not. Toodles.”

Whistling, Draco pocketed Weasley’s wand and went looking for a battle.

How he’d fight Hermione tonight, he didn’t know. But he would. He must.
“This is it, then.” Hermione twisted her hands in front of her. “Everything is… should be… ready.”

They were standing at some storage building near the small harbour. She’d wanted it to be here. She had established a lone presence in this town, and she said waking up to the sea sounded lovely.

Draco gritted his teeth and looked away. He wanted to argue but he knew it would be pointless. He’d argued with her for weeks now, to no avail.

“Please,” she said. “Don’t be angry. I can’t bear it if the last thing I have of you is you being angry with me.”

“Well, lucky for you, you won’t have even that, will you?”

It was a low blow, he knew it. He felt awful for saying it as soon as the words were out. Yet he couldn’t take them back.

“You think I feel lucky?” she softly asked.

“I don’t know what you feel. You haven’t even held our daughter since the night she was born!”

Tears welled in her eyes. “You think you need to remind me of that? You think I don’t know what I’m missing? There is nothing but pain and emptiness in here,” she pounded her chest, “but what else could I do? It would be too selfish of me to bond with her when I knew I had to abandon her.”

He knew. She’d explained everything in great detail to him several times. For a baby to bond and have that bond broken could cause anxiety and other issues later. Draco was the primary caregiver now. It had been in some of her books and it was probably true, but just because it was true didn’t mean he had to like it.

“I know. Don’t cry. I know.” Draco tried to pull her into an embrace but she resisted.

“No, Draco.” She drew back and wiped at her eyes. “It’s easier if there’s no… no hugging. No touching. No physical contact.”
“Nothing about this is easy. You can’t even see what’s going to happen any longer.”

“I know. Frankly, I don’t miss it, but I wish everything wasn’t so uncertain after this. I wish we could do more.”

Draco wasn’t certain that he liked the ability to see the future very much. To him it seemed like it caused nothing but worry.

“Do you think our daughter has that talent?” he asked. “Do you think she has to see everything?”

“Merlin, I hope not. Hopefully it was just a pregnancy thing.”

“A pregnancy thing? Visions?”

She shrugged and attempted a small smile. “Some women get gestational diabetes, I get gestational foresight.”

“Do you believe that?”

She sighed again and looked away. “No. I think our precious baby is going to need special care growing up.”

“And we’re going to give it to her. Together.” He put his hand on her shoulder.

“Draco…”

“No. I don’t want easy. I don’t need it. But I do need for you to give me some of your strength and conviction before you… leave.”

He drew her into a tight hug.

“Merlin,” he muttered. “I never want to let go.”

She burrowed into his chest but didn’t reply.

“There has to be some way, something we can do.”
“There is. We’re doing it.”

He shook his head, hugging her even closer. “I can’t do it, Hermione. I can’t erase us.”

“You’re not erasing us. You’re keeping us safe. And one day you’ll give us back to me.”

“Promise?”

She smiled, but the smile didn’t reach her eyes. “Promise.”

They both knew she was lying and that such a promise couldn’t be made.

Yet it was a comforting lie.

He kissed her then. Slowly, leisurely, as if they had all the time in the world.

And then he walked away without a backward glance, as her empty stare was turned to the sea.

There was a battle going on right in front of her.

Hermione stood, frozen, in the vast, dark garden as she saw all the exploding lights from spells going on lighting up the side of the manor before her. There was a long room on one end, where most of the fighting seemed to go on.

She took a deep breath.

While she hadn’t been left out exactly, she hadn’t been assigned a particular role either. Nor had she been let in on any secrets. Except one. One she’d apparently known before she’d left.

The Order had spent months preparing weak artefacts and creating rumours about powerful horcruxes and ways to take another’s soul into your own. It had been a convenient and very successful distraction while they had built their own numbers and prepared for tonight. With any luck, Voldemort would even attempt to use this ‘weapon’ against them tonight and fail.

It had been her idea.
Yet tonight, she was simply a spare wand.

She didn’t care any longer that they didn’t trust her. If she had a child, it might be right in there, and what wouldn’t she do to keep that child safe?

No, this was for the best.

She caught a few flashes through the windows at the front and frowned. That part of the house seemed to be mostly abandoned. Perhaps someone could use her help.

Feeling a bit awkward, she walked up the wide stone steps and tried to open the imposing front door without making a sound. To her surprise, the old thing neither squeaked nor groaned, and she opened it just wide enough to slip in before closing again.

Then she crept closer towards the source of the flashes.

“Pansy!”

Quickly Hermione dodged behind a pillar that had seen better days.

“Ron! What on earth are you doing under that table?”

“Just… having a bit of a rest. Mind helping me pick it up? It’s just a tad heavy.”

“I’ll say.” Hermione couldn’t see well, but it sounded like Pansy was chuckling. “Actually, this might be for the better.”

“What? What the hell do you mean by that?”

“Oh, come on. We’re drowning in Weasleys in there. Who knows what you’ll do once you see your dear old Mummy.”

“You don’t trust me? After everything I’ve done for you?”

“Of course I don’t trust you. I know how easily you flip at a few sweet words. See you later, Ronniekins.”

Hermione waited for the steps and Ron’s curses to die down before she revealed herself, cautiously edging closer with wand in hand.
The place was a mess. Broken glass, plaster, and china crunched under her feet as she walked, and the table on Ron’s legs looked like it would take a half dozen strong men to lift.

Or one good spell.

Ron’s face was deathly pale. No doubt his legs were hurting him, and he had lost some blood too. He looked up and when he saw her, relief flooded his features.

She felt a wave of disgust.

“Hermione!” he said. “I’m so happy to see you!”

She glanced him over. “I don’t doubt it.”

“Could you get this thing off me? That damn Malfoy…”

“So how do you like your new friends, Ron?” she interrupted him, crossing her arms. She was in no great hurry to alleviate him of any pain or discomfort.

“Do we have to talk about that now?”

“No, you’re right. I should get going. Battle to fight and all that.”

She began walking away, but he called out, “Wait!”

Expectantly, she turned around.

“It was your fault! If you hadn’t been so selfish and had cared more about what I needed, then I’d never have listened to them! And that goes for all of you. None of you gave a damn about me. You just took it for granted that I’d always be there without any thanks or acknowledgement at all!”

“You sure showed us.”

“Now get me out from under this damn table.”
“No. I don’t think so.”

She began walking away again.

“Since when are you such a bitch?” he yelled.

“Since you’re a Death Eater that might hurt those I love.” She glanced back, her eyes cold as ice. “Nobody hurts my loved ones.”

As Hermione moved closer to the fighting, she faltered a little. Not because she was a coward, but because there was something about the whole situation that made her apprehensive.

Peering into what appeared to be an old ballroom, she saw pure chaos. It was impossible to tell who was winning and who was losing. People were shouting and shooting off spells in every direction.

Suddenly Hermione had a thought. Certainly, they were busy here, but everyone seemed to be holding their own decently enough. Instead she should go search this manor for any secrets. Like babies. Her baby.

Quietly, she withdrew from the ballroom doors and made her way back. Ron was no longer making a fuss, he’d passed out.

She waited to feel a pang of sympathy for him, but nothing happened. Instead she crept onward and up the stairs to the first floor. Somehow she just knew that what she was looking for would be up here somewhere. Yet, none of the rooms she passed showed anything of interest.

“I thought I saw a little mouse scurry away from the battle,” a voice drawled behind her.

She slowly turned to face Draco Malfoy.

“You,” she breathed.

“Me.” He glanced beyond her. “Were you hoping to steal my silver? Because one, you’re in the wrong place, and two, you’re too late for that. So many sticky fingers around these parts.”

Hermione tilted her head. He seemed nervous. “What do you know about the… about the child?”
His gaze flew back to her. “A child? Sorry, we don’t kidnap children. Well, possibly we do. I don’t really know. But we don’t keep them up here.”

“You know that’s not what I meant.”

He lightly touched his wand to his chin, making his silver mask solidify over his features, hiding any expression he might have.

“I know no such thing, Granger.”

“O-our child. Mine and… yours. You are the father, aren’t you?”

She could see him falter in the way his wand lowered.

“It is true, isn’t it?” she pressed on. “We have a child. But I… I chose to forget. Why?”

He regained his composure and raised his wand against her again.

“You weren’t supposed to know this. Listen to me, Granger. I am not your friend tonight. Or your lover. Or your… anything. And you do not have a daughter.”

“A daughter?” It was barely a whisper.

He cursed. “We have to do this by the book. The book that says that we never became involved. The book that says I’m about to hex the living daylights out of you.”

“But why?”

“Trust yourself. You made this decision. For her. We fight each other. For her.”

“Fine.” She drew her own wand. “Just tell me one thing. Is she safe?”

He nodded slowly. “Safe and happy and very much loved by her mother, who’s made great sacrifices to see that it is so. We both chose our Destiny.”

Then he threw the first spell. Hermione dove for a doorway, but her shoulder stung painfully. Too slow. He threw more hexes her way, one after the other.
She answered in kind.

Soon the first floor windows were almost as lit up as the ones down in the ballroom.

When the sun rose several hours later to the sound of a baby crying for its first bottle of the day, there was a victor.

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