

These Sad Things

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Is it better to love and lose or to have never loved at all?

Chapter 1

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Is it better to love and lose or to have never loved at all?

Go hence, to have more talk of these sad things;

Some shall be pardon'd, and some punished:

For never was a story of more woe

Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.

"You shouldn't be here," Lucius said.

The wizard cupped an empty tumbler to his forehead before a crackling fire – the only light in the rented suite.

Despite his words, Hermione could tell that he was done fighting, too. Sorrow tightened her chest.

"Men like you have affairs all the time, don't they?" Hermione asked, her voice a whisper because she'd never dared voice such a thought before. Lucius had pushed her away since she'd been appointed as his fellow British representative for the International Confederation of Wizards – he'd hinted more than once that he valued his marriage.

"I'm too old for such foolishness," Lucius rumbled, turning his head so that she could see his face. In the flickering light, he did look old.

"Oh, Lucius. That excuse is tired," she sighed, taking a step towards him. She was making a ridiculous assumption by entering his rooms, but he'd almost kissed her when they had said good night. It was time to face what they'd been dancing around for months.

"I've kept you safe for two years, Hermione," he said, summoning a crystal decanter from somewhere in the darkness.

"Safe from yourself," Hermione replied.

Lucius filled his glass and sipped heavily from it.

"Safe from *yourself*," he clarified.

"Of course," Hermione said, chastised. "The photographs of me with Viktor."

The look Lucius shot at her clearly called her an idiot. The physical relationship Hermione had developed with Viktor to deaden her longing for Lucius had been discovered by Rita Skeeter and would have been published with appalling pictures if Lucius hadn't stepped in.

But that wasn't what he meant.

"Older men have the privilege of knowing their own character and not being ashamed of it. I am a selfish man. Do not mistake my actions as anything other than what they are."

"You've said as much before." Hermione took another step. "Many times."

Lucius sat back into the farthest corner of his chair.

Hermione was startled to see bare skin. His dressing robe was open as if he'd started to tie it and then given up.

"I do not deny that I'm attracted to you," Lucius purred, sipping again from his glass.

Hermione fought the desire to visually devour the flesh visible where his silk robe gaped open. Lucius didn't take a step without knowing where his foot would land; surely he knew the illicit-thought-inspiring picture he was presenting.

"Attraction? Is that what this is?" Hermione asked cattily. She knew, without a doubt, that Lucius' feelings mirrored hers. She recalled every time he had touched her; a playful tug on her curls, a brush of his fingers over her hand when she was about to say too much – an action that effectively made her brain blank. And tonight, he'd pulled her into his arms. His mouth had been a breath from hers. Her heart had sped with fantastic hope.

And then he'd released her and disappeared.

Hermione knew she wouldn't get another answer from the world's best politician.

"You stood up for me to Taokazuya Yen," Hermione said.

Lucius' eyes glittered at her; "The Supreme Mugwump should know better than to use such colorful language in front of a witch."

"You told Octavia you had nothing to do with her brother's disappearance."

"What sense does it make to have a secretary so terrified of you that she won't be in the same room?"

"You did so only after I mentioned her fear," Hermione said softly. He'd done it for her – she simply knew it.

"I didn't know of Ms. Pepper's ails until you informed me."

Hermione began to feel foolish. She had thought Lucius was in the same place she was: Sick of loving someone she couldn't have. But he was blatantly thwarting her reasoning. Was it possible she misinterpreted the subtle nuances that had passed between them? Suddenly insecure, Hermione backed away.

"There is a reason I have no friends," Lucius said, seeking her shape outside the firelight's reach.

Hermione leaned on the door, waiting. He didn't want her to leave. He wouldn't have said anything if he did.

"I'm not worthy of trust," he muttered, tossing back the rest of his drink and filling his glass again.

"I don't believe that," Hermione replied.

Hermione didn't see what Lucius did but the fire roared brighter as he stood.

"The pictures of you with Krum came from someone I hired. I fabricated the threat of a story so that you'd stop seeing him. How trustworthy is that?"

Hermione's immediate indignation dissolved as she processed Lucius' confession. He did care for her, after all. She wasn't imagining any of it.

"I didn't love Viktor, Lucius," Hermione said, moving towards him again.

"Don't be kind to me," Lucius growled.

Hermione stepped around the end table so that she could feel the fire's warmth on her legs.

"And don't be so cruel to me. I'm not a child," Hermione snapped.

"You're just the same age as my son," Lucius said coldly.

"Stop it! Lucius, just stop it!" Hermione stomped her foot, feeling absurd and frustrated to no-end with the man.

"Why can't you admit that you care for me?" she whispered, summoning the courage to lift her hand and touch her fingertips to his jaw.

Lucius closed his eyes and nuzzled Hermione's hand.

"Emotions are potential weaknesses to enemies," he muttered.

"Good lord, Lucius," Hermione said, tears welling in her eyes. He'd shared bits of his history with her – values he was raised with and his comment fit with perfect accord.

Lucius suddenly snatched Hermione's hand from his face and pulled her close by it. There was a raging fire in him – something once carefully caged had been set free, and it roared in his pale gaze.

Before Hermione could register what was happening, Lucius' free hand slipped under her chin and his lips found hers. Hermione's heart stopped and then started again as the man she loved kissed her. She held on to his dressing robe, aware that he was nude beneath it.

Kissing Lucius and being held by him was ten-fold better than she'd ever imagined it would be. And yet, the reality of it was shocking.

Lucius was married.

There was no future for them.

Was it worth it?

"You're crying," Lucius whispered, still holding her.

Hermione's tears stopped abruptly and she took a deep breath.

"I want it all, Lucius. I want to live with you. I want to marry you. I want you to come home to me – but that will never happen, will it?"

The answer was clear in his eyes.

"I want more. I deserve more," she said softly as his arms fell away.

"As did my wife, once upon a time," he replied.

Hermione left Lucius' suite and he didn't try to stop her. She owed her resignation to the Minister that night.

She preferred to never know.