

"Is master intending to join the dinner party before dressing?" the house-elf asks, his tone boarding on rude.

I peer down at the creature, wondering if this is one of those horrid 'free elves.'

"I am not *your* master," I retort, for I know every person and creature in residence at the Manor.

"Indeed not, Mister Lucius," the ugly elf replies, "I is still owned by *Mistress* Malfoy." Before I can punish the insolent bugger for the smirk on its distorted features, the doors open, and Narcissa slips into the hall.

"Don't tell me you've changed your mind and have decided to join us after all?" she asks, her voice screeching in his ears. From the tone in her voice, it would appear she wasn't expecting me to acquiesce. We must've argued over this at some point. Whom has she invited to dinner? Not Death Eaters, the only time they are invited to dinner is when the Dark Lord is in residence, and then, refusing is not an option.

Draco. Draco must still be safe. Narcissa is not that good of an actress; she would not be hosting a dinner party if something horrible happened. I do not know why I hesitate to confide in her all that has happened. We have always been on reasonable terms, but instinct dictates that I remain silent for the time being, and I've lived thus far by obeying its wishes.

"Certainly not." I skillfully disguise my unease behind a sneer. "I've already declined, and I see no reason," peering over her shoulder and nodding to the people gathered in the room behind her, "to change my mind at this late date."

I turn gracefully as if to walk away, but pause and spit out over my shoulder, "Please make my excuses to *ouguests*."

Her face grows cold. "There aren't any excuses for your insufferable behavior." She turns and quickly re-enters the dining room. Casting a slight amplification spell, I listen as she calmly states that while I was able to return home from Ireland sooner than expected, I was suffering from a bit of Apparition sickness and thought it best to have a bit of rest.

Ireland? Why the hell did she think I'd gone to Ireland? And Apparition sickness? *Bite my ass, bitch*, I think disgustedly. I've never had Apparition sickness a day in my life, as she well knows.

Suddenly unsure of whether or not I am experiencing some hideous dream, I make my way to my study. I enter the room, locking the door behind me. I immediately reach for the crystal decanter and pour a very large Scotch. Swallowing a mouthful, eager for the burn, I turn and stride towards my desk. Surely there will be some clue there. I throw myself into the butter-soft leather chair, closing my eyes for a moment, reviewing all that I've learned since coming to in the alley. I swivel in my chair and reach for the top drawer of my desk, hoping to find something of value when my eyes rest on a photo of my son. Standing next to a young woman of whom I've no recollection. My first thought is that he looks happy. *Older. Older?* I grab the frame to take a closer look. He is older, by four or five years if I am judging correctly, although right now I'm not certain of anything. He is a bit taller, broader in the shoulder and narrow in the hip; his hair is slightly darker than the last time I saw him. *When was the last time I saw my son? Is this a recent photo?*

I look around wildly: new photos sit on the mantle above the fireplace, a new rug lies in front of the double doors that let to the low balcony overlooking the west gardens. I dig into my breast pocket for my father's pocket watch that is always on my person; it is gone. Probably stolen. My rising rage does not replace my discomfort however; I've more questions than answers. The chill creeping in from the glass doors ignites the fireplace, and immediately the heat radiates and casts an orange glow that should be soothing, but isn't.

I throw myself onto the couch facing the fire and *Accio* my drink. I do not know if Draco is in immediate danger. That the Dark Lord did not carry out his original plan does not mean that he has been defeated. I do not know if the war is still raging or if the bastard has fallen. Has he gone back into hiding? The calendar on my desk tells me it is now October, but does not supply the year. Could I have been hit with an *Obliviate*? It would explain much. Who would curse me, and to what purpose would it serve? I vow to Floo Severus at Hogwarts at the earliest opportunity. He is my dearest friend and closest confidant. Perhaps he will have answers for me.

I do not like the unknown; I've made it my mission to gather as much information as possible. Information is power, and with power comes safety. I must formulate a plan. Now that my initial fear for Draco's safety has eased, I will need to locate him and ascertain the status of the war and where my old friends are. That Aurors are not banging down my door and are not confiscating my possessions means I have not lost the war yet; but I will need answers. Soon. For now, there is one person in this Manor whom I *can* confide in.

"Gobbert," I call out. Immediately, my most faithful manservant appears, but instead of wearing his usual attire, an immaculately clean tea towel, he is wearing what looks like, *dear god*, a horse rug. He also appears to be haggard and drawn, which means Narcissa has been punishing him. Which means I have been gone from the Manor for longer than a week. *I need answers. NOW*

Before I can begin my questioning, Gobbert raises his glassy yellow eyes and croaks, "Thank you for calling, master."

I rub my face with my hand. I can't ask Gobby anything in his current condition.

"Gobbert, you look abominable. Burn that hideous bit of filth you're wearing." Immediately, the fire flares in the fireplace, and Gobbert is now attired in his usual pristine towel.

"I'd like the final guest list, Gobbert." I intone, and he nods solemnly. It is understood that he is not provided with such information, only those elves that serve Narcissa have access, but for a house-elf, Gobbert is quite ingenious. He disappears and immediately returns holding a sheaf of papers in his filthy hand.

Taking pity on the creature, I say, "I'm tired this evening, but before I retire, I would like a bath. Clean it for me. When you're done, return to your quarters. I'll inform you when to prepare my bath." I would never utter "Thank-you," but I let my eyes rest on Gobby's big yellow globes and offer him a small smile, instead. While the bleach and water he will undoubtedly use will burn his parchment-thin skin, I suspect it will also kill the fleas and ticks that have been burrowing there.

The house-elf's fat tears threaten to fall, but squaring his shoulders, he offers a dignified bow and disappears once more.

I scan the guest list in my hands, hoping for some clues, but I see no names I recognize. I lift my gaze from the list to the portrait of my father above the fireplace. He sleeps, as he has done since the day he discovered my allegiance was no longer to the Dark One. A thought burns, *my journals!* I leap to my feet and stride over to the portrait. Dropping the wards, I swing open the portrait to reveal a small wall safe. The safe itself is never locked, since the wards only respond to my non-verbal, numeric code. Reaching into the small chamber, I discover my journals are gone, replaced with a bit of parchment. Shutting the safe and swinging the portrait back into place, I look down and read a name. *Hermione Granger*.

What the FUCK is going on?

The doorknob clicks as someone tries to open the door and finds it locked.

"Lucius," Narcissa strident voice penetrates the room. "I'd like a word with you."

I rub my forehead, trying vainly to ease the throbbing. This is going to be difficult.

A/N: A huge thank you to my betas, Wildcatcdc and sc010f for their invaluable help! Love you!

looked as if had been empty for a while. Neither were you at your office downtown. This was the last resort."

Snatches of words and phrases are running a marathon in my head. *Acquisition. Office. Penthouse. Last Resort.*

"I needed Gobbert this weekend," I say flatly, desperate to maintain an evenness in my voice.

"Ah," she says and nods her head.

"Lucius, I may have found a solution for Gobbert, although I doubt he will react favorably, at first. It may be the only way ..." her voice trails off as she shrugs her shoulders.

I sit, dizzy from this surreal conversation. One thought is droning in my brain. *I trust her.* But why, and why *her*? I cannot fathom it, she is just a Mudblood who was somehow lucky enough to survive the war; and here she is, in my study, addressing me by my first name as if we are on intimate terms. *Intimate terms.*

"I had thought we were going to meet at the pub on Friday when we returned from Dublin." Ms. Granger said this casually enough, but there is tightness around her mouth, as if it is an effort to make the question casual. Interesting.

When I do not respond, she stands and walks to my desk, setting down her cup and saucer. I watch her walk, her hips sway softly, and think she must be exquisite to watch dance. She possesses a natural rhythm, an inherent tempo she moves to, whether it be pouring tea or crossing a room.

I want to snatch up today's newspaper and read the article on my business dealings; I want to inquire as to her suggestion regarding Gobbert; but I don't do any of these. Instead, I rise slowly from my seat and move to stand before her.

"You said you needed to talk to me," she mumbles while staring down at my shirt. I grasp her chin and lift her face so that her gaze meets mine.

"Indeed."

Without breaking eye contact, I reach in my breast pocket and withdraw the scrap of parchment bearing her name. Her reaction is fast and furious, as if a trap is sprung. Her eyes widen, and without uttering a single word, she snatches her briefcase in one hand and my hand with her other. Pulling me after her, she strides to the fireplace. She releases my hand to fill hers with Floo powder. How much Floo powder does she need? A large pinch or two would be enough I think. While the green flame swirls, she pushes me forward while nearly shouting the word, "Penthouse."

As my body is drawn into the blaze, she is next to me. After long minutes, we slow to a stop and step from the fireplace in a well-appointed living room. Without breaking stride, she leads me to the couch where she pulls me down next to her. The last time I was led by the hand, I was a toddler. To have her do so now is inconceivable; yet here I am, docilely following behind like some boy in short pants.

"Lucius, what is going on?"

My showing her the parchment with her name on it has caused this reaction. Was it some sort of signal? What did it mean? The only fact I know for certain, the one thing I know for sure, is that I trust her. *I trust her.*

Taking a deep breath, I outline the events of the past three days, beginning with my coming to in a darkened alley with no memory of having been there. I relate to her my confusion as to recent and not so recent events and conclude with the fact that I have lost nearly five years worth of memories.

She sits quietly until I finish. I've no rational explanations to offer her, no hypotheses formulated; nothing but questions upon questions.

As if on cue, she answers my most urgent question first.

"Voldemort is dead. Harry killed him after destroying the six Horcruxes Voldemort made."

"Six?" My heart is pounding. This was wrong, very wrong.

Hermione is nodding vigorously. She places her hand on mine, as if sensing my agitation. I had noticed how small her hands were when she was leading me about, but now, I momentarily marvel at their strength. It is somehow reassuring.

"Miss Granger, there are, were, more than six Horcruxes." Had the Dark Lord succeeded in his plans, or had he been killed before he could...?

She smiles, but there is a hint of gravity about her cinnamon-colored eyes. I realize I don't know what I've shared with her in the past, but I've revealed information I hadn't previously. I don't know what the implications are going to be.

"Harry was a Horcrux, as well. He hadn't quite figured it all out when he died." Before I can speak, she rushes on, "Don't worry, Harry didn't really die. Well, he did, but only for a moment. Voldemort had cast a curse that technically killed Harry, but only long enough to release the bit of Voldemort inside him. It was really Voldemort that destroyed his own Horcrux. Trust me when I say Voldemort was completely human, or as human as he was going to be, when Harry finished him off."

I fall back against the couch, pinching the bridge of my nose in a vain attempt to stop the thumping in my head. I am sick with relief. I take a deep breath, hoping to expel the tightness in my chest, and slowly, my heart stops its vicious pounding. I cannot stop the images as they stream across my consciousness: Draco, Severus, the Dark Lord. The Horcruxes.

I lurch forward, looking around for my decanter of Scotch that I know to be somewhere. Spotting the small side bar, I summon the decanter and a glass resting nearby. I pour myself three fingers, needing to bolster my slightly fragile countenance.

Through this, Ms. Granger has not moved a muscle, not uttered one word, and for that, I am grateful.

I clench my jaw as the liquid hits the back of my throat, thankful for this slight reprieve from explanations for the moment.

I settle against the couch once more and turn my gaze to the woman sitting next to me. She meets my eyes steadily, but takes a deep breath, as if her nerves, too, need tending.

While there is much I need to know the state of my business affairs, my position in the Wizarding world, the location of my journals, there are more pressing questions I need answers to before I can move on and rebuild the life I seem to have lost.

Yet, I am able to put all of my questions aside when I look into Miss Granger's, *Hermione's*, eyes. Have I noticed this in the past? In the hour since I've clapped eyes on her, I've noticed her legs, her rhythm, her hair. But it is her eyes that draw me.

To steady myself, I break my gaze and take a look about the room. I don't remember an inch of this room. Do I sleep here? Do I live here? Do I entertain guests here?

My glance returns to the woman beside me. She fits in this room. I feel as if she belongs here. In my mind, I see her passing through the rooms, her hand brushing the back of the couch, bringing in a tray from the kitchen. I have no memories of this place or this woman, but I *know* her. Deep in my soul, I acknowledge that this Muggle-born, this woman, is important in my life, somehow. I do not know how I know this, but just as surely as I know my birth date, I know this woman will fill my arms perfectly. My mouth will fit hers as if they were made for each other.

"Penthouse," she corrects me softly, but stands and leads me to a study quite similar to my own at the Manor.

Crossing to my desk, I quickly scrawl the names of those on Narcissa's guest list from Friday evening. She snatches the parchment before the ink is dried, her eyebrows shooting up as she scans the list.

"Well, this was her most... ambitious dinner party to date," as she flings the paper back onto the desk.

"Explain."

Ms. Granger sighs as she takes the chair opposite my desk. She crosses her lovely long legs but squares her shoulders, as if preparing for a confrontation. I am both amused and curious at her posture. Surely the guest list was nothing she had control over.

"Mrs. Malfoy has been, for the past two years, cultivating friendships and liaisons with certain members of the Ministry, particularly those Muggle-borns wizards who have been newly elected to office. She has also been cozying up to Muggle businessmen whose young sons and daughters are or have been recent students at Hogwarts.

"Until now," she continues, nodding to the discarded list on the desk, "she had limited her sights on lower ranking officials and less-than-brilliant businessmen to promote her own agendas. It would appear with the newest additions to her guest list, she has advanced on to the major players."

"I do not recognize those names; they must have risen to a level of power or prominence in that past few years. Do I not have any interaction with them? Why did I refuse to attend my wife's dinner party, Ms. Granger?"

Hermione looks away, uncrosses her legs and walks to the window. She stands there, arms crossed as if to ward off a chill. *She looks lonely*, I think, and give myself a mental shake. *Why should I care how she feels*, I remind myself briskly. *She is only a Muggle-born.*

Still, I do not like the picture she makes. Before I can speak, however, she does, in a soft, low voice that could only be discernable in a quiet room such as this.

"We were to be in Dublin for a week. The buyout of CelticMicro by Malfoy Industries, while not a secret, was mainly kept under wraps for fear some of the minority stockholders would attempt to block the sale.

"Incidentally," she turns and points to the regenerated guest list once more, "three of the guests at Malfoy Manor on Friday are stockholders in CelticMicro. Narcissa, I believe, is attempting to undermine your newest acquisition."

And a few more pieces of the puzzle fall into place.

I stand and stretch. I catch a glimpse of interest in her eye as she quietly studies me. *Interesting.*

I join her at the window. My arms snake around her, drawing her backwards into my chest. She wraps her arms around mine and leans her head on my shoulder. My instincts are spot on, as usual. She fits perfectly in my arms. How easy it is to hold her. We stand this way for long moments, and I feel my life being re-written, moment-by-moment. *She is comfortable in my arms. She has spent time with me, here in this flat, in the past.*

"Why did you react as you did when I showed you the piece of parchment?" She clearly isn't expecting my question, for she pulls away and walks over to the fireplace to magically light the kindling laid out. She stands with her back to me.

I follow her slowly, giving myself time to acclimate myself to this newfound fascination for Ms. Granger.

"After Draco was almost kidnapped last year, you handed me a package and requested I safeguard it. You didn't explain further, and I didn't ask." She continues to stand before the fire, while I observe her, once again, from behind my desk. "I suppose I just reacted to what I thought was a dangerous situation. This penthouse is extremely secure; there is no one to... overhear us."

She thought this flat, MY flat, was safe for her. She meant to save me, as well. That thought circles my brain in a dizzying pattern.

"Do you think these incidents are related?" I am frustrated, not knowing how all the puzzle pieces fit together.

"Perhaps, but then, maybe not. You've made enemies in both worlds, Lucius. I can begin discreet inquiries tomorrow."

She notices the time on the mantle clock and lets out a surprised gasp. She immediately begins gathering up her belongings and makes her way, not to the Floo, but to what I presume is the flat's foyer and front door.

"I've a meeting with the Minister in a half-hour, Lucius. And I've made... plans for this evening." She says the last almost apologetically, as if confessing to some misdemeanor, and I am intrigued.

"Two quick questions before you leave, Ms. Granger. Do I live in this... *penthouse*, and do you still have possession of my package?"

Indefinable emotions chase each other across her face, but she clears her throat and answers. "Yes, for the most part, you live here. And no, I do not have your package. I passed it off to... Severus, for safekeeping. The Floo in your study is open to his. He is to return tomorrow."

With those parting words, she jerked open the front door and strode the twenty feet or so to the door of the lift. Instead of pressing the button, she turns on her heel and Disapparates.

Tomorrow. As eager as I am to Floo Severus now, to assure myself that he is safe and well, I will curb my curiosity and use my time more efficiently. I will explore the *penthouse*.

Later, after discovering the many secrets the flat holds, including hidden rooms and some *interesting* charms in certain rooms, and feasting on an exquisite dinner from The Fat Duck, Heston Blumenthal being an exceptional wizard in the kitchen, I relaxed in the library, amazed to find many of my favorite tomes. The evening passes pleasurably, and, after a Scotch, I make my way down the short hall to the Master Bedroom.

I wake suddenly, as if some noise has penetrated my unconsciousness. I raise myself on my elbows, trying to pinpoint its source. My bedroom door opens slowly; my wand is in my hand. Ms. Granger, *Hermione*, is standing there, backlit by the muted light from the short hallway. Her hair is loose and falling about her shoulders. I cannot discern what she is wearing, but it is soft and clinging.

She doesn't speak as she walks into the room and comes to a stop at the foot of the massive four-poster bed that dominates my bedroom. With a flick of her wrist, the door closes softly and candles are lit along the perimeter of the room. I see her now; she is wearing a negligee that clings to her softly rounded curves. It is made of sheer silk and is the color of the finest champagne. The color highlights the richness of her curls and the glow of her skin. She looks petal soft, and I am eager to let my fingers roam free.

She gracefully climbs onto the bed, stretching her body like a cat stalking its prey, stopping when she is above me. Her hair falls and creates a curtain about our faces. I cannot see her cinnamon eyes as she lowers her head. I lift my own off the pillow to welcome her mouth with mine. She tastes better than I remembered from this morning. Determined not to rush the interlude, I raise my hands to hold her, settling them gently on her hips while my thumbs caress the softly jutting bones.

Her tongue skims over mine teasingly, inviting me to join in her erotic dance. Her hand finds my face, tracing my jaw lightly as it makes its way to my ear, and then tangling

in my hair. I let her set the pace of the kiss, but I feel every ounce of control she is exerting in holding herself up and away from my body.

In response, I pull her body so that she is lying on top of me. One arm wraps around her as the other cups the back of her head, moving her as I wish to deepen the kiss.

My cock is hard and hot as it presses into her soft body. I roll, taking her with me until she is lying beneath me in the middle of my bed. Her lips are pink and slightly swollen. She pants softly and her eyes are shining brightly. I bend to kiss those lips again, and then trail across her cheek to gently outline the shell of her ear with my tongue. I lick and nip my way down her neck, and she arches her head back, allowing me access.

Hermione's hands are roaming my naked back before sliding under my black silk drawstring pants. She squeezes my arse in her hands, pulling me closer, making my cock rock against her mound. I lift my body slightly, not wanting to end this interlude too quickly. My mouth finds her breast beneath the silk sheath, and with one finger trailing along her heated skin, I lower the shoulder strap until it is bare. Her pink nipple is rigid, waiting for my mouth to latch onto it. I grab a handful of her breast and bring it to my mouth so that I may draw on the nub deeply. She gasps and begins thrusting her pelvis upwards, determined to rut.

I shift to my side, letting my hand run up the length of her leg, gathering the negligee as I go. Soon, she is bare to my gaze. She parts her legs wantonly, and I am eager to explore her delicate flesh with my hands and mouth. I position myself between her lovely white thighs, my thumbs stroking her delicate pussy before pulling her open to expose her pert little clit. I lower my head and taste her. Her hips jerk, almost throwing me off. I lift myself higher, my shoulders spreading her legs wider. My hands clamp down on her hips so she is immobile.

I feast on her tender flesh, reveling in each quiver and shaky exhalation of Hermione's breath. Until now, she has been quiet except for her little gasps and moans, but now, as I lick and suck on her pussy, she chants my name interspersed with obscenities.

"Fuck. Lucius. Fuck. Fuck. Lick. Yes, there. THERE! Lick. Harder. HARDER! Yes. Lucius. Like that. More. Fuck me with your tongue. YES! Shove your finger in me. FUCK! Yes. Yes. More. MORE! Another finger. Fuck me hard. Fill me up. Don't stop sucking. More. Fuck. LUCIUS!"

She tries to fuck my face with her pussy. As if my painfully hard cock is buried deep inside her hot, wet walls. I can wait no more. I release her hips and push my pants past my hips and down my thighs. With one sharp thrust, I am buried to the hilt. My breath catches in the back of my throat. She is so hot, so tight, and I am too far gone to take my time. I snap my hips sharply while continuing to brush her clit with the pad of my thumb until she screams my name. I set a reckless tempo, beating mercilessly. The wet sucking sound of my cock being swallowed by her gorgeous cunt echoes softly about the room. I am slick with sweat. My hair clings to my forehead and the back of my neck. I grab the back of her knees, lifting her legs to my shoulders. I fall forward, bending Hermione in half and drive deeper. She is screaming incoherently then begins to shake violently and showers my abdomen with her juices. I scream her name as I burst inside her convulsing pussy.

I wake up. My hand is wrapped around my still-pulsing cock, and my belly is covered with hot semen; my pants are somewhere around my knees. I lie panting; not quite believing Hermione was just a dream. A delicious dream. I milk my cock slowly, savoring each shudder, every twitch in my stomach. Eventually I drop my deflating cock and bring my hand to my mouth to taste, imagining Hermione's sweet tongue. She was perfection in my arms; I can still feel her soft, small hands on my over-sensitized skin, her lush breasts against my cheek.

Sighing with disgust over my foolish fantasies, I turn to check the time on the bedside clock. Four a.m. It is early, but not horribly so. I throw back the sticky covers, vanish my pants and walk naked into the bathroom, intent on a hot shower and another wank.

Today, I shall visit Severus and retrieve my journals. I intend to ask him about Hermione's reaction every time she hears his name. And why she is so welcoming of my advances.

We shall see, I murmur to myself as I step into the steaming shower stall. *We shall see*.

A very big thank-you to my fantastic betas, Wildcatcdc and Sc010!

6

Chapter 6 of 14

Lucius stood in his study with no memory of the last five years of his life. In his hand was his one clue, a scrap of parchment with a name scratched on it. *Hermione Granger*.

Written for one of the loveliest people I know, Dynonugget. RAWRRR!!

We shall see, I murmur to myself as I step into the steaming shower stall. *We shall see*.

By the time I finish my breakfast and a week's worth of *Prophets*, I receive an owl post from Ms. Granger advising me that my business ledgers would be arriving within the hour. Ten minutes later, a package arrives by WPS, *Wizard Parcel Service*. After spending the morning familiarizing myself with the current state of affairs in both the economic and political circles, I feel slightly more comfortable. But before I begin poring over my ledgers, I need to visit Severus. I did not give into temptation at six o'clock this morning and check to see if he had arrived home. Ms. Granger was woefully lax in neglecting to state a return time, but knowing Severus and his boundless appetites; he would not stay out past the noontime meal.

Cautiously, I Floo. While Ms. Granger assured me I am connected to Severus', I was not informed as to where his connection was actually located. Knowing my old friend, he could be as close as one street over or as far away as South America.

I step out of the fireplace into what is unmistakably Severus' living room. I take in the bookcase-lined walls crammed with well-worn books, some behind metal grates, and the wall-hanging that once hung in the Slytherin Head's study, then glance behind me and note his Order of Merlin, First Class, for unwavering support and personal sacrifice made during the Second War, on the mantle. I am in his home a mere five seconds when I hear his voice from across the room. "Don't gawk, Lucius."

Standing in the doorway opposite the fireplace is Severus, looking every bit as formidable and stern as when he was Headmaster, every bit as proud and unapproachable as when he was a Death Eater. But his eyes now hold a hint of softness that I have not seen in many years, and I cannot stop the smile that insists on creeping across my face.

"Severus." A wealth of meaning is behind one small word. Unconsciously, I cross the room to clap him on the shoulder. My chest tightens, and I take a deep breath to steady my suddenly shaky legs.

"It is very good to see you looking so well, my friend," I say honestly.

"Come, Lucius, sit down." His voice holds a gentle quality, a softness that is unexpected from the hard man I've known in the past.

"Hermione owed me last night, explaining your ... circumstances." He holds up a hand to prevent my next question. "She was vague on the specifics, but she did say to expect your Floo this morning."

I do not like the liberty he takes in addressing Ms. Granger by her first name: it reeks of disrespect, or worse, a familiarity that I am certain is improper.

"Ms. Granger owed you? Last night? She'd mentioned that you'd be 'back' today. I was under the impression that you'd been away. She knew... where to find you?"

Severus nods. "Yes, a Potions symposium at which I was the main speaker. You," he continued, his eyebrow arched in slight amusement, "were the one who recommended me to the coordinator. Hermione was very helpful, making travel arrangements, hotel reservations..." his voice trails off.

"I am under the impression, Severus, that Ms. Granger is employed by the Ministry in a somewhat more official capacity than as your travel agent," I offer briskly, walking over to his over-stuffed sofa and sitting down.

Severus has the gall to chuckle as he takes the chair close to the fireplace. Next to the well-worn chair is a table holding a high lamp and a leather-bound tome. *How comfortable he looks here*, I muse. *Is he no longer teaching?*

"What has Ms. Granger explained, exactly?" I am gripping the arm of the sofa for support. I am not comfortable discussing Ms. Granger with him, although I do not understand why. Severus continues to address the witch by her first name after clearly taking note of my dislike for the same. I have no reason for this, yet I sit here, seething in quiet vexation.

"*Hermione* told me you are missing some memories, five years worth, apparently, and would be coming to me to fill in the 'missing pages'. I assume you have also come to retrieve your journals?"

For all my frustration, I heave a small sigh of relief. "Yes, thank you."

With a soft flick of his fingers, he Summons a package from behind the metal grate on the far bookcase.

"While you are more than welcome to use my parlor as you catch up on your life, Lucius, perhaps you would first like the particulars? I trust it is not too early in the day for a fortifying Scotch?" With a twitch of his wrist, a decanter and two tumblers float to the low table in front of me.

He received the package, the one I had mistakenly believed to be on my person the day I'd been Obliviated! I mention this, and Severus grimaces.

"I don't know how much you want to know, Luc. Sometimes I wish I'd been blessed with a well-aimed Obliviate. What is the last memory you have?"

I relate to him my memory of the day I left the Manor to deliver the package in Knockturn Alley.

"That happened three days before the final battle and the end of the Dark Lord. I received your package and your note enclosed, mercifully. The Dark Lord never found out about the Chinese pansies. Therefore, I was able to brew the antidote to Nagini's venom. It was Neville Longbottom, of all people, who killed the snake."

Severus shudders, but whether it is from thoughts of the snake, the Dark Lord or young Longbottom being the one to finally do the monster in, I cannot tell.

"The *Horcruxes*, Severus," I say urgently.

Severus shakes his head. "The Dark One did not succeed in making his final Horcrux, but not from lack of trying. He took Draco from the Manor, just as you suspected he might. It was the night before the final battle, and you had Moody's Invisibility Cloak. Hexes were flying, but you managed to turn your pocket watch into a Portkey and activate it for Draco moments after Voldemort killed Knott in preparation of turning Draco into his final Horcrux. You saved all our lives, Luc."

I sit silently, absorbing what Severus has told me. Voldemort is really gone. Well and truly dead. I look up as Severus presses a tumbler of Scotch into my hand, as if sensing my rioting thoughts.

"Drink," he orders, then returns to his chair.

I do as he bids, swallowing a mouthful as the weight of a thousand years is lifted off my shoulders. I slump back into the sofa.

"Incidentally," Severus continues after a moment, "Voldemort didn't know he had turned Harry Potter into a bloody Horcrux the night he murdered the Potters. It came as something of a shock." He chuckles. I look up and see Severus with a small smile on his face, chuckling like a boy with a secret, and for the first time since coming to in that dank alley on Friday last, I laugh.

After an excellent lunch, Severus provides a tour of his home and grounds; and while we stroll, he fills me in on his life, post-Voldemort. He no longer teaches; instead, he works in his lab, researching new potions for Malfoy Industries on a part time basis while writing a series of Potions books that will be used as part of the new curriculum at Hogwarts. And he dates. Apparently a lot, if his anecdotes are to be believed.

It is after an amusing story regarding a woman wearing only a dragon-hide trench coat that I ask casually, "Why does Ms. Granger become flustered every time your name is mentioned?"

Severus stops mid-stride and turns slowly.

"Luc, she and I have known each other for a long time; I was her instructor at Hogwarts, and I have come to know her better since she works so closely with you. There is no reason, but perhaps given the situation..." Severus is choosing his words carefully, and I hear what he is not saying.

"I believe the answers to your questions may be in your journals, my friend."

I say nothing, only nod and continue walking. I mull over all that I have learned in the past few days: the Dark Lord's downfall, Narcissa's duplicity, my relationship with Draco, the reinstatement of my rightful status in Wizard society, and most unexpectedly, my new business ventures, and one Ms. Hermione Granger. It is a lot for one wizard to take in.

We wind our way past the greenhouses and eventually make our way back to his garden. It is late, and upon entering his study, I retrieve my journals and head for his Floo.

"I will be in touch, my friend," Severus says as I grab a small handful of Floo powder. "For tonight, perhaps a Calming Draught?"

A small smile makes its way to my face as he hands me the small phial he knows I will not use. I pause for a moment before stepping into the Floo. I turn and watch as he walks slowly to his chair. The burden of being a Death Eater and spy has taken a toll on Severus, I see. I have not seen a house-elf, but then, a good elf will not be seen about. Still, I am curious. Perhaps for his birthday I will present him with one; I will speak to Ms. Granger. *What had she said about Gobbert?*

"Severus?" He looks up sharply, as if surprised I have not yet left.

"Would you know anything about my elf, Gobbert? Ms. Granger mentioned a solution?"

A small half-smile appears. "You do remember, of course, the dinner party when your son mentioned Hermione's elf-liberation movement at Hogwarts? It is still her hobby, so to speak. She has found that Gobbert is tied to Malfoy Manor, not the family. It is for this reason he cannot leave the Manor, even though you demanded he follow you to the Penthouse. Hermione has learned that if you, as owner of the Manor, free him, then *hire* him, or if he freely re-enslaves himself to you, then he will become either your employee or property and will be able to follow you."

I stare at his face with what I am sure is a look of horror. "Free? Gobbert? Good God, man!" I burst.

Severus' smile remains in place, but nods. "Indeed. That is what Hermione thought you would say."

Appalled, I pitch the Floo powder into the fireplace and step inside the swirling green flame.

Since taking my leave of Severus, I have been poring over my ledgers, and now, hours later, I come to the conclusion that I must be happy with the events of the past five years. What I have encountered is nothing short of fantastic.

With the help of one brilliant, hard-edged, technically savvy witch, I not only increased my holdings ten times over, I now have my fingers in the two hottest markets in Britain, pharmaceuticals and computers. With Ms. Granger's guidance, I cut loose those companies consistently losing money post-Voldemort, and under the auspices of the new Ministry, I began investing in new and emerging companies that show promise in furthering the development and betterment of both the Wizard and Muggle communities.

Ms. Granger and I are working the opposite ends of the same candle! I laugh to myself. She is using magic for the betterment of Muggles, and I am using Muggle technology for the betterment of wizards. I must have seen the dynamic from the start, whether it was articulated, or not. Was it a mutual agreement? Who approached whom? Did Ms. Granger weave her special magic on the new Minister of Magic, convincing him the Wizarding population *needed* Muggles, or did the pressure come from an outside source? From Muggles, whose only tie to the Wizarding world is through their children? A shiver runs up my back, raising the hairs at the nape of my neck. Someone has engineered this.

Setting the ledgers aside, I stand and stretch, then make my way down the short hall to the master bedroom. Along the way, I pick up my journals, intending to scour the pages, hoping to find more clues.

I don a pair of navy blue silk pajama pants and sprawl across the massive bed. Propped against the cream damask pillows, I look at the journals beside me, pondering their secrets.

A huge thank you to two wonderful women, Wildcatcdc and Sc010f, betas extraordinaire!

7

Chapter 7 of 14

Lucius stood in his study with no memory of the last five years of his life. In his hand was his one clue, a scrap of parchment with a name scratched on it. *Hermione Granger.*

Written for my lovely friend, Dynonugget. Rawrrrr

I don a pair of navy blue silk pajama pants and sprawl across the massive bed. Propped against the cream damask pillows, I look at the journals beside me, pondering their secrets.

My early journals deal with my trial and subsequent acquittal and, later, the return of my property by the Magical Law Enforcement. The defense I had outlined worked; the Wizengamot was convinced that I had acted in the only way possible for the safety of my family and the community. I was doing what was necessary to protect as many wizarding families as I could, though not all; to do so would have put my own in jeopardy.

I flip through the entries describing the trial, taking note of Narcissa's behavior. Narcissa had taken the wait-and-see attitude regarding these proceedings. While she was not an outspoken detractor, neither did she stand alongside me. A habit in her later years, it would seem.

I open a leather-bound book and begin reading at a random date:

2 May 2000

He is dead three years today.

Celebrations continue throughout the community, but I will spend this day as I have for the past three years, with Severus. His transformation has been remarkable, to say the least. Oh, how he would hate me calling it that, but what else could it be called, a miracle? He'd like that even less. After all those years of living with terror and madness, of recriminations and guilt and regret, he has moved on. He has forgiven himself.

3 July 2000

Of all the preposterous ideas the new Ministry could dream up, they have truly achieved a new level of stupidity. While I admit the incentives they are offering will contribute to Malfoy Industries' bottom line quite nicely, the requirements are nothing short of vulgar. A Muggle Liaison Coordinator. I can only imagine what type of wizard would debase himself to interact regularly with Muggles.

If an MLC is to be foisted upon me, I'll let it be known I have no intentions of following the advice of some Ministry lackey. Gods save me from some Muggle-loving do-gooder.

9 August 2000

I am going to Avada her if she wears that patently false smile one more time while she attempts to coach me on Muggle relations. As if I didn't know how to speak in a civilized manner. She says I have a condescending tone. Indeed? Does she forget to whom she speaks? Stupid chit.

12 September 2000

It is beyond all comprehension! The witch is insisting on accompanying me to business meetings for Malfoy Industries. It reeks of the Ministry and their to-date unsuccessful attempts to insinuate government oversight into my business. I made the deal, and I'll keep my end of the bargain, but I will not have some silly girl accompanying me while I conduct business with grown-ups.

I lay the book on my chest and chuckle. Having read my ledgers, I realize that Hermione Granger is more than likely Malfoy Industries' biggest asset. It is amusing to read these details of our somewhat rocky beginnings, knowing the outcome ahead of time. Despite the lateness of the hour, I am not tired, and I have more than a little interest in Ms. Granger.

Jumping ahead several months, I open the journal and begin reading once more.

6 March 2001

I am going to curse the witch if she dares suggest one more time that perhaps my negotiating skills lack finesse. I have been conducting business for longer than the silly girl has been alive, yet she shows no respect. If it wasn't for the monetary incentives the Ministry is handing out to participate in this travesty, I'd Oblivate her, Portkey her round bottom somewhere far away, preferably someplace with cannibals, and be done with it.

That her bottom is shapely is one more strike against her, in my opinion.

Ahah! Finally. While I have the uncomfortable sensation of being a voyeur of my own life, I continue skimming through the journals for more references to Ms. Granger's round bottom, or any other part of her shapely anatomy, for that matter. What is this unnatural fascination I have for the witch? Why does her face draw me? Will I find the answers here, as Severus has suggested? Stretching a bit, I continue on.

30 July 2001

Ms. Granger continues to wear revealing robes to our weekly strategy sessions. My office is quite warm in the afternoons, but to use the library across the hall as Gobbert suggested would deny myself the pleasure of seeing Ms. Granger's cheeks pinken when I point out her highly inappropriate dress. Gobbert has begun mumbling to himself when removing and replacing the Cooling Charm on the day of her visits. I must speak with him.

13 August 2001

This afternoon I spied Ms. Granger removing what appeared to be a Personal Cooling Charm from her person. How long has she been doing that, I wonder?

30 October 2001

Ms. Granger wore a completely unacceptable jumper to this morning's appointment with the realtor. It was a deep blue that set off the honey-depth of her hair and molded her remarkable pair of breasts.

I am noticing what she wears. *When did I stop caring that she is a Mudblood?* I wonder. Somewhere between her third negotiated acquisition and that jumper, if I had to wager. She is as remarkable as she is irksome. That I cannot stop her image from appearing when I close my eyes is ridiculous, and yet.... She is a vision.

27 December 2001

I have no idea what the silly woman was going on about this afternoon. She was waving the symphony tickets I'd given her as a Christmas present in my face, which led me to believe they were the topic of her caterwauling. When I handed her my handkerchief so that she might compose herself, thus regaining a small measure of dignity, she flung her arms about my shoulders and cried on my new set of robes. What else could I do but wrap my arms around her?

She feels as if she was made for me. It was with that realization that I forcibly put her from me. On her face was an expression of such pain that, before I could reassure her of my honorable intentions, she ran from the room.

Honorable intentions? Honorable? Just what were my intentions towards this woman? My journals thus far have not stated, and I find myself uncertain if I want to proceed. Whatever we are to each other, I am convinced there is more to this partnership than a mere business arrangement.

My head is beginning to pound. I am determined to keep my memory loss a secret for the time being, for to show weakness of this magnitude would undermine all that I have worked so hard to achieve. That I have three individuals to help me is a relief, but Gobbert is at the Manor, and Severus is... damn. I don't know where Severus is, exactly. The only one close is Ms. Granger. A completely unacceptable, but clearly, unavoidable arrangement.

Pushing the journals away, I reach for the strip of leather I keep at my bedside and tie my hair back before muttering *Vox* and slipping off to sleep.

Bleary-eyed, I open the door from the master bath and make my way back to my bed. While it is morning, I feel as if it is still the middle of the night. Once again, I was haunted by visions of one witch. A soft swish stops me in my tracks. I am not alone.

Am I dreaming? Hermione stands in the doorway, softly calling my name. She steps into the room and partially closes the door behind her. Before she can make her way to my bed, I catch her arm and push her against the wall.

"Lucius," she gasps softly.

"Why are you here?" I press myself into her, speaking softly into her ear. My hands rest on the wall on either side of her, trapping her.

"I thought... something was wrong. You never sleep... later than six o'clock." She sounds as if she is trying to catch her breath.

My senses are reeling. My brain cannot distinguish between what is real and what is a dream. I want to lower my mouth to hers, to taste her soft lips.

"Why are you here?" I repeat. My hand drops off the wall and onto her shoulder; my fingers dip into the depression above her collarbone before moving up to the base of her neck.

"Why, Hermione?" I lean down and press a soft kiss to her ear.

"I... I was worried. Someone Obliviated you. You... haven't seen a Healer."

I say nothing, not sure if I am awake or dreaming. She cries my name softly, and I come to my senses. She is real. She is here.

"You are in my bedroom, witch." My hand moves of its own accord; my fingers trail a path to her breast and trace large circles over her softly covered flesh. She moans softly.

"What is between us?" My fingers pinch her nipple through her clothing, and her breath hitches.

"Noth... Nothing," Her answer comes out in a rush of hot air.

"Liar," I whisper harshly. "You let me kiss you, hold you. Touch you." My fingers ease the strap of her dress off her shoulder. Underneath, she wears a scrap of lace and silk, and I trace her hot skin above the bra. Her breath hitches once more, and my body responds; my pajamas are now tight over my swollen cock.

I trail kisses from the curve of her neck to her breast. I gently bite her nipple, and the hands that had been clenched at her sides are now in my hair, holding me fast. Pull down the lace covering her delicate flesh, I put my mouth to the softest skin I have ever encountered. Her breast is a pale, round globe, more than enough to fill my hand, and her nipple is hard. I flick the pink pebble with my tongue, and in response, her fingers weave through my hair, her nails scrape lightly over my scalp. A shiver runs down my spine at the overwhelming sensations. That she can make me respond so forcefully with so little encouragement is unsettling, but I push the thought away.

I leave her breast, slowly covering up her beauty as my tongue wets a path between her breasts to her mouth. My lips slide over hers, mapping out their softness, the plump bottom lip that is slightly roughened from her teeth and her thinner top lip that is silken. My tongue tastes the corner of her mouth, lightly running the seam until her lips part, and I gain access to the hidden treasures within. My tongue finds hers, and an erotic dance begins. But I want more; more flesh in my hands and mouth, more cries of need keening in my ears. I want to lick the sweat between her breasts as she works herself above me, frantically working for release. I want to feel the softness of her hair that I smooth off her face while she is writhing beneath me.

"Tell me, Hermione." My fingers run down her arm, to her waist. I tilt her hips until her mound is crushed against my straining flesh, and slowly I roll my hips to tease her further. Shifting my weight, I break contact, and her hips follow me, arching her back off the cool wall. She moans, her frustration evident. I want her with an intensity that jars my senses. Her eyes are squeezed shut, and her breathing is labored.

My hands find the edge of her dress, and the soft material gathers about my wrists as my fingertips skim the backs of her legs and thighs. At her round bottom, I gather the material, twisting and gathering it around my hand. I begin suckling her neck, strongly enough to leave a reddened mark, but not so hard as to bruise her tender flesh. She tastes of a not-yet-ripened peach, tart but with a hint of sweetness, a promise of what awaits the patient man.

She braced herself against the wall and parts her legs. Tilting her hips, she offers herself for my exploration. I will not refuse her offer. She has not yet given me what I desire, her answer. Right now, against this wall, my need to know battles with my need to feel her delectable responses to my touch.

"Do you like my mouth on you, witch? Do you like the feel of my hand covering your body?" My free hand runs up the length of her inner thigh until I am cupping her heat. My middle finger slips past the feeble excuse for knickers to feel her swollen lips; her clit is engorged and eager. I have made her needy, and that knowledge shoots straight to my cock, now pulsing with its own need.

"Tell me who we are to each other, witch." I demand gruffly. My breathing is no less labored; her scent is permeating the very air around us. Her desire is a living thing, pulsing and breathing, newly awakened and eager to play; and I am on the edge of a high precipice, fighting for control and firm ground. I slide my hand inside the gossamer material to cup her fully. She is hot and wet. Two fingers slide down to dip inside her, and my name escapes her lips in a gasp. She is more exquisite than I could have ever imagined. She is perfection in my arms.

I kiss her fully as she begins to ride my hand. Her hands have left my hair and are now grasping for purchase on my body. She finds my hard cock and encircles me through the thin silk. She strokes me. I fight the urge to pump into her hand as she rolls her hips, grinding her clit against the heel of my palm as my fingers work her furiously.

She begins quivering, and her wet walls clench tightly around my fingers. She is not quiet in her pleasure; her soft screams and long, drawn-out moans escalate my need, and my weeping cock stains my silk bottoms. With blood thundering in my ears, my heart beats its pounding rhythm in my chest. There is no sight more beautiful than seeing this woman lose herself in her release.

I pull her to me. She buries her face in my shoulder, but her hand hasn't stopped its wicked movement. I begin to thrust, slowly at first, but the ancient rhythm cannot be denied. I want to drown in the pleasure she gives me, and I thrust my cock hard against her hand. She increases both her speed and pressure. Oh, that I could bury myself in this woman.

"Hermione," I groan as I come against the hot silk she holds in her hand.

We stand for long minutes, wrapped in each other, silent but for our shuddering gasps for air as we attempt to steady our thudding hearts.

"You don't remember me. You don't remember us," she sobs softly against my skin.

"I have no memory of you, but my body remembers you. And in my dreams, you are mine." I grasp her chin to look into her eyes, eyes that are shining softly in the morning light that has made its way past the draperies.

"Are we lovers?" I do not want her to be my lover. I have only met her, but I trust her on some inescapable level, deaf to my voice of reason and rationality. This is the witch. My woman. I do not want to offer her less than what she deserves, and for all its loathsomeness, I am still married.

"No," her voice sounds strained. She draws in a shaky breath and steps out of my arms. She takes a moment to straighten her clothes, as if she is settling her armor about her.

"You didn't want me." Her voice is flat, as if she is has convinced herself that this unmistakable lie could somehow pass for the truth.

"Gods, woman, I want you." The words are past my lips before I can censor my thoughts. The words are admitted as a growl, but they are nevertheless the truth. The evidence is now drying in my silk drawstring pants.

Her eyes are now bright with unshed tears. "I've missed you."

I wrap my arms around this woman, this witch. My witch. I have no answers, but for now, I have enough.

Many, many thanks to my friends and betas, Wildcatcdc and Sc010f.

I wrap my arms around this woman, this witch. My witch. I have no answers, but for now, I have enough.

Written for my lovely friend, Dynonugget. Rawwwrrrr!

I wrap my arms around this woman, this witch. My witch. I have no answers, but for now, I have enough.

A half hour later, I am sitting across from Ms. Granger, looking to all the world as if our interlude has never occurred.

She fled my bedroom with a muffled sob, and I thought it best to give her time to sort herself out. Where this softness comes from I cannot fathom, for I am not a soft man. I shower and dress for the day before joining her. She is no longer Hermione; she has reverted once more to Ms. Granger, and she has announced she has urgent news, hence her unexpected appearance in my bedroom.

That she is able to sit composed and in control is unsettling. I feel more at ease with her discomfort, her cheeks flushed and unable to meet my gaze. As it is, I am left at a disadvantage. The erection I'd taken care of in my shower this morning has not assuaged my desire for the woman, and while I am no longer the young schoolboy who must wank every time a stiff breeze hardens my cock, the uncomfortable tightness is a reminder of questions still not answered.

She has ordered breakfast, and a tense fifteen minutes pass before we set aside our cups of tea and face the matter at hand.

"Begin," I say, sitting back on the sofa.

"Almost three years ago, you bought a Muggle company, MicFabTech, or MF Tech. They developed a new micro fabric that can withstand most forms of mistreatment. Not only is the material fireproof, it is also able to withstand most common hexes and jinxes. Not that the Muggle company knew of this, of course, but you'd read the specifications that had been reported in the trade papers and made the owner an offer."

I wave her on. "This is not new to me, Hermione, I've been through my ledgers."

Hermione has the grace to blush, but whether it is from my use of her first name or the confirmation that I had begun filling in missing pieces of my life, I cannot say.

"MF Tech had two competitors; the first was barely keeping up and was heading for bankruptcy. The other, Tebric, Inc., was gaining on MF Tech as far as improved wearability in their outdoor clothing line. By you buying MF Tech, you virtually shut down Tebric. You pouring money and resources into this company virtually overnight ruined Tebric, who could no longer keep up.

The owner of Tebric is a Muggle named Michael Flannery, and his son, Michael Jr., is a fifth year at Hogwarts."

Michael Flannery was a guest of Narcissa's last weekend I remember.

"Monday past, I contracted PW Investigations to retrace your steps from Dublin to London. On Friday, before Apparating to MI's corporate headquarters, you received an owl. From eyewitness accounts, you met an unidentified man at The Duke. Witnesses place you there between half twelve and one o'clock in the afternoon. Your waiter remembers you and the man arguing, but could not remember hearing anything specific. You left first, making your way to the Apparition point in Duke Alley. According to the waiter, the man left shortly after."

Hermione pauses and heaves a short sigh. "A witch riding a bike on her way to work on Grafton Street can place you in Duke Alley, close to the Apparition point. She remembers watching a man in a blue overcoat approach you." Hermione smiles softly before continuing.

"Apparently she can remember because she was quite taken with your... hair. Regardless, the waiter from The Duke confirms your lunch guest was wearing a blue overcoat. It seems as if it was a rather *vivid* shade of blue.

"PW traced the credit card the Muggle used at The Duke. It was Michael Flannery. They went to have a little chat with him. It would seem that being face-to-face with two fully-grown wizards, instead of his son's classmates and professors, was a bit too much for Mr. Flannery. He confessed to hiring a wizard to cast an Obliviate. He'd heard about the spell from reading his son's Defense Against the Dark Arts text. It seems he wanted to erase the memory of the MF Tech sale so that he could make you a partnership offer. Unfortunately, the caster was a little too intent on causing injury."

I sit for a moment, soaking in the information as it has been presented. The urge to kill is strong, and I force myself to stay in my seat. I wait for Hermione to finish.

Hermione does not leave me waiting long: "The witness on the bike confirms that a third man joined you and Mr. Flannery in the alley. The third man cast the Obliviate that knocked you unconscious. Then a Portkey was activated that transported you to the alley in which you came to hours later. Ron's got a sworn witness statement."

"Who is PW Investigations? Are they reputable?" I cannot have some fly-by-night private investigator knowing the extent of my memory loss.

Again, Hermione smiles softly. "Yes, they are reputable. You hired them last year to investigate Draco's fiancée. You insisted on a thorough background and credit checks."

I let that sink in for a moment, approving of such actions, before asking my next question. "Does Draco know I had his fiancée investigated?"

At this, Hermione is laughing. "He is the one who asked you. The sneaky arse, he didn't want to be called on the carpet if Diana somehow found out about it. He was going to let you hang."

I chuckle. I am pleased to hear my son taking such reasonable precautions. After all, this witch would one day carry on the Malfoy legacy.

"I presume as Draco is still engaged, the report was satisfactory. Who are P and W, by the way?"

Hermione's smile grows wider. "Draco recommended them to you. Harry Potter and Ron Weasley."

By the look of satisfaction on her face, she has been waiting to drop those names in my lap. I am torn between congratulating her and inquiring if she has taken leave of her senses. What a difference five years make, I think as I struggle to mask my smirk.

"Indeed. And what of Michael Flannery?"

Her face is a delight to behold. "PW still has him. Harry's convinced the man that he is better off in their custody than with the Magical Law Enforcement."

"What of the third man, the unfortunate one who cursed me. Who is he, and where is he now?" He had best pray that he is in MLE custody before my wand finds him.

"Mr. Flannery gave Harry a name, and he is following up on it as we speak. Harry will find him; he is the best tracker out there." She begins fidgeting with the piping of the chair upon which she sits, a nervous reaction that matches the now sober expression on her face. "There is more."

"What is it?" By the tone of her voice, it will not be pleasant.

"Mr. Flannery and Narcissa... seem to be having an affair." The last words come out in a rush, as if saying them in a hurry will cause less damage. She looks at me, waiting for an explosion, I suppose. *What is she expecting me to say?* I wonder. *Does she expect me to become indignant and rush home to confront my wife?* I cannot say I am surprised by the news. When I don't comment, she jumps to her feet and begins pacing.

"The question now, I suppose, is if Narcissa knew about this, if she participated in this assault." Hermione sounds indignant, she appears angry and defensive on my behalf. For reasons best left unexplored, her indignity on my behalf warms me, then I quickly turn my thoughts away from the unsettling emotions. I pour another cup of tea as I ponder this last bit of information. Do I believe Narcissa capable of such a plot? She is a Slytherin, there can be no question. Do I believe she would be involved? She has more to lose than I. I think not. Still, there are too many coincidences. Perhaps some Arithmancy will help me work out the logistics of all this new information. Perhaps a triple finger of Scotch can do the same thing without the headache.

"Do you believe Mistrs Potter and Weasley are discreet enough to sit on this information?" I must begin damage control. I need to ascertain how much they know, and how much they are willing to keep secret.

"We've gone over...." Hermione stops and offers me an apologetic smile. "Sorry. Yes, Harry and Ron are very discreet. They've some high-profile clients, both Muggle and wizard, and they'd soon be out of business if they began sharing confidences. Draco trusted them enough to suggest using them."

I nod, accepting her statement, trusting her, and she looks at me quizzically. "Yes?" I ask, realizing this is not the reaction she had been expecting.

"No argument? No telling me that Harry and Ron would like nothing more than to see you destroyed? No insisting that they not be involved in the investigation?" Hermione rattles off what are apparently the justifications I've used in the past to disassociate myself from the boys.

"Is that what would have happened a fortnight ago?" I ask, thinking for the millionth time what a difference a week makes in one's life.

"Yes," she admits cautiously.

"And how do they feel about our association?" Hermione is blushing again, and I can't help but wonder what is causing the delightful reaction. Are they, perhaps, aware of a *tendre* she holds for me? *What a delicious thought*, I muse.

"They accepted our... association years ago." A wealth of meaning is behind those words.

"Hermione." To say her name is a pleasure. I want to say it again, to hear it in my ears, to shape her name with my lips and tongue.

"Will you have dinner with me tonight?" I did not intend to invite her. The words were past my lips before my brain could censor them. But I do not regret it.

"I... I don't think that would be a good idea, Lucius."

"What happened, Hermione? Why would you think I don't want you?" I do not mean to bring this up, not now, not when only an hour ago she was losing herself in my arms. But I cannot let go of the words she'd said.

Hermione jumps to her feet and begins pacing. She does not turn to look at me, but a fierce expression takes hold of her features, and when she speaks, her voice is anything but normal or calm.

"You told me. Flat out, you told me you didn't want me. I thought you cared about me! I thought we were going to find a way to be together! Gods, this happened months ago, I thought I was over this. I thought I could talk about this with you, knew it would come out at some point, but I can't."

She stops her pacing, and turns her back to me. I see her breathing deeply, her hands clenching and unclenching by her sides. Finally, she faces me, and her features are composed, even if her voice is less so.

"I realize you have no memory of our history since the war, so I will summarize it for you. Three years ago, we began working together via the Ministry's new programs." I lean forward to inform her I've read of this in my journals, but she raises her hand.

"No, don't interrupt; I will not be able to say this more than once."

I sit back, intent to listening to her point of view, her perception of our dealings together, and finally getting some answers as to who we are to each other.

"We began by fighting; you hated me, and you hated the position you had been put in, regardless of the deal you'd made and the incentives you'd been offered. And I hated you. I wanted nothing more than to see you fail, miserably. But you didn't. You excelled. Everything you touched turned to gold, and I was enamored by it all. You began mentoring me, teaching me how to use my skills to my best advantage. Somehow, along the way, we ended up... not hating each other. We shared a joke; we had a cup of tea. Eventually, we became friends. Then, we became more." Once more I lean forward, wanting to reassure the witch that I was somewhat aware of what had passed between us. But she glares at me with her hands on her hips.

"Please, Lucius, let me finish."

With a small, exasperated sigh, I once again lean back and motion for her to continue.

"We were not lovers. The painful truth is, I offered to be your lover, and you refused. No explanations, no justification, no remorse, even. Just, 'No. I do not want you for a lover, Hermione.'"

I sit transfixed. Horrified. This beautiful woman couldn't see why I would never take her for a lover?

"I never said anything more, Hermione? Not any other words to you?" Not knowing anything about our former relationship, I know I must have said more to her than 'No, thank you.'

"Oh, you said some drivel about time and circumstances and danger. I knew what you meant, however. How could I think you could possibly want a Mudblood?"

That she would use my words against me, against herself, cuts me to the quick. For all intents and purposes, I have only been in her presence less than a week; and yet I know, *she* is no Mudblood. While I will never admit to all wizards being equal, the woman in this room is far removed from those classless wizards who come into magic accidentally. This woman was born to be a witch. That I could have insulted her in such a manner is inconceivable. That I feel so strongly of this after having only known her such a short time is incomprehensible, and yet, I do.

"No, Hermione. I know for certain, as sure as I know my name and Draco's birth date, I know I have not called you a Mudblood. Not after our 'association' began." I add at her arched eyebrow.

"What I know for certain, Lucius," she spat my words at me, "is that on the Friday I offered to become your lover, you refused. Then you announced you were returning to the Manor, for you needed time and space to get your life in order. I thought perhaps you would re-think my 'offer'. When you returned on Monday, you barely spoke to me, much less looked at me. I took that as my cue to stay out of your life. As much as I could, anyway, having signed a five-year, irrevocable contract with the Ministry and Malfoy Industries."

I want to take this woman in my arms and kiss her until all her hurt feelings give way. I want nothing more than to make love with her, but all the reasons for not making her mine in the past still exist. I am still married. There is still danger. I still have a life to put in order. And now I also need to discover why I have not done all this to date. Why

have I stepped back, instead of moving forward? Why have I not *told* her?

Once again, I have to tell this woman I need time to think and get my life in order. I need to return to the Manor. I need answers, and I need them *NOW*.

I am *not* going to tell her all contracts are revocable.

"Hermione, there is nothing I can say to you at this moment. We both know that. For now, we have to accept things as they are, until I can finish piecing my life back together. I am not... indifferent to you. I am returning to the Manor." The look of shock on her face hurts me, but I have a plan.

"I need Gobbert, Hermione." And just like that, her face transforms. While her eyes are still bright with unshed tears, there is a smile about her mouth.

"Severus informed me of my dilemma regarding Gobbert, and after witnessing Narcissa's treatment of him this weekend past, I am open to your idea. Do not expect me to free all my house-elves, Hermione," I say sternly, standing and walking slowly to her. She does not move away from me, and once more, I draw her gently into my arms.

"Now, tell me how I am to free Dobby's oldest brother, Gobby."

Huge thank-yous to my fantastic betas, Wildcatcdc and Sc010f!

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Chapter 9 of 14

"Now, tell me how I am to free Dobby's older brother, Gobby."

Written for the lovely and talented Dynonugget! Rawwwrrrr!

"Now, tell me how I am to free Dobby's older brother, Gobby."

For the next hour, Hermione and I engage in delightful banter. Hermione flings facts and rehashes historical data while I offer my vast knowledge of elf history and welfare. The more I counter her arguments, the more animated she becomes. Soon, her hands are waving about while her voice takes on a stern, Head of House quality that is slightly arousing, much to my dismay.

Eventually she abandons her rhetoric regarding elf freedom in general and supplies the same information as Severus had earlier in the week. The notion of offering Gobbert clothing is repugnant, and I am loath to put both Gobbert and myself through the ordeal. The truth of the matter is that so much of an elf's psyche is tied to his ownership that the elf oftentimes becomes depressed to the point of suicide should his owner offer clothes, for to offer freedom in the form of clothing breaks their deep-seated bond.

Gobbert must be able to leave the Manor, as much for his welfare as for my sanity, and as it is now, he cannot. While Dobby was bound to the family, his brother, being the eldest, is bound to his Master's principle domicile.

As the only person or creature to have ever provided me comfort as a child, the thought of wounding Gobbert by thrusting freedom upon him is beyond the pale. For Hermione's part, she has not offered to 'help' me, and I am grateful. I must do this alone, and I must plan carefully, for while Gobbert is a proud elf, he is also sensitive. While I am neither soft nor emotional, I respect this elf. My elf.

"I am returning to the Manor," I announce. She looks wounded, but quickly composes herself and straightens her shoulders. I know she is recalling another time I had said those words to her. I want to reassure her, I'd like to be able to tell her that all will be well, but there is still much to work through, much to consider before I can make any changes in my life. *One step at a time*, I remind myself.

"And when I return, it will be with Gobby. I must search the Malfoy Archives; there are several large volumes dedicated to the house-elves, their genealogy and biographies. The spell to release the house-elf's enslavement will be there."

In the end, it was much easier than I'd anticipated. After Flooing to the Manor, I spent the remainder of the day researching Gobbert's family background and instances of the spell and the presentation of clothes. Mercifully, this only occurred twice in the last eight hundred years or so. It was Gobbert, in the end, who rescued me from my turmoil.

"So what you is saying, sir," begins Gobbert, "is you is wanting I to serve only you. And if I's want to do that, I has a choice. I can either be freed and you hire me," at this, his face takes on a pinched look, his eyes squinting, mouth pursed and nostrils flaring as if smelling rancid meat, "or I is given the opportunity to offer Iself for enslavement to you. Is I right, sir?"

I nod, staring in wonder at this creature who is calm amidst what I can only imagine to be a horrible blow.

"I likes the second choice much better, sir. But I has a few requests, sir, if you don't mind." Gobbert is dignity personified at this moment, and I couldn't be prouder of him.

"Go right ahead, Gobbert," I respond formally. The elf relaxes, acknowledging that the negotiations have begun.

Over the next twenty minutes, I discover that Gobbert is an excellent negotiator. His demands are few, but firm. I am to immediately enslave him upon offering him a bow-tie, a vulgar clip-on, to be exact. It is the smallest piece of clothing he can imagine. To minimize the effects and lessen the pain of freedom, a simple slaving ceremony will take place. He will utter "Gobbert is yours to do your will," to which I will respond, "You are mine to do as I will," and then I will cast the *Foveo Ligatio* spell.

Gobbert's second request is for Draco to inherit him upon my death, as well as any and all of Gobbert's future offspring. And finally, the offer of freedom must never again be made to him or any of his descendants.

My conditions are absolute, as well. He is to never utter one 'thank you,' neither is he to offer one bow nor one quivering smile in regards to his new ownership status, whether he means it or not. To do so will result in unpleasant circumstances, including a month's visit to Narcissa.

Narcissa is away visiting friends, making my time at the Manor almost enjoyable, and now, two days later, I am once again taking up residence in the penthouse, this time

with Gobbert in tow. Gobby, for his part, is settling in very well, and I secretly suspect he is enjoying finding the more interesting spells and charms that have been cast upon his new home. Every few minutes he is popping in and out of my study either to offer a comment or suggestion as to what he sees are serious deficiencies in household protection and offering suggestions for more enjoyable living quarters. Laughing, I wave my hand, knowing he will interpret it as acquiescence for him to do as he wishes. I know exactly what he has in mind. And I wonder what Hermione would think.

As I retire for bed, I notice two journals on the bedside table. I have gone through the previous journals that covered the years after Voldemort: they offer surprisingly little beyond those rocky beginnings with Hermione. I wonder if perhaps I have kept separate journals after I became involved with the witch. Believing I had forgotten to lock these away with the others, I open the safe. There are the other journals I had placed there, which mean these are new. *Gobbert*. He must have either brought them with him from the Manor, or he found them here. Climbing into bed and tying my hair back, I open a journal and begin to read.

Two hours later, I set the book aside. Rage is once again boiling under my skin while jealousy spears my head and heart. She betrayed me. Hermione Granger betrayed me. And not with some stranger or some boy she knew from school. No, she betrayed me with someone I trust, someone whom I look upon as a brother. Severus Snape.

The killing blow is that I have no justification to be mad, no reason at all to be feeling jealous. Three months ago, I turned Hermione away. I had been grossly unfair to her, not willing to commit to her, not giving her a definite decision as to what I wanted. I knew that she was in danger. I knew that she deserved more than an affair, but my way of life was clinging to my robes, and I was having a hard time walking away, no matter how tempting and exciting this new world seemed to be with Hermione at my side.

My journal entry for that infamous weekend is choppy and barely legible at times, not at all the graceful scrawls that is my usual style. I began the entry by reassuring myself that I was correct in refusing Hermione's offer. She was not the occasional witch whom I would fuck and then abandon. Apart from the occasional quick shag, I have never had an affair outside my marriage. That I was giving thought to leaving my wife was a revelation, but speaks of the depth of feeling I had, *have* I correct myself, for Hermione Granger.

Why then did she turn to Severus? She had left my arms and walked into his. *No*, I correct myself, she ran from my arms.

Smashing the tumbler of Scotch into the fire makes me feel only marginally better.

Tomorrow, I will pay a visit to Severus.

"What is your relationship with Hermione?" I sit down on the sofa in Severus' study, declining the cup of tea that he handed me. Severus shrugs, setting it on the table. Sitting in his leather chair with a cup of tea in his hand, he sets his gaze upon me, as if to study me for a moment before answering.

"How are you holding up, Luc?" Severus asks, his concern evident.

"I've had one hell of a week, Severus, I can tell you that. I've been Obliviated, learned that I'm working with a Mu... a Muggleborn to conduct business with Muggles. Muggles, Severus! Can you imagine? Me? It is disgusting; yet, when I read my business journals, I learned I am actually enjoying it, like playing a new game on a new pitch. It is strange and has left me quite at odds with myself.

"I also learned the exciting tidbit of information that I've been contemplating *arelationship* with a Muggleborn and that I actually care for this witch, I care for *Hermione*. I'll admit I'm attracted to her, and on some level, I *know* her. It is quite disconcerting to learn that the life you thought you lived wasn't really a life, after all.

"And last night I learned that she ran from me straight into your arms. My best friend, my brother in all ways but blood, fucked the woman I wanted. Care to explain?" The rage is once again threatening to consume me, my fingers itch to feel my wand, to throw a curse, whether justified or not, would feel so satisfying.

Severus for his part merely sighs and leans forward so that his arms rest upon his knees. "We've been through this before, Luc. I did not 'fuck' Hermione. I will not deny that we each needed what the other was offering; but, she is not mine, and that is what I told you three months ago."

"I want your Pensieve." I want to see the memory; I need to know exactly what happened.

Severus stands and rounds his chair, his hands resting on its leather back, gripping it slightly for control. "What good would that do, Lucius? You've forgotten what you witnessed..."

I walked in on them? Fucking gods! What had been going on? The rage is boiling in my lungs, preventing me from breathing. My heart stops beating for the burning coursing through me. He would dare to talk me out of his memories? I begin breathing deeply, knowing he is still speaking, knowing I must pull my thoughts together and listen to him.

"... to me for an explanation, I gave it to you. Perhaps it is a gift that your memories were taken away. It is a chance to start over, start a new life. You finally found freedom, embrace it. Don't look back at what you think you're missing and lose sight of what is in front of you! Oh, I'm sure you can fill in the blanks of the past five years; you always were an excellent note taker, I cannot imagine you not having extensive files on your business dealings, and such."

Severus does not sound like a man who has betrayed his friend, and yet, that is what he did.

"What did I walk in on, Severus?" I need to know; this fire in my chest is a raging inferno.

What Severus says makes sense, yet he is not the man who has lost five years of his life. I want that time back. I want the memories of Hermione back. I want to feel what she was, is, to me. My bond with the witch goes beyond attraction and trust. While I am indignant at the idea of needing anyone, I admit to myself that I *need* her. I cannot be in the same room with her and not desire to pull her into my arms, to tell her of my day, to describe to her all the ways in which I want to worship her body.

I want to give Hermione the world. I want to offer myself, my pure blood running through my veins, my desire to conquer all in my path. I want to give all this to her without reservation, but I need to put these ghosts to rest. I need to know what has happened so that I can walk away with no looking back.

"I want to know, Severus."

Severus sat down once again. "Lucius, I want you to think. Subconsciously, you recognize her for what she is to you, even though the memories of her are gone. The feeling she is able to invoke is still there. I don't feign understanding for you pushing her away as you did. But, Luc, Hermione and I did not make love, have sex, or fuck ourselves silly, although the last does sound appealing."

"Severus," I grind out, and he quickly clears his throat.

"I consoled and comforted her, and in the end, I reassured her that your feelings for her were true and genuine. You were caught between two worlds, and I asked her to give you some time to sort things out.

"She wanted someone who was free to want her. And truth be told, I needed what she was offering, as well." Severus finishes, rubbing his face with his hands before running them through his hair.

"I want the Pensieve, Severus." Like a well-placed *Crucio*, I know it will hurt, but I need to know the worst of it, how far it had gone, so I know exactly for what I am to forgive her.

Severus' face reveals his exasperation and defeat. "Fine," he says. Follow me." We make our way to his lab and his Pensieve. Forcing my jaw and hands to relax, I straighten my shoulders and follow him.

10

Chapter 10 of 14

We make our way to his lab and his Pensieve. Forcing my jaw and hands to relax, I straighten my shoulders and follow him.

Written for my lovely friend, Dynonugget. Rawr, babes!

We make our way to his lab and his Pensieve. Forcing my jaw and hands to relax, I straighten my shoulders and follow him.

Severus moves slowly. The years have not been kind to Severus, and as I wait for him to prepare the stone bowl and his memories, I think perhaps I am being unfair, then wonder where this softness is coming from. He is entitled to his memories, after all. For all that has been taken from him by Dumbledore and Voldemort, not to mention the media circus that had been generated in the aftermath of the war, he is still willing to share his memories with me. Has he been conditioned to do this on command, I wonder? Certainly, he'd had enough of it from the egotistical tyrants he'd served for so many years.

"Severus."

He sets the Pensieve on his workstation and looks up. There is a glint in his eyes, something I don't quite recognize. It is not malice, nor is it glee, something in between, perhaps.

I pause, warring with myself for a moment, and then, with a great sigh, I utter, "You do not have to do this."

His squares his shoulders and rounds the table to face me. "Lucius, I refused you months ago. Perhaps you are right, perhaps you do need to know what ground you covered before you can move on. But know this; I do not regret this memory. I've a right to my happiness and to take it where I find it. I'll not apologize for it. But know this, my friend; you have changed from who you were, and the reasons for showing you this now are the same as when I denied you previously: Hermione's welfare. She has been through much. I cannot give Hermione what she needs, a future committed to her. I will be free; I will not be tied to anyone or anything again."

I nod, not wanting to dwell on his words. Instead, I watch as he adds his silver strands into the bowl; I step around the table and lower my face.

I land in Severus' kitchen, watching as he prepares tea. I laugh he adds a good measure of whisky to the pot and look up when the Floo activates. Hermione calls for Severus as she steps from the fireplace. Severus has a devilish gleam in his eyes, as if he's been expecting her. He adds another cup to the tray and adds the bottle of whisky, as well, before entering his sitting room. I stand in the doorway, watching the scene before me.

"That insufferable man! That... that asshole! That... that... that fucking prick!" She screams, ignoring Severus as he sets the tray on the table. "Fucking no good, rotten, ball smashing, twat twitching..."

Severus raises his hand, a smirk firmly in place.

"What has he done this time?"

Hermione rounds on him, "What has he done? That idiot wouldn't know a good thing if it spat in his face! Do you know what he said to me? What he had the fucking balls..." She stops suddenly, as if she'd just run out of steam.

More gently than I would have thought possible from the former Death Eater, he guides her to the sofa and softly urges her to sit. He lowers himself to sit next to her and pours them both a whisky. Hermione calms, but her jaw is clenched tight. She accepts the offering with grim determination and proceeds to drain the cup. Neither speaks. She shudders, but then relaxes her shoulders slightly. She is angry, yet, there is sorrow in her eyes, and her mouth is pinched as if in pain.

With a shuddering breath, she sets down her cup and turns to Severus, who has been patiently waiting.

"Did you know?" Hermione asks.

"Did I know what?" Severus counters smoothly. His manner suggests that they have had similar conversations. I wonder whom they are speaking of, although in the pit of my stomach, I know.

"I've come from the penthouse. Lucius is spending the weekend at the Manor. He told me... he said that he..." She doesn't continue, her breath has caught in her throat.

"Ms. Granger, if you and Lucius have had a squabble, it is no affair of mine." He says this with such disdain that I can almost believe he has no feelings for the witch, but his eyes have softened as he watches her, the gleam now gone. Something has changed.

"A squabble?" Hermione screeches. "Lucius and I have never squabbled. Oh, we've had some heated debates, and Lord knows, we've had our share of disagreements, but this, this is so far beyond a squabble..." A choked sob escapes, her words muffled.

"Perhaps, then, you'd like to tell me why you are in my sitting room, bitching?" Severus asks formally, insisting on maintaining his aloofness, despite her obvious state.

"You know about my involvement with Lucius, I know you do. Do not play innocent with me. I am sure Lucius has confided in you. Did he tell you of his decision?" She jumps up and begins pacing the room, her agitation and sorrow written on her face.

Severus nods hesitantly; his lips are pursed as if he has found something distasteful, though I am not sure of what, my involvement with Hermione or the information.

She relates all that happened that afternoon, how I had refused her offer to become my lover, choosing to spend the weekend with Narcissa at the Manor instead of with her at the penthouse. Severus asks several questions, asking for her interpretation of my motives, and such. It appears as if he is attempting to lead her to some realization, but from my own recent experience, it would be easier if he just comes out with what he wants her to know.

She finishes her pacing and turns to Severus. "Why doesn't he want me, Severus? What is so wrong with me that he would just turn me away?" Her anger is now gone now, sadness and defeat has taken its place.

Her voice unnerves me; hadn't I realized she needed an explanation? She heard my reasons, had listened to my words, but never reached the obvious conclusions. It slaps me in the face: she is not from my world; she is not Slytherin. Had that been part of her charm? She had adapted well to the business world, almost as if it were her playground, and yet... and yet; while both arenas require creative thinking, it is not in her nature.

Severus stands and meets her across the room. He takes her by the shoulders once more, but it is with a light caress that he gently draws her to him. She leans into him, placing her head on his shoulder. Severus wraps his arms around her and cups her head in his hand, sifting his fingers lightly through her hair.

"Listen carefully, Hermione. Lucius cares for you, but he is caught between two worlds. Listen to more than his words; for gods' sake, you are a smart young woman. He would not have you in his world, in his house, if he did not trust you. If he has pushed you away, it is for your safety."

"That is not what he said, Severus," Hermione says softly. "I feel as if I am still waiting to live my life." She lifts her face to gaze into his eyes. "I've left school and the war behind, and I believed I could start a new life with him, despite his marriage and our past. I did not kid myself into thinking he would leave his wife for me; even though I know his is not a real marriage. I need someone to want *me*, Severus."

Hermione lifts her head from Severus' shoulder and slowly reaches up to trace his jaw with a delicate finger. "Severus," she whispers and leans up to place a soft kiss on his chin.

"Hermione," Severus murmurs, "I am certainly not who you want. I will not stand in for my best friend." His voice is firm, but his fingers lightly stroke her hair, and he has pulled her closer.

"I know whose arms hold me, Severus. I know whose heart beats hard against my chest. There has always been an attraction. I've always felt it. Now you are free. You are free, Severus. Free to want, free to take. I need someone to need me. *Me*. Not the know-it-all or the Muggle-born or the kickback from the Ministry. Just me. You could want me, couldn't you?"

"I don't deny the attraction, my dear." Severus says quietly, running his hand up her back. "But do not misunderstand, I may be free, but I am not willing to tie my life to someone again. And I doubt that is what you are after, either."

I stand there, motionless. I am unable to rip Hermione from his arms, to challenge him to a duel. I would fight for her, yet I cannot fight what has already been. My heart tightens in my chest.

Hermione lifts her arms and slides them around him, pulling him closer. "I am not asking for ties, Severus. I am asking for *this*." Her hands splay across his back, and she lifts her mouth to his. Severus does not pull away; instead, he mumbles against her mouth, "Hermione, no, love, I'm not who you really want."

"You are not Lucius, no. But I am here with you now. And you want me. I can feel you. You want me in your arms, and it feels so good to be held. I know, Severus," she whispers, "I know about loneliness, and I can be what you need, what we need, for now."

I am appalled. That she could go to Severus, that there had been an attraction between them. Had I seen it? Is this why I walked away? It seems trivial to me. What does this matter? An attraction?

With those whispered words, Severus lowers his mouth to hers, his large hands cradling her head gently as he learns her taste, feels her body molding to his. Her moans of pleasure puncture the stillness of the room.

I stand in the doorway and watch, outraged that Severus would fall for her charms, and yet, I had fallen, as well. Hard, harder than Severus. I want to leave this memory, yet, I cannot.

Severus' hand skims down her neck and shoulder to gently capture her breast. I hear Hermione's breath hitch, and suddenly, they are a whirlwind as hands move furiously, removing clothing and grabbing for purchase wherever they find. No words are spoken, but there is a pause, a moment where their eyes meet and a question and answer are given. Severus scoops Hermione up in his arms and turns to stride down the hall. I follow.

They land on Severus' bed in a heap, their muffled laughter in the air. And then, their laughter dies and is replaced by hushed words and whispers that are barely discernible to me as I stand in the doorway. Like a man walking to the gallows, I enter and approach the sleigh bed set in front of the fireplace.

They are naked now, hands and mouths exploring. Their skin is flushed and breathing uneven. They are lying on their sides, with Hermione at the head of the bed and Severus facing the foot. She is muzzling Severus' cock, rubbing her cheek against his length before taking him in her mouth. A great huff of breath escapes Severus as he looks down the bed, watching as Hermione suckles him.

Severus lowers his head to Hermione's pussy, the one I held in my hand just a few short days ago. He begins lapping at her, spreading her open with his hand and sucking on her pert clit. Her muffled gasps shoot straight to my cock. I am twisted inside, a part of me watches as voyeur, the other recognizes that this is my Hermione, the one I don't remember, but the one I feel every minute of every day.

The duvet has been pushed off the bed, the sheets as well; there are no barriers to keep their bodies separated. Hermione's curling her toes, and Severus pins her hips to the bed, his mouth working furiously on her swollen pussy. When he sucks on her clit, she screams in pleasure, but Severus does not stop his ministrations. Her hips are jerking, and she has lifted her mouth from Severus' cock, slick with sheen.

My cock is hard, and I want nothing more than to join in. I push those thoughts away, disgusted with myself. It is as if I am in one of those Muggle cinemas, watching a giant photo playing out before me; while it is lifelike, it is not quite real.

"Severus, please, no more." She gasps. Her hands reach for his hair, pulling him away.

He gives a low chuckle and bucks his hips towards her. "Put me in your mouth," he whispers hoarsely. She smiles saucily, taking him in her mouth once more.

Severus, for his part, is now petting her gently, running his hands along the inside of her thighs and over her mound. From somewhere down the hall, I hear the Floo activate. Walking quickly, I enter the sitting room and see myself emerging from the Floo. I am looking around and spot the clothes on the floor, with a smirk, I follow the trail leading to Severus' room. I stand behind myself in the doorway. Severus notices a movement and looks up, and from where I stand, I know his eyes are meeting mine. Hermione has no idea of my presence; her back is to me, and her eyes are closed tight as she works Severus' hard length down her throat. My memory self turns and leaves as silently as he approached, but I remain behind. Soon, Severus is shouting, his hips bucking his length into Hermione's mouth and hand, and she is swallowing his seed, the creamy white coating her lips.

I could murder Severus for his deception. While I have no doubt as to his feelings for her are genuine, he also played on her vulnerable state and took advantage. That it was exactly what I would have done under different circumstances fuels my indignation. But damn it, Severus knew she was my witch, and he enticed her.

And yet, I also feel detached, as if the Hermione whom I am watching is somehow not my Hermione, but a doppelganger. She is not the woman that strode through my Floo Monday morning, business as usual. This not the Hermione who shuddered in my arms as I brought forth her orgasm with only my fingers. This Hermione is weaker, without the steely resolve I'd seen in her eyes as she laid out Michael Flannery's treachery, without the brazen defiance that made her look me straight in the eyes as she lambasted me and questioned my motives.

I am satisfied. I can walk away from this memory. Whatever she was to me three months ago is not what and who she is to me now. Perhaps the old Lucius was right in turning from her, but I am who I am, now. I have my answer, and I exit the memory.

As always, I must thank my amazing betas, Wildcatcdc and Sc010f. I am proud and humbled to call them friends. Also, a HUGE thank you to Shellsnapelover for all her

help!

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Chapter 11 of 14

I have my answer, and I exit the memory.

This is for one of the best people I know, Dynonugget. Rawwwrrrr!!!

I arrive back at the penthouse in a foul mood. I enter my study there, intent on drowning my anger and disgust in a bottle of thirty-six year old Kinclaith. That it is only early afternoon means nothing to me. Clenching my jaw as the Scotch hits the back of my throat and exhaling loudly when it hits my belly, I draw another mouthful, knowing full well I will become drunk if I keep on this way.

The first chair smashed against the wall by accident. My wandless magic is more difficult to control the more inebriated I become, and today, I plan on becoming very drunk. Once again seeing Hermione in Severus' arms, I sail the second chair into the mirror. With a wild wave of my arm, I set the couch alight. Soon, I'm flaying portraits off the walls and towards each other, intent on dueling, until Gobby appears and quietly put to rights the damage I have inflicted. I sit at my desk, my chest heaving, the half-empty bottle in one hand, and my tumbler in the other.

"What am I to do?" I murmur to myself, but Gobbert has heard me and comes to stand before me.

"What is wrong, sir? You is been out of sorts these past few months, sir."

"Why do you think that is, Gobbert?" I ask conversationally, the Scotch blanketing my brain like a thick duvet in winter.

"Oh sir, you isn't remembering things, is you? I sees, sir. I do. Little things, sir. I has tried to get them back for you, sir, but I can't. I found your books, sir, hidden in your bedroom, sir. I gives them to you to read, sir, so you can know, sir." Gobby stands still next to me, his concern evident in his tennis-ball sized eyes.

"Tell me what you see, Gobby." I say quietly, hoping not to intimidate or scare him away. He is fully aware of my temper and lack of control of my magic when I drink.

"Everyone is sad these days. You is sad, sir. Miss Hermione is sad. Mistress is sad, although it is sometimes hard to tell, sir, as she is angry most of the time, as well."

I clutch my tumbler tightly and set the bottle of Scotch carefully on the desk.

"Gobbert," I say slowly and carefully, "stand in front of the desk where I cannot see you." I say this for his safety, and he scrambles to do my bidding. If I cannot see him, I will not hurt him. When he is out of sight, I continue.

"Gobbert, I have no memory of the past five years. I've read my journals and I've read my ledgers, so I have a fair picture of what my life has been since then. You will tell me what you know of Narcissa's activities, and then you will tell me why Hermione is sad."

By the time Gobbert finishes recounting events and answering questions, I've destroyed the study beyond repair.

Gobbert vanishes the furnishings, the carpeting and wallpaper, everything but the fireplace and the desk and chair at which I am currently sitting. I am spent, the glorious drunkenness I'd experienced from the Scotch gone, and in its place is coldness and the urge to kill. I have much work to do, and as it is still early in the afternoon, I straighten my robes and Disapparate.

Malfoy Manor has not changed since my childhood, it merely receives fresh coats of paint and paper when needed, new furnishings and floor coverings when desired. Since coming to in the alley a week ago, I have been as disconnected from my life as I am now with this place; and neither feel as welcoming as they once had. To my amazement, I do not miss living here. Everything I now want and desire can be found at my penthouse.

Narcissa is in her sitting room off the music room, and from her steely look, she is not happy to see me. I offer her a small smile, and for a moment, she looks confused before her firm gaze returns. We sit quietly as she calls for tea, knowing I will not drink, but thankful for the extra bit of time to reestablish my sense of purpose.

Before I can say a word, she begins, "I'm glad you called this afternoon, Luc. I believe the time has come for us to discuss the course of our future."

I look upon her: her gorgeous blonde locks, her pristine blue eyes, her fine porcelain features and wonder how such a beautiful woman could harbour such an ugly and calculating soul.

"I want a divorce, Lucius." Her voice is cold and measured, and I am relieved. If she had been screaming or crying, I'd have become angry; instead, I look dispassionately at her, for I know what has prompted her request this time.

"Granted." I drawl coolly.

Her face betrays her shock; she had been expecting yet another argument that Malfoys do not divorce, that we gain more together than we would independently. I am done with all the useless prattle that had once been the mainstay of our conversations; I will no longer stay in a miserable excuse of a relationship, much less the travesty of our marriage. I want more. I deserve more.

"Will you be waiting for Michael Flannery?" The look on her face is fearful. Leaning in close, I whisper *Legilimens* and learn she has had nothing to do with my attack. She blinks from my sudden intrusion and exit, but she squares her shoulders and the hard look returns.

"No. He is dead to me, now." She is wounded, I see, despite the hardness in her voice.

"Didn't you love him, then?"

She laughs now, and I offer her a small smile of my own.

"Heavens, no. He was a means to an end, as they all have been. You know that."

"Then why have you asked for a divorce now?" I do not regret granting her request, but I am slightly intrigued to hear her reason for it.

"And why have you granted it, after all these years?" She counters, and my eyes meet hers. "Is it because of Ms. Granger, then?"

I cannot stop the grin that slowly spreads across my face. I shake my head slowly. "Intriguingly enough, no, it is not because of Ms. Granger, although the realms of possibilities that are now afforded me are exquisite. We both agreed to the terms of our marriage long ago; while finding pleasure for pleasure's sake was quite acceptable, affairs of the heart were another matter. Since you found it as easy to give your heart as you did your body, I believe that is answer enough. Congratulations, as soon as we settle a few matters, you will be free. I do have a request, if possible." Narcissa's eyes narrow, and she leans forward in her chair, as if preparing to attack my person.

"I'd like for you to stay here at the Manor." Narcissa's eyes widen, and a small gasp escapes; her surprise over this pronouncement is evident. "It has been your home for a long time, 'Cissa. Until you remarry, you are welcome to continue living here. Draco will inherit it, after all, and it is not as if you can sell it or remove any of the possessions. What is brought to the Manor stays at the Manor."

I chuckle at the dazed look in her eyes. "Ah, didn't you know that? It is a shame you did not read the marriage contract more carefully all those years ago, my dear. The furnishings, the jewelry, the art... Regardless, I wish you to remain, as long as you desire. I've no use for this place."

I look around the room dispassionately. If I am to move forward in my life, I must make a clean break with my past. I can afford to be generous, after all; all she owns, every piece of property, reverts to the estate should she cease calling it home.

"Just like that, Luc? You are so willing to get rid of me?"

"Why did you ask, if you were not willing to hear my answer then, 'Cissa? Do not worry; I will not stand in your way of happiness, wherever you may find it. I would ask that you do not attempt to move your Muggle lover into the Manor, however; I suspect the house will make its displeasure known."

"Luc," she sighs. "I thought perhaps Mr. Flannery would be my entree into this new post-Voldemort society, but I was wrong. These people are crass and uncouth and completely without the social niceties. I cannot go back to the life I knew, and I no longer know how to move forward." She leans back, closing her eyes. She looks tired and defeated. She is a very good actress.

I leave the Manor two hours later a divorced Wizard. I am unsure of what that means to me, and it will certainly require some sort of adjustment. As Narcissa and I have never had a regular sexual relationship, that won't be an issue. While we may have resided in the same house, we certainly didn't share apartments. In fact, beyond not having a woman on my arm while I attend various functions, I believe I will get on quite well.

I return to my home exhausted, the effects of the curse and all that has occurred leaves me weaker than I'd like to admit. After sending an owl to Draco regarding tonight's dinner plans, I decide to take a quick shower and lie down.

I am dozing, and in that space between dreaming and wakefulness, my fantasies take hold. Hermione comes to me. Hermione, with her long soft curls, her supple skin and wet lips. I lazily reach for my cock, half hard from the mere thought of her. I rub myself slowly, imagining that she is here, undressing and readying herself for bed. She peels off her robes slowly, revealing breasts tipped with dark pink nipples and shapely hips. Her womanhood is nestled in a dark patch of curls, neatly trimmed and glistening with arousal.

I tighten my grip, and I stroke myself as my Hermione reaches up to grasp her creamy breasts in her hands, lifting them and pushing them together. She tucks in her chin and licks her pert nipples. She wets her fingertips and traces them gently, hardening them. I continue to leisurely stroke myself, imagining that I am giving her instruction.

"Pull at your nipples. Yes, that's a good girl... yes, you like that, don't you? Good. Twist them... a little more... a little more... Pinch them for me, Hermione. Imagine them in my mouth, my tongue swirling those pink tips. Drawing them deeply into my mouth. Good girl..."

On and on I go, imagining her against the wall, the same wall that I had her pushed up against just days ago, when she walked into my bedroom. Her hand now drifts down to her wet folds, swollen with desire.

"Spread your legs wider, Hermione. Show yourself. That's a good girl... Look how pretty that is, now spread yourself open. Oh, that's good. Spit on your fingers, Hermione. Yes, get your fingers nice and wet. Good... dip your fingers inside, my love. Feel how excited you are, waiting for me, wanting me inside you. That's it. Roll your clit in your fingers, yes, just like that..."

I can imagine Hermione's breath catching at my words. In my fantasies, Hermione craves instruction, explicit instruction. She is panting, going only as fast as I allow, rocking her hips against her hand, catching that sensitive bundle of nerves with her thumb.

On and on it goes as I stroke myself. I reach down to grasp my bollocks and roll them in my other hand, feeling them draw in close to my body. All too soon, my stomach is hot and slick with semen, and my breath is ragged. I continue stroking, milking myself slowly, determined to draw out each sensation, making the most of my fantasy.

Replete, I cast a quick *Scourgify* and drift off to sleep, a smile on my face. It won't be long now.

Waking an hour later, I quickly shower and dress then Apparate to Draco's flat. My son's flat is well proportioned and comfortable, tastefully decorated in soft chocolate browns and sage greens. The flat suits him as a bachelor.

As quickly and succinctly as possible, I inform him of the divorce. He is unable to smother his surprise, but he is not upset, and for that, I am thankful. He informs me that he had been waiting for this day. I assure him that his mother is still provided for, living at the Manor, in fact, since it has been her home longer than any other residence. That I can easily relegate her to the status of 'his mother' is telling. Perhaps he is correct in thinking the move has been a long time in coming.

"So, you are living at the penthouse full time, then?" he asks as we sit down to a remarkable lobster bisque with French bread. It is simple fare, but somehow fits the evening. "Will Hermione be joining you soon?"

My hand stops halfway to my mouth. Slowly I lower my spoon. "How do you feel about it?" I ask, stalling for time. But my son is clever, and he can read the clues as easily as me.

"Yes, I know about Hermione. Remarkably, she and I have become close over the past years. I once thought of dating her, actually, but then I'd met Diana, and you were beginning to demand more and more of her time, ..." He ends the sentence with a shrug of his shoulders, and I am left to deal with the uncomfortable feeling of lusting and fantasizing and, gods help me, *falling in love* with my son's schoolmate. *Former schoolmate*, I remind myself fiercely.

I will not talk to Draco about my relationship with Hermione, not yet. I've more important matters to discuss with him, although one day very soon I want to hear his thoughts on gaining Hermione as a stepmother. I swallow a choking laugh at the thought. From Draco's sharp glance, he may have deduced my train of thoughts.

Over snifters of brandy and cigars on the patio, I begin relating to him the events of the past week, including the ongoing investigations and PW's findings. His eyes grow round at the news, but he handles it remarkably well. He will also talk with Misters Potter and Weasley; from what Draco says, he has a good working relationship with the men. He asks good, solid questions, and without being melodramatic or pitifully sympathetic, my son expresses his concern.

In return, Draco fills me in on the last five years of his life: the women and his burgeoning career as a restaurateur. He has built a good life for himself, and my pride is well justified. By the end of the evening, I am content. I've shared a warm, filling meal, excellent brandy and a more-than-adequate cigar with a son any man would be proud to

claim. Winning three-hundred galleons from him didn't hurt, either.

I bid my son a good night, promise to return the following week, and step out into the crisp night air and Apparate home.

Later, getting ready for bed, I hear a woman screaming vicious expletives. Instantly recognizing Hermione, I grab my wand and burst into the study. I come to a stop as I see her standing in the middle of the bare room, tears streaming down her face, as she looks around wildly. The wall sconces illuminate the empty space with a soft glow.

Seeing me standing there in my black silk pajama pants, she runs to me, and reaching out, she slaps me. Hard. "You bastard! I thought you'd left again. What the hell happened in here? Why is everything gone?" Her breath hitches, and angry tears begin to fall.

My arms reach around her, pinning her arms to her sides, and pull her tight. "Shhh... Hermione. My love. I'm here. I'm right here." I reach up to stroke her hair. Looking past her shoulder, I see a folder on the bare wooden floor, its contents scattered over half the naked surface.

"I Floo-ed by to drop off the final paperwork for the Mi -MicroCeltic sale. When I saw the empty room..." her angry sob choking off her words.

I stroke her hair and back, long smooth strokes meant to sooth and calm her. "I thought I'd redecorate," I tease. I've no wish to relay the true happenings of this afternoon. She has been through much these past few months, and I've no wish to add to it. I've forgiven her for the *interlude* with Severus, and while I know it will be brought up at some point, it will not be tonight.

Taking her face in my hands, I press a gentle kiss to her lips. Immediately her mouth opens under mine. I know she is reeling from shock. I feel her relief acutely, to have her in my arms is heaven. I cannot help but delve into her mouth; like a flower soaks up the rain, my senses fill with her. She wraps her arms my neck, her fingers tightening in my hair. She is ferocious in her kiss, her tongue willing to duel with mine. In one flowing movement, I sweep her into my arms and carry her down the hall.

"Where are you taking me?" she asks, immediately suspicious.

"My bedroom." I cannot contain the smugness in my voice. I will finally have her where I want her.

"But why?" For a remarkably bright witch, she is slow to catch up. I cannot hold back the husky timber as I chuckle softly.

"One guess."

A/N: We all know what is coming next, right??

Thank you Sc010f for your extra special attention to this chapter. Thank you Wildcatcdc for the polish and shine!

12

Chapter 12 of 14

In one flowing movement, I sweep her into my arms and carry her down the hall.

Written for my good friend, Dynonugget. Rawwwrrrr!!!

In one flowing movement, I sweep her into my arms and carry her down the hall.

As we approach the door to the Master Chambers, Hermione whispers a soft "Luc." She says this timidly, and the Death Eater in me laps at it, feasts on it. Lowering my head to her neck, I suckle on the tender flesh. Her sudden intake of breath spurs me on. I bite down as I draw her into my mouth. Her hands clutch my head, not to drag me away from her bruised skin, but to hold me fast. Knowing she is well and truly marked, I raise my head. Her eyes are glazed, lost in passion. I take her to bed.

As I sink down with her on the counterpane, I vanish her clothes. I am determined to take my time, taste every inch of her, even if I have to bind her. But she knows my intentions, for her hands grab for the headboard. I kiss her, devouring her mouth with my tongue and lips, nipping, never stopping in my quest to learn her taste and texture.

I force my mouth to leave hers and slowly make my way down her body, stopping to lick the ridge of her collar bone, planting wide, open-mouth kisses on her sternum before turning my attention to her breasts, so soft they steal my breath. I rub my thumb over her pelvic bones and find her ticklish. Tucking that information away, my mouth traces her ribs, counting them as I continue on my path. I place light kisses along her hips and lower abdomen. She heaves a breathy laugh. I move from her, and she makes her displeasure known by lifting her hips to my mouth. Ignoring her, I turn my attention to her thighs, her inner knees, down to her calves and finally, her feet. I lift her leg gently, running my nose along the tender ball of her foot before nudging her toes. I lick the soft pads before slipping each toe past my lips. Sucking each one in turn, she finally cries out my name, twisting her head on the silk sheets. She fuels my passion, my eagerness for her. I will not be deterred; I have waited a lifetime for this woman, this time with her. She is my greatest achievement, and I will bask in my glory.

Gently turning her and spreading her legs to kneel between them, I work my way back up her body, licking the backs of her knees, suckling on her creamy inner thighs. As I reach her soft, round arse, I take a moment, enjoying the sensation of it filling my hands. I want to take my hand to her, to raise a blush in those cheeks with my palm, but not now, not yet. Lowering my head, I find the delicate flesh where cheek meets leg, nibbling and wetting her skin, watching as goosebumps rise. Hermione is eager, raising her hips off the bed, and offering her glistening pussy to me. Placing my shoulders between her thighs, I put my mouth to her, and she moans her pleasure.

She tastes like nectar, tart and sweet with a hint of something more, something that is indescribably female. Her folds are flushed with need, and her clit is swollen and eager to be taken. I force myself to only sample her treasures; I've yet to taste the small of her back or trail my tongue up her spine, over and along the slightly raised ridges that lead me to her shoulder blades and the back of her neck.

I bury my face in her hair as I let my rigid cock rest against her arse, hot through the silk drawstring pajama bottoms I still wear.

I ease away, and she quickly turns over, grabbing my face and pulling me down to kiss me. She is wild with need. She works my bottoms off my arse, reaching for me and guiding me into her. She is hot and wet and oh, *fucking gods*, soft! Her muscles are clenching around me, pulling me further into her body. She wraps her arms and legs around me. She is small and slight, and as I lift up onto my knees, I wrap my arm around her and bring her with me. Sitting back on my haunches, I reach under her legs, my elbows under her knees and my hands wrapped around her shoulders, I lift her so that her knees almost touch her chest. She is fully open and exposed for me, and I begin thrusting into her. She is gasping for air, and she is glorious to behold. She clutches my hair as I hold her tight and fuck her.

I fuck her like there is only this night left, fuck her as if my life depends upon it, for there is only this night, and my life revolves around sinking my body into hers. I put my mouth to her breast and suck hard, and she falls apart in my arms, moaning and shaking in release. My release is building in my spine and racing to my balls, drawing them tight against my body. I come long and hard, and I roar her name.

It takes me several moments before I can slowly lower her legs and wrap them around my waist. She takes my mouth in a desperately hungry kiss. My legs are trembling; never have I felt such an explosion of sensations. With my arms around her, I gently ease our bodies onto the bed, turning slightly so that we are lying facing each other.

Our kisses grow gentle. Her hands caress my body, running lightly over my shoulders and chest; her fingers graze my nipples. Her hand finds my hip, then my arse. Her delightful fingers explore the round flesh, tickling as she caresses. Our eyes meet, and we share a smile. I am still nestled in her body, but she is slick; I feel our combined wetness running down her thigh. Reaching between us, I lightly finger the proof of our passion and relish the feel of the hot, tender flesh of our still-joined bodies.

"Finally," we murmur simultaneously, and startled, we chuckle. I slip from her body, and the wetness increases. My fingers smear the juices over her mound and thighs.

I push my fingers inside her, and her inner walls close in on them. Easing them out, my soaked fingers reach down to lightly stroke her flesh, making my way to her anus. Looking into her eyes, I gauge her willingness. She leans in for another kiss and presses her tender flesh against my hand, granting access. My fingers return to her pussy, coating them before applying gentle pressure to her arse so that they slowly sink into her small, tight channel.

I slide down her body, intent on cleansing her soft flesh with my mouth. I raise her leg so that it rests on my shoulder and press open-mouth kisses to her thighs, using my tongue and lips. My fingers are motionless inside her body, giving her time to adjust and respond to the new stimulus. Soon, she is slowly undulating her hips, working herself gently on my fingers, and my lips latch onto her clit. The combination proves to be too much, and she begins shaking with the force of her second orgasm. Her hips are thrusting madly into my mouth as she attempts to draw out every last drop of pleasure, and against her firm round flesh, my fingers are buried to the hilt.

At last she stops, and I gently remove my hand and mouth from her body. I wrap my arm around her hip and rest my cheek against her stomach. Her hands, once clutched tightly to the pillows behind her are now in my hair, holding me close. Silently, I am beating my chest and roaring to all that this is my woman, my witch, with whom I will build my home and life. Ours is not merely a physical union, I feel as if she's crawled into my body, that I carry her under my breast, in my heart. I feel her heartbeat, and I know it is mine. Her pulse is thundering just under her skin, but it is my blood that flows through her, as it is her blood that flows through me. I want to scream, *I love Hermione Jane Granger.*

We lie unmoving in those moments, and our heartbeats finally slow. Her fingers are now in my hair, drawing me up her body to once again lie next to her. We kiss languidly, supping on each other's mouths, drinking in this moment.

The need to speak weighs heavily; yet I am loathe to break this spell. To hold Hermione in my arms is a homecoming. I am replete. I am content. After the stress and strain of the day, to end it with her, here with me, now, in my bed, is more than I can articulate. Yet, I know I must say something, for this has come about unexpectedly, and I've no doubt come morning I'll either find myself alone or facing an emotional witch. Not the best of choices.

"Will you stay with me?" I ask softly.

Her answer is to lay her head on my chest with her hand over my heart. She drapes her leg across mine, and her toes lazily draw patterns against my calf. I wrap my arm around her, pulling her close. I kiss her hair, and I catch the gentle floral scent of her shampoo.

We lie motionless for a while; the hand moving slowly through the hair on my chest tells me she is resting, not sleeping. I wonder who will be the first to break the silence?

"Lucius," she whispers. *I should have known*, I smirk to myself. "What have we done?"

I begin laughing. "My sweet one, if you need to be told, perhaps..." I inhale sharply.

"Oh, hush," she teases, tweaking my nipple. "You know what I mean." The little minx likes to play. A devilish thought takes hold.

"I do," I agree just as softly. "We've made love, Hermione. I've much to tell you. But, perhaps, you'd like a shower first? I'll transform something 'appropriate' for you to sleep in."

"I'm not sleepy in the least," she giggles. "But yes, a shower sounds grand."

She rises lithely and makes her way into the master bath. Quickly rising from the bed, I stride over to my armoire and remove a cravat. Quickly transforming it into a silk, pink peignoir, I toss it on the bed and set out to join her in the shower.

The bath is hot and steaming as I quietly close the door. I open the glass door and quickly join Hermione, who smiles over her shoulder. She reaches for the bottle of shampoo and hands it to me. Smiling, I begin washing her hair, taking delight in having my scent on her. I let my fingers roam her scalp, gently piling her hair on top her head and working my fingers through the mass. I rinse the tresses then apply my special hair conditioner, working it quickly and evenly through her hair before rinsing one final time. She is enjoying herself, emitting soft moans.

"I knew you'd be marvelous at this," she admits, leaning back onto my chest. In my hands now is my shower gel, and instead of a flannel, I use my hands to spread the soap and bubbles across her supple skin. I lightly skim her mound, finally washing away the evidence of our first bout of lovemaking. I take delight in running my hands down her body, chasing the soap and bubbles down the drain. With her hands on my shoulders, she urges me to trade places with her, and now she is washing my hair. She stands on her toes to reach the top of my head, and I do little to help. I like the feel of her breasts brushing against my back as she works. She rinses then applies the conditioner, as I did for her.

"I never thought I'd be washing a man's hair that is as long as mine," she giggles. *Gods save me from a giggling woman.*

She sinks to her knees and takes me in her mouth. Unbidden images creep into my thoughts, but I firmly push them aside. She is mine, and she is here with me. I rest my shoulders against the cool tile of the shower and close my eyes.

Her hands feel heavenly; she alternates between stroking and roaming. She takes me deeper and deeper into that warm, wet cave of her mouth. Her teeth lightly graze the base of my cock, and a shiver runs down my spine.

Her hand is on my arse again, but now, her fingers are cool and slick and lightly probing between my rounded flesh. I look down at her, and she is a sight to behold. Her soft lips are stretched thin and tight over my hard cock; she is not able to take my full length, but *dear gods*, the woman is trying.

Her fingers rub lightly against my hole, and I see the conditioner bottle on the floor near her knee. I meet her heated gaze and smirk, then plant my feet farther apart, granting her access. Her fingers sink slowly into my body, pausing as I adjust. She begins sucking vigorously, and her free hand grabs the base of my balls, constricting them, making my breath catch. My cock hits the back of her throat, and I feel the muscles there relax so that another inch sinks down her throat.

There is an explosion in my brain as her questing little fingers find my prostrate. I am caught between heaven and hell, between fucking her mouth until it is numb and holding back and letting her set the pace. All too soon I am rocking into her mouth and I come long and hard. I feel her throat muscles working frantically to swallow my seed, and her fingers continue to work their magic inside my body. The pleasure goes on and on.

For several long minutes we are motionless before she slowly slips her fingers from me. She places light, open kisses to my now-shrinking cock while my legs continue to tremble. Finally, I am steady, and I hold out my hand to help her stand. I kiss her then, tasting my seed on her lips. My kiss is gentle for her lips are red and swollen.

With the water now streaming over our bodies, I smooth the wet strands of hair away from her face and look into her eyes, those beautiful, expressive eyes; the ones that

toss insults, throw daggers and roll with exasperation. Holding her face in my hands, I lean in close and whisper, "I love you, Hermione Jane Granger."

In typical female fashion, her eyes fill with tears. "Come, my love, we need to talk," I say as I open the glass door. Leaving the shower, I cast drying charms and a useful spell that manages our long locks. In the bedroom, we don our dressing robes. I hand her one of my hair ties, and together we secure our hair.

We settle ourselves in the living room. Pulling her onto my lap, I wrap us in a cashmere blanket and call for Gobby, who appears in an instant. He is happy to see his friend Miss Hermione, and they chat for a moment about his new home and new status. She frowns when she learns he has been enslaved, but is mollified when she learns it was his decision. I request a cold repast, and with a quick bow and "Welcome home, Miss," he disappears.

Hermione leans her head on my shoulder, placing her arms over mine as I hold her. "You didn't remember me, remember us. How could you have fallen in love with me in a week? What has changed so much in three months? How do you know you aren't going to learn or figure out or realize why you rejected me and think you should never have become involved with me?" I feel her tension, feel her begin to pull away. I tighten my arms around her.

"Shh, Hermione. Love, it will be fine. I've things I need to tell you. Sit here with me, let me hold you and tell you. Alright?"

I feel her nod as she lays her head on my shoulder once more.

"First, Narcissa and I divorced this afternoon." I feel her pull away, and tug her back once more. "Stay still and listen. You are not the reason for the divorce. I know that fact stings, but, nevertheless, it is the truth. My life is not what it once was. For the first time in my adult life, I am free to make decisions that are best for me. I've read my journals and ledgers, I've talked with Gobby and Draco and Severus." As much as I loathe the stiffness in her shoulders, I press on.

"Those chains that held me are gone, Sweet One. This week has been traumatic and a revelation. Everything I once knew is gone. I am no longer tied to the past, no longer bound by those promises. I am a different man now, Hermione. A free man. You are correct. I did not fall in love with you in a week."

I relate to her Severus' theory that my feelings for her ran so deep and strong that I recognized them, though the memories associated with those feelings were gone. She says nothing for several long minutes, and I give her this time to adjust to what I have said.

"Severus has been a good friend, Lucius. To both of us." She whispers this, and I fear she is going to confess to her interlude with my best friend.

"Yes, he is a good friend, love," I say quickly. "He has rightly pointed out that I am not the same man I was a week ago, or three months ago. I've read of that time, I know all that has happened. But it is *in the past*. I am determined to make a future, Hermione. A future with you, if your feelings haven't changed, that is."

She pulls away from me, and I am left cold with her absence. "It took quite a long time for me to develop my feelings for you and accept them, I hardly think I am about to abandon them now," She says with a wide smile.

Relief courses through me. It had been a risk, admitting to her how I felt before knowing her feelings. She leans in and kisses me, running her small hand down my cheek. "I love you."

I crush her to me, kissing her, consuming her, reassuring her of my love, offering myself to her.

Gobby returns with our food, and we quickly realize we've an appetite. Like all new lovers, we feed each other and share stories and quiet revelations. I share with her why I rejected her offer to become my lover.

"It is not because I did not want you, Sweet One. Of that I am sure. I've never let myself become emotionally attached to a witch, she would have become another target for Voldemort, another way for him to control me. I'd spent most of the war trying to distract the maniac from as many witches and wizards as possible.

"But more importantly, love, the vows I'd taken the day I was wed meant something to me. I was young and idealistic, and when everything in my life started to unravel and fell apart, when I saw my friends and family either killed or become killers, when I saw Voldemort becoming more and more insane, I needed one part of my life to remain true. I could not even raise my son as I truly wanted, but I could remain true to my vows, though the marriage itself meant less and less as the years went by.

"But you, Sweet One, tested me. Challenged me. You defied my notions of who Muggle-borns could be, and what place they could have in my life. That does not mean," I continue as I see the gleam in her eye, the corner of her mouth lift in a small smile, "that I will be surrounding myself with them."

"When I saw you this past Monday," she admits, "when I Floo-ed over, your eyes followed me about the room as they once did when we first began working together. I felt the change. There was a charge in the room. And then you kissed me, and it was new and better than any of the others we'd shared. It felt like it was our first kiss. And then, when we'd been in your bedroom..." she pauses, blushing. She clears her throat, but she still sounds breathless and husky. "You never let me touch you, before. You gave me pleasure, but you never let me..." She leaves the rest unfinished. I kiss her, letting my mouth and tongue explore her mouth leisurely, the first heady rush of passion being assuaged, I now am eager to explore every inch of her.

We talk for hours. I share with her my feelings of this past week, the confusion of waking and not knowing what had happened, hiding the memory loss from Narcissa and those I came across this past week. I told her I'd been to see Severus, but did not share with her that I'd seen their interaction. We were different people then, and I am determined to keep my life moving forward.

Eventually, the events of the night catch up with us. We slowly walk down the hall to what is now our bedroom. I complete my nightly ablutions, and when I return to the bedroom, Hermione has my last journal in her hands. She has been reading; her curiosity must have overtaken all rational thought. With a frightened look on her face, she looks up and asks "Lucius, who is Hespion Warland, and what is the Warland Council?"

Thanks to my amazing betas, Wildcatcdc and Sc010f. You ladies ROCK!

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Chapter 13 of 14

With a frightened look on her face, she looks up and asks, "Lucius, who is Hespion Warland, and what is the Warland Council?"

This is written for my wonderful friend, Dynonugget. Raawwrrrrr!!!

With a frightened look on her face, she looks up and asks, "Lucius, who is Hespion Warland, and what is the Warland Council?"

I cross the room and gently remove the journal from her hands, tossing it onto the floor on the opposite side of the bed.

"Tomorrow, my dear. We'll discuss that nasty bit of business tomorrow," I say, leaning down to kiss her again. Lying down next to her, I draw her warm body into me. "Rest now, my love."

I wake early, as is my custom. Hermione is sleeping curled on her side, her knees drawn halfway to her chest. I had taken her in the middle of the night positioned as she is now, entering her from behind, with one hand molesting her clit and the other tweaking her nipples. It was hard and fast, with no soft words or gentle caresses, just long moans and gasping cries of pleasure. With a sigh, she rolls to her back, her cheek rubbing slowly on the pillow before settling once more.

My hands roam her body again, learning her shape and texture; the roughness on her elbows, the silkiness of her stomach, the firmness of her thighs. I begin to gently grind my morning erection against her hip. My hand once again covers her pussy, rubbing gently and slipping my finger between her folds.

Hermione brushes my hand from her body. "No," she mumbles, her eyes still closed, "I'm a bit sore from last night. It has been a while since I've..." Her voice trails off as a satisfied smile replaces her words.

"I know just how to fix that, Hermione," I whisper.

"What are you doing?" my witch asks, trying to deter me. I chuckle against her skin as I make my way down her body to settle between her legs. I alternate between nipping and licking her clit while gently rubbing her swollen pussy and thighs. The Death Eater roars in satisfaction, for she has been well and truly marked, and the evidence of our passion is on display. She sports small love bites and faint marks from my mouth and fingers. She gasps and twists in pleasure. I gently roll her clit with my tongue as I insert a finger into her swollen channel; she is wet. I insert another, and she whimpers, but not from pain.

"Keep still," I demand gruffly when she begins to fuck my face, and I place one hand on her soft belly to hold her down. I begin in earnest, gently biting and nipping, squeezing her clit and filling her pussy. She likes this small display of dominance, for when I inform her she is not allowed to orgasm, she cries softly but struggles to comply, tensing her thighs and curling her toes in the effort to stave off her pleasure. After long moments, I give her permission, and she screams through her release, her thighs trembling violently while her body softly convulses.

I pet her then, stroking her heated flesh, preparing her for what is to come.

"Up on your knees," I order in a low voice.

She moans softly, but rises. With my hand between her shoulder blades, I press her down so that her face lies flat against the bed. Bending over her to nip at her neck, I whisper, "Would you like to play, Sweet One, hmm? Is there is anything you want, anything you desire? I promise you will enjoy every moment."

Hermione's sexy laugh fills my ears. "Besides wanting you to fuck me, you mean?"

"Oh, I will do that, gladly, my love." Pulling back, I grasp her hips and bury myself fully in her hot body. A long wail escapes her, a mixture of pleasure and pain. I am still for the moment, letting my hands roam the soft flesh of her rounded arse spread out before me, the arse that sways as she walks, on which material clings softly, molding gently to her plump flesh.

I swipe my hand across the swell of her arse before issuing a sharp slap, and her soft cry reaches my ears. I withdraw my hand to see a lovely pink handprint. I pause to gauge Hermione's reaction, and her reaction is a delight; she works herself slowly on my cock, signaling she is ready for more. I thrust gently, and she whimpers. My hand slaps her again, producing another startled gasp. She is wet, and I slip easily from her until only the head of my cock is resting inside her.

"Are you ready, Sweet One?" I ask gently.

She gently rolls her hips. "More," she moans.

My hand lands on her bottom a half-second before I thrust into her, and soon I settle into a rhythm. A pink blush now covers her lovely arse. Her moan is as sweet as sugar to my ears, and I struggle to rein in my desire to dominate her, to bend her body to my will.

"Luc, more... more," Hermione begs, and I thrust deeper, picking up speed. I begin kneading her pink bottom until I can see her puckered little hole. Slowly my thumbs spread her soft flesh, working closer and closer to her anus until they are resting on either side of that special place, that hot, tight channel of untold delights. I message the area slowly, applying gentle pressure. I hear Hermione's low moan of excitement. My little witch likes this play, and I grin in delight. Leaning over her body, I bring my fingers to her mouth. "Wet them, love."

Instead of drawing them into her mouth and swirling her tongue around my fingers, she spits on my fingers. She glances back and smiles.

I hum in her ear, "What dirty thoughts are you harboring in that incredible mind, my love?"

"You know what I want," Hermione huffs thickly, groaning as she works herself into my hard length.

Rearing back, I gently coat her tight hole with her spit before once again placing my thumbs on either side, bearing down so that they slide into her body. I don't pause until my thumbs are buried to the hilt. She is moaning loudly, grinding awkwardly, not quite finding the correct angles for both her pussy and arse.

I slowly glide my thumbs in and out of her body, stretching her a little more each time. I feel my cock moving through the thin membrane that separates the two channels, and I press my thumbs down, the added sensations catching my breath.

"Wait," she pants. "Wait."

Hermione slowly eases forward so that I slip from her body. My erection is jutting and painfully hard, as she crawls to the edge of the bed. Reaching the nightstand, she grabs a quill and quickly transforms it into an anal plug. I am enchanted. She slips it past her lips, working it with her tongue and lips. With it in her mouth, she crawls behind me. I feel her hand on my back, urging me to bend over. I chuckle. My darling has a dirty little mind, and I am going to reap the rewards.

She slowly pushes the soft plug into my body, twisting it as it slips slowly past my tight muscle. I grunt as it hits bottom, and I pant as a thin sheen of sweat forms on my brow. It has been far too long since I have indulged in this type of play, and I am pleased beyond measure to know that Hermione, my strong, brave, intelligent and sexy witch is so open in sharing her desires with me.

"Okay, Luc?" Her voice is small and breathy, but tinged with excitement.

"Yes, love. Are you?" My voice, too, is small, and I take two slow, deep breaths to compose myself. She whispers her assent.

"All right. Get in position."

She positions herself in front of me, presenting her lovely pink arse once more. Her body is to be worshipped and adored and pleased. I tell her how it feels to have her body clutch me, trapping me inside her slick heat. I plunge myself into her pussy, and she screams in pleasure.

The plug in my arse is moving within me, rubbing against my prostate, sending electric shots up my spine. A heady aroma fills the air, sweeter than any bouquet and more intoxicating than any aged brandy. I work furiously, driven by the need to please her, to make her mindless with sensations.

Hermione is incoherent as she comes again and again. I reach under her body to find her fingers rubbing her clit with a frenzied urgency. I explode over her body, and my hands smear the white mess, massaging it into her skin.

Exhausted, we collapse, falling onto the bed. We must have dozed, for when I open my eyes, Hermione is once again sleeping on her side, my hand buried between her legs. I shift and discover the plug is still inserted. I smirk, shifting my hips to drive the plug deeper into my body. My cock is not co-operating, however. While exciting, apparently it is not enough to raise me. Regretfully, I remove the toy from my body, then Vanish it. Glancing over at the timepiece on the nightstand, I see various potions Gobby no doubt has set out; one for aching muscles and another for all-over body pain. Hermione stirs next to me, and I kiss her, worshipping her lips and tongue and softness.

"I love you." I croak, my emotions rising suddenly.

"And I love you, Luc."

I smile, content.

Later, over breakfast, I begin the tale of Hespion Warland.

"The old wizard petitioned the Ministry of Magic thirty-five years ago to create a Wizarding think tank in order to best deal with the influx of Muggle-born wizards that would be receiving owls from Hogwarts eleven years hence. When the Ministry inquired of Mr. Warland how he knew there would be an influx of students to Hogwarts, Mr. Warland pointed to the young Wizarding and Muggle populations intermingling all over England and America. The year was dubbed "The Summer of Love;" and with a great deal of sex going on between Muggles and wizards, it would hardly be a stretch of the imagination to guess that children would be a result.

"Such was the auspicious beginning of the Warland Council. Since then, they have been working behind the scenes in both the Wizarding and Muggle worlds to demoralize the bonds that had been created during that summer. When Voldemort rose to power, Warland all but stopped his work, not willing to draw attention to himself, thus escaping Voldemort's watchful eye." Hermione has narrowed her eyes, not a good sign.

"You knew all about this, didn't you? After the war ended, you knew he'd start again?" Hermione is becoming flushed, and not in the delightful way she did earlier this morning.

"I don't remember the last five years, my dear." I say smoothly. I put up a hand to stop what would have been the beginning of a tirade. I am quickly learning how to deal with my prickly witch. "I have, however, read my ledgers and journals, and I've come to the conclusion that the Warland Council engineered the inter-Muggle-Wizard relations campaign with the hopes of accomplishing what he set out to do all those years ago.

Hermione is just about to stand when I reach out and touch her hand. She settles back in her seat, and without giving her an opportunity to launch into what I am sure will be an entertaining monologue, I continue on:

"He is quite serious. He will not rest until he has accomplished his mission of bringing Muggles to heel and stop the infiltration of Muggle-borns into our society. He is not a killer, however; he is more practical and pragmatic. He understands politics and economic tides and is quite clever. Voldemort would have done well to learn from him. Since the end of the war, Warland has set plans in motion to destroy Britain's economy."

"How? That seems impossible; it is too big, too..." Hermione begins, but I stall her.

"His plan calls for Wizards to infiltrate Muggle businesses under the guise of inter-Wizard-Muggle relations. In simplest terms, it is a matter of 'divide and conquer.' The Council compiled a list of those companies that would best be served by a 'marriage' so to speak. In reality, under the approval of the Ministry, nearly one-fifth of Britain's top one hundred companies are now under the direct control of wizards. Stocks and values are being manipulated; and soon, the British government will follow suit. It is really just a matter of time before wizards are selected for key Muggle government positions, and after that..."

"Lucius," Hermione begins, her voice low but gaining volume as she continues. "He has involved you! The both of us! When this all comes out, the two of us are going to be accomplices in this whole sorry mess! How could you have let this happen, has the war taught you nothing?"

She is working herself into quite a state, it seems. She is concerned for her welfare, as she should. I am pleased that she is thinking of herself in those terms, not like the selfless, foolish Gryffindor. And her concern for me is quite touching; I am most pleased. Perhaps I am a sound influence on her.

"My dear, you do not believe that. I would never allow myself to be used in such a manner. No. I made my own deal with the Ministry after the war: I would start this little venture and continue on for a period of five years. At the end, I quietly remove myself from all ventures and resume my place in the world of Wizard finance, full of knowledge of how Muggle technology and economics affect our world. I will quietly go on amassing my billions and stay out of the Council's way." As her unease continues to grow, I hasten to reassure her, "We were never a part of the Council's schemes."

She smiles then, reassured. "We will expose the Council and overhaul the program. I'm sure it wouldn't be too difficult to begin an accounting of all those Muggle companies adversely affected. Of course, it would take a full audit to ascertain whether or not the company did poor through its own fault or..."

I cut her off. "No."

"Well, then," she huffs, "what are you going to do?"

"Nothing," I answer smugly. She looks appalled.

"But Lucius," Hermione wails, her disbelief evident. "You like working with Muggles!"

"No, I don't," I say succinctly. Even with no memory of my interactions with them, I know this.

"Yes, you do! Oh, I know you don't remember, but trust me; you've come to respect them. You've praised their intelligence, their inquisitive nature. You came around to not hating them, collectively, as a group." I cannot let her continue on in this manner.

"But I hate enough of them, Hermione. They are *Muggles*, for gods sake. I sincerely doubt that I would change that drastically over such a short period of time. I hardly think it possible."

"I don't understand," Hermione says softly. I draw her into my arms, comforting her. "Lucius, I'm a ..."

"You are a witch, Hermione, a lovely, temperamental, gloriously beautiful witch; *my* witch."

Her arms wrap around my waist and hug me tight. "Please, Luc. At least give the journal to PW Investigations. Let them make the decision as to what to do. We aren't involved. It can't hurt us."

Absently rubbing her back, I think of her suggestion. If my suspicions are correct, one or two more surprises are on the way. I smile, enjoying the build up of what is to come.

"Well, Floo them, then. I've wanted to talk with them about their investigation regarding the third man, the one who cast the *Obliviate*."

Two hours later, Misters Potter and Weasley stand uncomfortably in my downtown office. This meeting on neutral territory was Hermione's idea, and I am thankful. Potter and Weasley are no longer the young pups of school. They are now tall, strong men, capable of taking down Dark Wizards and thugs alike. *Not that they'd have a chance in hell with me*, I smirk.

When I ask after their progress on locating the third man, they stare in puzzlement.

"Didn't Draco Floo you?" Mr. Weasley asked, disbelievingly.

Mr. Potter chimed in. "We received a tip last night that Gerald Strommond, your attacker, was holed up in an upstairs room at the Leaky Cauldron. We were just about to Apparate, when we received a rather urgent message from the Minister, so we tried to Floo you."

"We weren't able to get through," Mr. Weasley injected bitterly.

"So," Mr. Potter continued, "we Floo-ed Draco, who Apparated to the Cauldron to keep an eye on Strommond until we could get there and take over. He said he'd keep you apprised of the situation."

"So, I take it you've Strommond in custody?" I ask tersely, itching to get my hands on the man before the MLE do.

"Well, no, actually..." Before Mr. Potter can continue, my secretary owls to say Draco is waiting to see me. He'd stopped by the penthouse, and Gobby informed him of my whereabouts. With the flick of my fingers, I open the door, and Draco strides through.

"Father, didn't expect to see you at the office on a Saturday. I've some..." he stops abruptly seeing the other men in the room. With a smile, he greets them as friends, but there is a glint in my son's eyes that keeps me quiet for the moment.

Potter and Weasley both ask him what happened to Strommond at the Cauldron. Casting me a quick look, he looks at the men sheepishly and rubs the back of his neck.

"He got away. I was sitting at the bar, waiting for you to return, and old Tom asked if I'd have a quick look at the new ovens he'd had installed. I suppose I must've been in there longer than I'd thought, because when I checked to see if Strommond was still in his room, the door was wide open and there was no sign of him."

Again, Draco casts a quiet look my way, and I smother a grin. The apple hasn't fallen far from the tree, it would seem.

Misters Potter and Weasley assure me they will resume their investigation, but I stop them.

"No, leave it be." Both men stare at me, even Hermione is looking on in disbelief. "He will meet his own sticky end. Miscreants usually do."

Mr. Potter spends a long moment staring at me. At last, he nods in understanding, "We won't waste our time on him, then."

I allow for a small smile, then move on to the next item on my agenda. With a nod to Hermione, she retrieves the journal from my desk and presents it to Mr. Potter. Quietly asking that she fill her friends in on its contents, I rest my hand on my son's shoulders and guide him out of my office. With the door closed behind us, we turn to each other grinning, acknowledging that he has taken care of Strommond himself, thus eliminating the need for Potter and Weasley or the MLE to become involved.

Draco pulls on his outer robe and makes to leave. Before stepping in to the Floo, he turns and grinning, he asks, "Are you going to marry her, then?"

Not waiting for an answer, he disappears in the green flames, leaving me to stare at the empty fireplace before slowly turning and enter my office once more.

A/N: A big, wonderful thank you to my two fantastic betas, Wildcatcdc and Sc010f.

14

Chapter 14 of 14

Not waiting for an answer, he disappears in the green flames, leaving me to stare at the empty fireplace before slowly turning and entering my office once more.

A/N: This story would never have been written if it wasn't for Dynonugget. She lent her amazing beta-ing skills to my Knickers series. And when I offered to write her a oneshot, presumably to be a part of the series, she asked if I would write her something else. Of course, I said. This story is the result of her plot bunny. I will never find enough words to thank her for her friendship, support and guidance. Raaawrrrr, babe!

I cannot imagine this story ever seeing the light of day if it weren't for my amazing friends and betas, Sc010f and Wildcatcdc. Thank you for your patience and ideas and friendship. To Wildcat, for the most awesome suggestions and Scoffy, for stopping me from writing Lucius as a porn star. Love and Kisses to you both!

And finally! As you read this final chapter, you just might come across a line that sounds awfully familiar. Well, it will be familiar if you've read Care of Magical Creatures, written by the stunningly talented Mia Madwyn. I've borrowed her line, "As the Malfoys go, so goes Slytherin," with a slight addition to the end. Thanks aren't enough, Mia, but I'll say thank you, just the same. :)

Not waiting for an answer, he disappears in the green flames, leaving me to stare at the empty fireplace before slowly turning and entering my office once more.

We just finished our meal at the new restaurant in Knightsbridge Draco had recommended. After settling the bill, Hermione and I leave the establishment, ready to return home, intent on spending the weekend at the penthouse, naked and satisfied.

The curse comes from nowhere; the all-too-familiar green blast narrowly misses Hermione only because she paused while I adjusted her shawl about her shoulders. I look around wildly, scanning the nameless faces, looking for some recognizable feature. I see Severus running north along the wide street. Pushing Hermione into the limousine and tersely ordering the driver to take her home, I take off, quickly Apparating alongside my friend.

With a grim smile, he points his beaked nose at someone ahead. At first I am not able to discern whom Severus could be chasing, but soon it becomes apparent that someone is concealed by an Invisibility Cloak; only trainers are visible as the would-be killer makes his way down the sidewalk. I return Severus' smile. I had been expecting an attack of some kind, had known Hermione and I were being followed. Several days ago I'd owed Severus, not wanting the MLE or PW Investigations

involved. Up ahead, the trainers round the corner; Severus shoves me hard into a dank alley. Immediately Apparating to its end, I take off again. Severus and I now run parallel, and we each round the corner. Spotting Hermione's attacker, Severus and I capture him between us, and in a flash we are gone.

We Apparate to Severus' home.

I draw my wand, my fingers itching to kill the man who would take my witch away from me. As of yet, I don't know if the *Avada* was meant for Hermione or me, but I will soon enough. I barely control my anger, my need to hurt him as viciously as he has hurt me, as he has scared me, is boiling in my veins. For now, he is sitting in the middle of Severus' sitting room on a kitchen chair, his arms and legs bound. The as-yet nameless attacker's wand crackles merrily in the fireplace, emitting yellow puffs of smoke as the unicorn hair core ignites. The man whimpers. Severus is off in his lab procuring Veritaserum, intent on uncovering the whole sorry mess. I am impatient, and knowing I have to wait to kill this insect does nothing for my disposition. In my frustration, I execute a neat roundhouse, landing my Italian-shod foot solidly in his face. He and the chair crash onto the floor. I look on dispassionately; it appears his cheek is broken, as well as his nose.

Severus enters the room and sniffs disdainfully at the unconscious wizard on the floor. With a quick *Evanescio*, the blood is cleaned up, and he quickly sets the bones to heal.

"If you had shown the slightest bit of restraint, he would be awake and suffering. As it is, he is unconscious and free of any discomfort," Severus comments drolly, and I cannot help but laugh.

"Quite right, brother. *Ennervate*," I say quietly. I am going to enjoy this.

The wizard's name is Bugger. I smirk at the name, thinking he certainly was, and even Severus snorts. I leave Severus to the questioning, for he never killed anyone in his quest for information. It is always a near thing when I handle a situation like this. I will admit it is perhaps best suited for someone with more patience than I possess at the present time.

It takes over an hour, but the full story has been drawn. *My ex-fucking wife. I knew it.*

As much as it pains me, I Floo Mistery Potter and Weasley. We've an appointment for Monday, but under the circumstances, I believe it is best to learn what they have uncovered before confronting Narcissa. Severus is not pleased with the idea of having the men in his house, so we've agreed to meet at my office downtown, instead. I Floo Draco, telling him to meet us there. I ask Severus if he would like to sit in on the meeting, but he has voiced his displeasure of being involved in any intrigue. I smile softly to my friend and nod my understanding. He has not asked after Hermione, and I know now that he will not. He has put their time together behind him as has Hermione, and while I am sure my friend is waiting for me to broach the topic of the memory I witnessed, I will not. There will be no looking back. With a nod to the now unconscious Bugger, Severus answers my silent question with a nod, reassuring me he will take care of the vermin. I am not sure what his plans are, but I will not question Severus. Death Eaters do not speak of such inconsequential matters, after all. I bid him a goodnight then throw powder into the fireplace. I call out my destination and step into the green flames.

In my office, the Dynamic Duo confirm my suspicions: Hespion Warland and his Council have been hard at work. Mr. Potter has been gathering counter-intelligence, while Mister Weasley has put into place a strategy for bringing the Council to heel. It would appear having a brother working for Gringotts still opens doors, and I am pleased to know Mr. Weasley has learned to use all the weapons he has at his disposal. With the cooperation of several well-placed wizard Financiers and some Ministry officials, plans are in motion for the expulsion of Hespion Warland from both the Head of the Warland Council and Member of the Hogwarts Educational Board.

I do not divulge what I have learned regarding my ex-wife. This is a family matter, best left for Draco and me to handle. Draco had Floo-ed his mother earlier, informing her of his impending arrival. Now that our meeting has ended, we Apparate to the Manor, where we drop the wards and enter. I am not sure what to expect from Narcissa. She is not expecting me, and I wait to see if she will put the events together and realize why we are here.

She descends the staircase, faltering slightly as her eyes fall upon me. But she smiles thinly and crosses the foyer to greet Draco, reaching for his hands as she leans in and kisses the air beside his cheek.

"Lucius, what brings you here? Surely that horrid elf of yours gathered all your belongings before leaving our home?" She sniffs disdainfully, still holding Draco's hand, his wand hand. I narrow my eyes slightly.

"Careful, Narcissa," I drawl, determined to keep my temper in check and get to the bottom of this fiasco. "As it is, I've learned some interesting news that I thought I'd share with you."

Narcissa is careful to maintain her composure, but there is a measure of apprehension in her eyes. She straightens her back and says, "Well, then, by all means, let us retire to the parlor." She takes hold of Draco's arm, leaving his wand hand useless. I wonder again what her intentions are. I must tread carefully.

Draco, too, senses his mother's imbalance; he maintains his composure, his demeanor somewhat gentle. "Come, Mother. Sit here by the fire, in your favorite chair. Father, please, sit in your chair as well. I'll pour us some drinks. Father, your Scotch? Mother?" I nod to my son, pleased that he has managed to extricate himself from his mother's grasp. I glance at Narcissa; her fingers are white as they grip the arm of her chair, even as a serene look settles on her face.

"Scotch, yes," I say agreeably. "Narcissa, something for you?"

Her eyes glide from Draco at the bar, the decanter in his hand and an expectant look on his face, to me in my usual seat with my legs crossed and cane settled against my thigh.

She looks at me, considering. "Yes, thank you, darling. Port, please." She releases her death grip on her chair, apparently satisfied that I am not going to draw my wand on her.

I smile slightly. Her son, at this moment, is dispensing three drops of Veritaserum into her port.

She asks after Draco, his fiancée and his restaurant. Draco answers pleasantly, and I sit back, watching a caricature of the normal Wizarding family play out before me. The interested, loving mother, the studious, affable son, the reserved, but affectionate father. It could not be further from the truth, of course. Draco's mother was never interested, much less loving towards Draco or myself. And for Draco's part, while he did pull down excellent grades in school, affable was far removed in any description heaped upon my son's head. And to call me reserved, let alone affectionate, was laughable in the extreme. But we play the game all the same.

"Mother," Draco begins, and I do my damndest not to sit straighter in my chair. "Have you heard of Hespion Warland? He approached me the other evening, said he knows you and Father."

Narcissa looks as if she had just been hexed. "Hespion approached you? He...." She stops, her agile brain making connections. Suddenly, she jumps up, drawing her wand from beneath her sleeve. Draco and I are prepared, of course, and just as quick, three Malfoys are standing in the Manor's parlor, wands drawn on each other.

"You bastard," Narcissa spits. "You *know!* How? How did you find out? No, it doesn't matter, does it? Doesn't matter in the least. It is time for me to leave. Draco, come here." She waves her wand at him, believing I will not do anything to jeopardize my son by attacking her. She is wrong, of course.

With a flick and an *Expelliarmus*, her wand is gone. She lunges for Draco nonetheless, wrapping her arm around his neck, attempting to choke him. With two deft moves, he is free of his mother's grasp and flips her over his shoulder. Narcissa lies stunned on the floor, her mouth opening and closing like a fish out of water. For his part, Draco looks appalled, but for the life of me, I don't know if it's because mother attacked him or he flipped her over his shoulder. I laugh.

In two minutes she is secured in her chair by the fire, and the whole sad mess is told between sobs and curses.

Hespion Warland approached her while I was on trial. In return for her help in recruiting me, she would be ensured her place in the new Wizarding world after the Council secured my services. *As the Malfoys go, so goes Slytherin and, indeed, the rest of the purebloods*, so a witch named Ursula was once quoted as saying. Hespion was an astute businessman and wizard. He could not ensure an acquittal, but her efforts, should I regain my freedom, would be made worthwhile. With me firmly entrenched, he would soon have the cooperation of all Slytherin families, and most pureblood families, as well.

So it began: her aloofness during the trial, her repeated attempts in the following years to draw me into her new circle, even Hespion's own efforts to lure me into his vision of the new world. As if I wouldn't be able to sniff out a plot to overthrow Muggles. I was an advisor to Voldemort, for gods' sake. While it would have been foolhardy to turn my back on the Council, I took advantage of the loopholes and escaped his net.

"I didn't want a divorce, you bastard!" she screams, beginning to sob hysterically. Draco and I are embarrassed by her awful display.

I do nothing but stand there, looking on dispassionately as she rants on and on, a small allergic reaction to the Veritas serum, it would seem: these emotions coming from the coldest woman I've ever known.

She cannot stop crying. "I didn't want a divorce! I wanted my life to go on as it was before the war, before Voldemort left. Life was good, there was power and prestige and influence. Now, now there is nothing! No place for our elite society, no place for purebloods!" She twists and turns against the bonds holding her.

"What did Warland want you to do, after I refused?" I ask casually.

Narcissa sniffed indelicately. "Pretend to work with the Muggles, lure them into thinking all will be well if they participate in the program the Council set up. Show them what life among wizards would be like."

I nod slowly. "Why did you ask for the divorce?"

She looks up at me, no longer crying. She is once more under control, and her blue eyes are two shiny orbs and as hard as ice. "I wanted to force your hand. I knew you couldn't have feelings for that Mudblood girl. But she was exposing you to filth, to vermin of which we spent a lifetime trying to rid our world. That you could... could fraternize with *them* is just despicable!"

"Bugger." I say the name softly. Narcissa's eyes glint, and she curls her lip in an evil smile.

"Did he kill her? I'm hoping that's what you've come to tell me. That the piece of trash I hired was able to do the one thing I asked of him. Is she dead, Lucius? Did I kill that dirty-blooded piece of ...?" Her voice chokes as my hand wraps around her throat, squeezing ever so slowly. I look into her eyes, and fear finally replaces her hate and prejudice. She is unable to stop me, bound as she is, and it will be so very, very easy to do away with her once and for all.

A hand on my back stops me. "Don't, Father," Draco says softly. He hand squeezes my shoulder softly, and taking a deep breath, I slowly take a step back, releasing Narcissa's reddened neck. I turn to my son; his look is long and measuring.

"Thank you. I'll take care of this. She won't be bothering you or anyone else. I promise," Draco says with a small measure of urgency in his voice.

"How?"

Draco allows a small smile to cross his face. "Diana's father is a major stockholder and Chairman of a large conglomerate of Muggle hospitals, including some psychiatric facilities. I'll have her admitted."

Relief floods my senses. I have raised a fine son, and I am once again amazed at how well he has risen to the occasion.

"I'll leave you to it, then." I turn to the witch sitting quietly in the chair, staring at the fire. I don't want to say good-bye, don't want to care about this woman with whom I've spent a better part of thirty years, don't want to admit my part in what drove her to this. Nodding once, I turn, intent on making my way back to the Penthouse and Hermione.

"Are you going to answer my question, Father?" I hear the amusement in Draco's voice. I know what he is asking, referring back to his question he'd asked weeks ago, on a night much like this.

With a soft smile, I say, "Yes," then open the door and cross to the Apparition point, intent on seeing my witch.

Ten minutes later, I quietly enter our home. It strikes me, then, how much my life has changed in such a short amount of time. I hear a soft click; Hermione must have heard me enter, for she runs down the hallway and leaps into my arms. I fold my arms around her, lifting her off the floor. With my future in my arms, I am reminded of my grand-mère, Raine Malfoy, who would say, "Ne regardez pas au passé; au lieu de cela, déplacez-vous avec le but dans le futur." *Do not look to the past; instead, move with purpose into the future.*

I intend to do just that, with Hermione.

End