Decapitation Blues

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Chapter 1 of 1

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gave him credit for.

Warnings: Post-DH, EWE and Fred's not dead (because I say so).

A/N: This one is for Drcjsnider. She gave me the prompt headless. Thank you, eloquentquill, for beta'ing the story.

Hermione slowly circled the dance floor, feeling out of place. The Weasley twins' annual Halloween party was in full swing, and everywhere Hermione looked, people in ridiculous costumes were laughing, dancing and generally having a good time.

She despised the whole lot of them.

Last year Hermione had attended the party together with Ron, the two of them dressing up as Dracula and his victim. She had enjoyed the party immensely and had been looking forward to this year's Halloween bash as well.

Until she had come home early from work three weeks ago and found Ron together with Padma Patil...in their bed.

Now she was forced to attend the party alone, and having fun was completely out of the question...at least for now. Three weeks hadn't been nearly long enough to get used to the idea of being single again. If Hermione had gotten her way, she wouldn't have come at all. Only Harry had been quite adamant about her attendance, saying that it wasn't good for her to shut herself off completely.

He had been right, of course. In the three weeks since her break-up with Ron, Hermione had only gone to work and grocery shopping. Other than that, she had opted to stay at home, trying to come to terms with Ron's unexpected betrayal.

Harry, however, could not be discouraged, and he had nagged her until Hermione had finally agreed to go to the twin's party.

Hermione had spotted Harry the minute she had walked into the party. He was dressed as a fireman, the yellow helmet barely hiding his chaotic dark hair. One look at a smug Ginny, dressed up as a fairy, and Hermione knew who had chosen Harry's costume. Hermione allowed herself a tiny smile as she remembered Harry's costume from the previous year...a zombie. Ginny had complained the whole evening that her boyfriend looked gross and absolutely not kissable.

Not wanting to spoil the party for her friends with her sour mood, Hermione stayed away from them, walking around instead. Unfortunately, her wanderings brought her close to Ron, who had come to his brothers' party together with Padma. Hermione allowed herself only one look at them and quickly decided that Ron looked quite

ridiculous in his spaceman costume and Padma's sexy kitten outfit was borderline indecent. Hermione turned away, resolutely walking to the other side of the room.

Her own costume was quite simple. She wore a long vintage skirt and blouse. The main component to her costume, however, was the headless charm she had procured from the Weasley twins. All that the other party guests could see were her old-fashion clothing and her neck, her head was as invisible as if she had draped Harry's Invisibility Cloak around it. She had to hand it to the twins; it was quite an extraordinary piece of magic.

Of course, being headless made it particularly difficult for other people to recognise her, which was exactly the reason why Hermione had chosen the costume. She might have let Harry talk her into attending the party, but he never actually made her promise that he'd be able to see her.

Confident in her disguise, Hermione continued to circle the dance floor, counting the minutes to midnight when everybody would take off their masks. She planned on staying exactly long enough for Harry to see that she had made good on her promise, then she would go home, curl up in her bed with Crookshanks and forget that this month had ever happened.

"Hello, Granger," someone right behind interrupted her solitary reverie. Hermione wheeled around, shocked that someone had recognised her even without her head being visible. She was even more shocked to see that the *someone* was Draco Malfoy...there was no mistaking the white blond hair, even though his face was partially hidden by a black mask.

"Malfoy?"

"Thought it was you," he continued, the condescending tone of his voice removing Hermione's last doubts about his identity.

She rolled her eyes, forgetting that Malfoy would not be able to see that.

"How did you recognise me?" she asked, honestly curious as to how he had figured out her disguise when even her best friends hadn't been able to.

"I just had to look for the person who seemed to have the least amount of fun," Malfoy drawled, smirking at her. Hermione huffed in indignation. He was right of course, unlike everybody else she did not enjoy the party, but she rather thought it was bad manners to call her on it. She had good reasons.

But Draco Malfoy seemed to have made it his mission in life to point out her weaknesses. Like the day after her break-up with Ron, when she had come into work at the Ministry of Magic with bloodshot eyes and looking rather pale, just hoping to get through the day without another breakdown.

Everything had gone smoothly, until Parvati Patil, working as secretary for the Wizengamot, had come to request a few files for her department. The knowledge that it had been Parvati's twin Padma, not Parvati herself, who Ron had cheated with, did nothing to help Hermione keep her composure. One look at a non-suspecting Parvati and Hermione felt all the hurt come crushing down on her.

To make matters worse, Draco Malfoy had decided to grace her office with his presence just when Hermione felt the tears welling up in her eyes. Taking the files out of Hermione's shaking hands, he had thrust them at an astonished Parvati and sent the secretary on her way. He then had commenced with telling Hermione exactly how dreadful she looked. By the time he was finished enumerating her countless faults, Hermione had forgotten all about Ron and was shaking with anger. Only her wish not to create a scene at work had kept her from lashing out at the man in front of her.

She had made it through work that day, keeping her mind occupied with plans to kill Malfoy whenever thoughts about Ron threatened to pull her under.

"I was under the impression that the Headless Horseman was male," Draco commented dryly, shaking Hermione from her thoughts.

"Oh, but I'm not the Headless Horseman," Hermione corrected. "I am the ghost of Pauline Young."

"Who?"

"She was murdered by her stepfather in 1940. According to him, she had been trying to curse him. After having bashed in her head with a hammer, he severed her body in six pieces. Only five of them were found. The police were never able to recover her head. It is said that she still haunts the family house in Rockland, Maine. I found quite a few interesting articles about the story."

"Leave it to you to do research on a Halloween costume," Draco snorted.

"I just wanted to be thorough," Hermione defended herself.

"I'm sure," Draco replied. "And this has nothing to do with the fact that being *headless* makes it so much easier for you to hide from the Weasel?"

"Of course not." Hermione replied, grateful that her costume hid the blush that she knew was colouring her cheeks.

Draco, though, didn't seem convinced at all.

"Doesn't seem like you," he said quietly, the change in his voice throwing Hermione off-centre.

"What's not like me?" she asked defensively, staring at Draco, but his mask made it impossible for her to read his face.

"Giving up like that," he explained, giving a small nod towards where Ron was presently dancing with Padma.

"I don't want him back," Hermione huffed. "Not after what he's done."

"Then why have you been walking around with a face as long as a fiddle for three weeks now?"

"You wouldn't understand," Hermione replied bitterly.

"No, probably not," Draco agreed. "I would have never let anyone get away with betraying me like that."

"What would you like me to do?" Hermione asked. "Walk over there and make a scene? No, thank you."

Draco shook his head in disgust. "That's the problem with you Gryffindors. You've got no sense for subtlety."

And before Hermione had the chance to ask him what he was talking about or why the hell they were having an actual conversation, about her recent break-up no less, Draco took her hands and guided a completely perplexed Hermione to the dance floor. And all of a sudden, Hermione Granger was dancing with Draco Malfoy.

"Er, Malfoy? What are you doing?" she asked, but was cut off when Fred Weasley's magically amplified voice boomed through the room, "Ten seconds till midnight, people!"

The crowd began counting down the seconds, and at exactly midnight, everyone ripped off their masks. Malfoy let go of Hermione briefly in order to take off his black mask, and she hurriedly took out her wand to end the headless charm. Then they continued dancing until the song was over.

When the last chords of the song were fading, Draco spun Hermione around one last time. Her eyes suddenly fell on Ron, who had been dancing near by with Padma. Ron, however, seemed to have stopped moving altogether, staring at Hermione and Draco instead. An obviously annoyed Padma was trying to recapture Ron's attention, but he completely ignored her.

"See, subtle," Draco whispered into Hermione's ear before giving her a brief peck on the cheek under the watchful eyes of her ex-boyfriend. Then he walked away.

Hermione stared after him, all thoughts about Ron forgotten as she tried to figure out what in Merlin's name had just happened.

The End