

# Of Laws and Wagers

*by cocoachristy*

In the midst of the new Marriage Law, Severus and Draco make a wager against Lucius concerning Hermione and Ginny. Who is really the winner in the end?

## Chapter 1

*Chapter 1 of 3*

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**Disclaimer:** All notes and beta thanks are disallowed until after the challenge. Normal disclaimers apply (not mine, no money).

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### Chapter 1

Hermione stood staring at herself in the full-length mirror at her childhood church. She was going to become Mrs. Ronald Bilius Weasley today, something she'd dreamed about for many months.

Ron had asked her right before they'd passed the new Marriage Law, just as Harry had asked Ginny, and she'd accepted him. And though Hermione hated that there even had to be a *law*, she did reluctantly understand the reasoning behind it.

Simply stated, the wizards and witches in England were dying out. She'd been at the Weasleys when Kingsley had been there, explaining to Arthur how dire the situation truly was, especially after the war. He'd even had color-coded charts.

If drastic measures were not taken, and taking into account the amount of Squib births within the past decade, given another twenty years, there would be scarce few magical folks born.

*At least they are letting people chose their own spouse, even if they only have a year to choose*Hermione thought.

Stopping the morose thoughts on her wedding day, Hermione studied herself in her long, white, satin gown with her great-grandmother's pearls in her ears and around her neck and smiled. She did look rather pretty, if she did say so herself. She was suddenly brought out of her musings when she felt a soft hand on her shoulder.

"You look so lovely, dear," Mary Granger said with tears in her eyes. "I want to thank you again for agreeing to have the wedding here. I know it wasn't an easy thing to arrange, but it means so much to your father and me. We never really get to see you anymore. Not that we don't understand, mind."

"Not at all, Mum. You know that I've dreamed of getting married here since I was a girl. And though the wizards and witches may appear to be somewhat... odd, I think that for the short amount of time they'll be mixed with the Muggles, all will be well."

"I hope so. I've something I want to tell you. I struggled with the timing of it all, but with all the wedding planning going on, and since you're leaving for your honeymoon straight away, well, I don't know when I'll have another chance."

"What is it?" Hermione asked, starting to feel worried.

"Oh, nothing bad, I assure you. It's just that, with you grown and on your own now, and living in the wizarding world, well, your father and I have decided to move to Australia permanently."

"But, Mum..."

"Now, Hermione, don't," her mother said as she fussed with her daughter's veil, holding back tears. "Like I've said, we rarely get to see you anymore, not that I'm blaming you. I want to make it perfectly clear that I don't blame you for living your life, dear. You're doing exactly what we've raised you to do. But we really enjoyed it there, you know. Besides, you can pop in over there as easily as you do at home, can you not?"

"Yes, I suppose so. It just won't be the same."

"Dear," Mary laughed, "things haven't 'been the same' since an owl with an envelope flew down our chimney. But change is good, I say."

"Yes, it can be," Hermione agreed. "Definitely can be good," she said as she nodded once. Taking a deep breath, she looked in the mirror one last time. "This is it," she whispered.

"Ready, love?" Henry Granger asked from the doorway, tears running down his cheeks. "They're waiting for you."

"Daddy," Hermione said as she beamed at her father. "How dashing you look!" She took a tissue and gently wiped his face. "None of this now. You'll ruin your image."

Chuckling, he told her, "A man has a right to shed a tear or two when he's about to give his only daughter away to another man."

Kissing his cheek, she agreed. "I suppose he does." When the music started, she placed her arm inside his. "Ready?"

"As I'll ever be," he said, making her smile brighter. "You look beautiful."

"Thank you, Daddy. I feel beautiful!" she said as they began to walk down the aisle.

Hermione wanted to remember everything she could about this day. How the church looked, how Ginny and Luna, her maid-of-honor and bridesmaid looked, how her guests looked, and how her heart felt as she walked...no glided...to the man waiting for her at the end of the aisle, smiling at her as if she were the only woman in the world. But as soon as her wedding march began, Hermione could only stare at Ronald. She felt well and truly loved.

When her father presented her to him, she could scarcely make out the words coming from the priest's mouth so intent she was on her husband-to-be.

When he finally asked, "If anyone can show just cause why these two should not be wed, speak now or forever hold your peace," Hermione's bubble of happiness was burst.

"I can!" shouted a pretty woman with dark hair and eyes from the rows behind her.

Hermione stiffened and noticed two things at once. Ron turned to look at who shouted those words and went completely white, and Harry, standing up for Ron, also turned to look, and when he turned back to face Ron, he was livid, but not surprised.

"Ron!" Hermione harshly whispered. "What's going on? Who's shouting that?"

"Er..." Ron started as he put a finger under his collar as if he was suddenly too hot. "Nothing. It's no one." To the priest he said, "Please. Continue."

"I'm sorry, son, but I cannot. Not until I hear this woman's cause," the priest explained.

With dread cloaked around her, Hermione slowly turned to face the crowd. She didn't immediately recognize the woman standing there, but one thing was quite evident. She was noticeably pregnant. "Can I help you?" Hermione asked, trying to sound irritated to cover the terror.

The woman snorted. "Can *you* help me? I don't think so. However, *he* can," she said, pointing at Ron.

"Ron!" Harry hissed. "I thought you said you'd ended things with her!"

Ginny jerked her head from the woman to look at her fiancé. "You know who she is? You knew about *that*?"

"Ron?" Hermione asked, not wanting to believe the truth staring her in the face.

"What's this about, Ronald?" Molly Weasley asked. "What's this young lady on about?"

"You have no proof," Ron angrily said, shooting curses with his eyes at the woman.

"You know it's yours! I told you from the beginning I would do this if you kept ignoring me! I will not raise this baby alone, and you *will* acknowledge it."

"I *do not* know that it's mine!" Ron roared. "I only know what you claim! For all I know, it could be anybody's!"

"You know that it's not!" she shouted, tears streaming down her face. "I love you, Ron, and you love me. I know you do. You just don't want to disappoint your family. Do you think I've forgotten that you said you're not truly in love with..."

"Stop!" Hermione yelled, throwing up both hands to silence the woman from yelling anything else and making this very private moment any more public and shouting something she was not yet ready to hear. Turning to Ron, she asked quietly, "But it *could* be yours?"

"Hermione..."

"Who is she?" Hermione asked. Then, angrily facing the woman, asked, "Who *are* you!"

"Romilda Vane," she answered. "But of course, I don't expect the likes of you to remember me."

"The one who gave poisoned chocolates to Ron in our sixth year?" Hermione asked, gobsmacked.

"Meant for Harry," Ginny remembered as she sneered at Romilda.

"Ah, so you *do* remember," Romilda taunted. "Yes, that's me. And also the one who's been seeing Ron for the past eight months."

"NO!" Ron shouted. "I ended things with you three months ago!"

"Yes, when I told you that I'm pregnant, you panicked and ended things. If it hadn't been for that, I dare say things would still be going strong between us." She looked at Hermione. "I'm sorry, truly I am, but you must understand why I had to stop the wedding, under the circumstances."

"You're wrong," Hermione corrected Romilda. "I don't understand any of this. Ron, how could you?" she cried as she threw her bouquet in Ron's face and fled from the sanctuary.

"Hermione!" Ron yelled and started after her, but Harry placed a restraining hand on his arm.

"Let her go, mate. I cannot believe this. You said you'd ended it with Romilda!"

"I *did*! You just heard her admitting that I'd ended it months ago!" Ron said as he watched people leaving the church, giving him nasty looks as they cleared out. Both his and Hermione's parents had run after Hermione.

"When? After she'd told you she's pregnant, like she claims? You should've never let it start to begin with, Ron! I told you that!"

"And you knew," Ginny said accusingly. "You're just as bad as he is, and he's a complete and utter git. How could the two of you do this to Hermione? I thought you loved her!"

"I do!" both Harry and Ron said at the same time.

"No, neither of you do. Ron, if you can sleep with another woman, then you don't belong to Hermione. And Harry, if you can lie to her daily, straight to her face, then you're not her mate. You've both betrayed her.

"And I wonder. If the two of you can lie so easily to her day after day, what else can you lie about? Harry, I feel like you betrayed me, too. I've lost faith in you."

"Don't be ridiculous!" Harry snapped, worried at the look on Ginny's face. "This was not for me to tell. Ron should've come clean months ago. I didn't want to hurt her! Besides, this situation has nothing to do with you or us."

"Well, you did. She knows that you knew, and that will hurt her. And though this situation has nothing to do with us, you still told a horrible lie, day after day. Both of you!" she spat, turning her glare towards her brother.

"Ginny," Ron said imploringly.

"Stay away from me! I am so furious with you two! As a matter of fact, the both of you stay away from me right now! I don't want to see either of you! And for heaven's sake, leave Hermione alone for a few days," Ginny commanded as she stomped off, glaring at Romilda as she went.

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Severus clutched his drink, only half listening to Lucius bitch and moan about how unfair his life was. Narcissa, after catching him with another woman one too many times, was finally divorcing the bastard. *Serves him right*

They had been at this little exotic island for almost a week now because Lucius had said he'd needed a break and didn't want to be alone. Severus snorted. *A break indeed.*

"Something I said sound amusing to you, Severus?" Lucius interrupted Severus' musings, clearly put upon.

Severus looked at him, one eyebrow raised. "I find this whole situation amusing, Lucius. I've told you time and again that Cissy would soon tire of your womanizing, but you kept on with it. You've made your bed, so to speak, now lie in it."

Lucius turned to Severus, a hurt look on his face. "How can you say that to me? Narcissa is *my life*!"

"Save it," Severus snapped. "Draco hasn't joined us yet. He's the only one who believes that drivel. You can't constantly hurt someone if you love them."

"Those ladies meant nothing to me! They were merely... hobbies, if you will."

"Right. Well, looks like your hobby has cost you your wife."

"I don't know why she's doing this now. Especially since that dratted Marriage Law has been passed! It only means that she'll have to marry someone else and produce a child." Lucius brooded into his drink. "If she stays with me, she won't have to have any more children."

"She's been asking you for a baby for years, Father," Draco said as he walked up behind them with Greg Goyle, carrying the *Daily Prophet*. "You know how badly she's wanted one, especially in the past few years since the war ended."

"Well, I agreed, didn't I? I told her just the other day that I'd let her have a baby!"

"Too little, too late," Severus said. "And now, some other man will have the privilege of 'letting' Narcissa have a baby."

Lucius' eyes narrowed dangerously. "You wouldn't be thinking about having that privilege, would you, mate?"

Before Severus could answer, Draco said, "Damn. This paper is a week behind. Look." He pointed to a full size picture of Hermione in her wedding dress as he laughed. "Granger finally married Weasley. I suppose it won't be long until Potter marries into that family now."

"Now *that* is a divorce waiting to happen," Severus commented. "Weasley and Granger. Though I'm not in the least surprised that they've married. I figured she would be stupid enough to marry one of those two imbeciles. Neither would make her happy."

"You don't think they'll last?" Greg asked his former Potions professor. "They've always been together ever since we were kids. It seems like they will."

Severus shook his head. "They are not equals in any way. And I'd wager that they both want different things in life. Weasley will want what he knows...his mother. Granger will want to work and make her mark in our world. To *prove* herself worthy of being here," he spat. "As she's done from the start."

Draco laughed. "Well, that will never happen because she's not."

"Well, it proves one thing," Severus said. "*All* women are ignorant when it comes to the opposite sex. All a man has to do to get a woman is say a few choice words and shag her senseless. I can't imagine any other reason Granger would marry a Weasley. Any Weasley."

"I'd like an answer to my question, Severus," Lucius quietly said in a voice that Severus knew very well. It was a voice that many Muggle and a few Death Eaters had quickly learned to fear.

"Well, that's odd," Greg said as he nodded to the door. "What is she doing here with her?"

All eyes turned in the direction of the door. In walked Hermione Granger and Ginny Weasley. "Perhaps she brought the wrong Weasley with her on her honeymoon," Lucius snapped, irritated.

The other three men at the table snorted. "Probably get on better with her than the jughead she married," Greg said.

Suddenly, an owl flew to Draco, dropping several more *Prophets*.

"Hold on!" Draco said and began laughing so hard that he couldn't speak. Tears were literally rolling down his face. "Ssshhee dddidn'ttt mmmmaarrryy him!" Draco stammered, pointing to the paper at the top of the pile.

"Draco! Control yourself this instant and give me that paper!" Lucius said harshly. After reading a bit, he simply said, "Ah. The plot thickens. It looks as if Weasley was having an affair, impregnating some witch, and the Granger girl cancelled the wedding. At the altar, no less. Tsk."

Severus snorted, amused. "That doesn't surprise me. She's better off, though I doubt that she thinks she is. Now she'll just have to find some other person who can put up with her. Perhaps Longbottom."

Lucius threw back his drink and finished it in one gulp. "What say you we have a bit of fun?"

"What are you up to, old man?" Severus asked, not liking the scheming look in his friend's eyes. Severus knew very well that by not answering Lucius' question about Narcissa, he was adding fuel to the fire, but the man needed to suffer a bit after the way he'd treated his wife.

Lucius shrugged. "You said it yourself. Women are easily wooed. Why don't you and Draco woo those two?" He nodded towards Hermione and Ginny. "And then right when they are at their most vulnerable, dump them."

"Bitter much?" Severus taunted.

"No, just enough. See there, the young Weasley? She looks a bit like the Mudblood you fancied so much, Potter's mother. Your victory over her would be twofold: taking a woman away from a Potter and having someone who so closely resembles Evans."

Severus tightened his hand around his drink, saying nothing. Lucius always spoke of Lily as if she'd been insignificant. He could easily see why Cissy had had enough of this man.

"Absolutely not!" Draco shouted. "I will not 'woo' any Mudblood. If we do this, I'll take the Weasley girl."

"Oh, and what a hardship it would be for you, too, eh, Draco? You've fancied her since our sixth year," Greg said as he watched a curvy waitress set new drinks on the table and smile shyly at him.

"Fancied is not the word I would use, Greg," Draco corrected him. "I wanted to shag her...nothing more."

"Whatever you wanted to do, or want to do now for that matter, is quite moot. I refuse to bow to this façade," Severus informed them. "It's extremely tasteless."

Lucius nodded. "You're scared. I understand that. You'd never get the Granger girl to look twice at you at any rate, especially after the way you've always treated her. I suppose women aren't quite as gullible as you made them out to be. Certainly not one as smart as that one is."

"Oh, stop trying to goad me into going along with this idiotic plan of yours to hurt everyone and everything because you're hurt and throwing a tantrum. What? You're not happy, so you don't want anyone else to be? Don't you think she's hurting enough at the moment?"

"Hardly. Besides, I'll get Narcissa to change her mind, have no doubt. I just thought that before we headed back home it would be amusing to watch those two get knocked off their high terrestrial. But obviously, you're not the man for the job."

"I could get the Granger girl if I wanted her, Lucius," Severus said, insulted. "A few choice words and acts of infatuation? A gift or two perhaps? She would eat right out of the palm of my hand."

"I say that you can't."

"I most certainly could."

"Prove it."

"I'll do my part," Draco quickly interrupted their banter, eyeing Ginny. "I'll get Weasley to fall for me and dump Potter."

Greg looked at Draco, raising both eyebrows. "Please! She's loved him all of her life. You think that *you*, someone she's *hated* all of her life, could change that?"

Draco winked at Greg. "Piece of cake."

"Why don't we make this interesting? Make a bit of sport out of it?"

"How would you suggest that we do that?" Severus inquired, curiosity piqued in spite of himself.

"Make it a bet? Say the two of you have two weeks to get Granger and Weasley to admit they're in love with you? If they leave here before then, you can continue back home. Once they've done so, you quite painfully dump them."

"Then when we get back home and the deed is done, you'll have plenty of time to find a suitable wife and comply with this absurd marriage law. Draco, I've said it enough; it's time for you to marry. I agree with this law if only for that. If you had done so and had produced a grandchild for your mother, perhaps she..."

"Enough!" Draco said. "What do we get if we win?"

"More importantly, what happens if they lose?" Greg asked.

"It doesn't matter," Severus said before Lucius could answer, "because I'm not doing it. It's distasteful. *She's* distasteful."

"Salazar's emerald stirring rod," Lucius blurted out. "If you win, I'll give it to you. I know how badly you want it."

"Are you mad?" Draco demanded.

Severus stared at Lucius intently. He must truly be worried about him going after Narcissa to offer that. "And if I lose?"

"You resign as Headmaster."

Severus sighed. "Lucius, they will not make your son Headmaster of Hogwarts. He's too young and inexperienced."

"Let me worry about that. Have we a deal?"

"What about me?" Draco asked. "What do I get if I win?"

"I will sign the deed to the villa in France over to you." Draco didn't have to know he'd planned on doing that anyway once he'd chosen a wife and married. "And if you lose, you will accept the job as Potions professor that Severus has been trying to get you to accept. You should do that anyway, son." Lucius had no doubt that Draco would not

win his part of the bet. Greg was right. There was no way the youngest Weasley would leave Potter for his son. She was just not smart enough to understand how much superior Draco was.

"No, Father, I shouldn't. I despise the thought of it. However, I accept the terms. Severus?"

Lucius had Severus right where he wanted him, and he knew it. He'd coveted that stirring rod since the first time he'd lain eyes on it. *And besides*, Severus thought, *I've already tried to resign as Headmaster, though Lucius doesn't know that*. Because there was a binding contract signed, Severus had to remain as headmaster ten full school years. He sighed.

"Yes, I accept. With all the grief that girl has caused me, it will be my pleasure."

Lucius picked up his glass and toasted all at the table, well pleased. "Let the games begin."

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Hermione and Ginny sat at the bar, each nursing a glass of wine. "Thank you for coming with me on what was supposed to be my honeymoon, Ginny, but it's not necessary. I don't need a sitter. I am perfectly fine. You must be ready to get back. No matter what you say, I know that you really miss Harry."

"No, actually, I don't. It's only been a week. Besides, I think time away from Harry would do us both good. I cannot believe those two! And I know you're still grieving. I don't want to leave you alone."

Hermione shook her head, not wanting to hear it. "It's done, Ginny. I don't want to think about it right now. I just want to sit back, relax, and get pissed."

"Sounds like a plan," Ginny agreed as she toasted her friend.

Just as Hermione took a drink, the bartender placed two frothy drinks in front of them. "From the gentlemen there," he said as he pointed towards Severus and Draco's table.

Hermione sighed and took another long sip of her wine. She was going to have to nip this in the bud. The last thing she wanted was a drink from a man! Turning in the direction the bartender had pointed to so that she could politely refuse the drink, she suddenly choked on her wine as Severus Snape raised his glass to her from across the room.

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This is for the Potter\_Place Variety Challenge:

I. Something Old

A. Oldies but Goodies

1. Revisit a once popular challenge

2. Try to bring it up-to-date by using current canon

a. example: Post DH Marriage Law Challenge where Snape is a half-blood (who survived that snakebite) has to marry because the Ministry says ...

## Chapter 2

*Chapter 2 of 3*

In the midst of the new Marriage Law, Severus and Draco make a wager against Lucius concerning Hermione and Ginny. Who is really the winner in the end?

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Chapter 2

Severus watched Hermione choke on her drink and took a drink of his own to hide his smirk. She was surprised, and that was good. Since he'd decided to begin this little... wager, it was best to keep her surprised. He fully intended to win the emerald stirring rod that he'd coveted since he'd first lain eyes on it.

"We'll, you've certainly got her attention, Severus," Lucius observed.

"Mmmm," Severus said noncommittally. He was watching the two women sitting at the bar whisper to one another, gesturing, no doubt debating as to whether or not they were going to come over to their table to thank them for the drinks.

"What do you think they're on about?" Draco wondered. "They're sitting there clucking like two hens!"

"Oh, I'd wager they're trying to decide if they want to come over and thank us. I'd say Granger wants to and Weasley doesn't."

Greg snorted, watching the waitress he was trying to get the nerve to talk to gracefully take drinks and such to customers. "They'll be over directly. Granger is too bossy not to get her way. She was forever bossing Potter and Weasley."

"Too right," Draco agreed. "I don't know how Potter survives now without Granger gabbing in his ear and telling him how to do every little thing."

"Doesn't look like she's winning this argument, however, does it, old man?" Lucius commented, amused.

Severus looked to Lucius and raised an eyebrow. "I'm not the least bit concerned, *old man*. I'll have her eating out of the palm of my hand before the week is out." Severus held up his palm as if to make his point. "I've clearly got the advantage. She's vulnerable right now after that disaster of a wedding, and let's face it. Compared to Weasley? Well, conversations with me alone would be excellent foreplay."

Lucius nodded. "We'll see."

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Ginny thumped Hermione on the back. "Are you all right? What is it?"

"Do you see who sent us these drinks?"

"No, your hair's in my way. Who? Is it someone that we know?"

"Professor Snape!"

"You're kidding me!" Ginny gently shoved Hermione to the side so that she could see for herself. "I see that he's here with his usual gang of gits."

"We should go over there and thank him," Hermione said, chewing her lower lip, debating.

"You go on ahead, Hermione. I'm not going anywhere near Lucius Malfoy. Or Draco either, come to think of it."

Hermione turned from staring at her former professor and looked at her friend. "It's the polite thing to do, Ginny."

Ginny shrugged. "Bugger that! Look," she started as Hermione stared at her disapprovingly. "I know that you're right, but I can't stand Malfoy. Either of them, really, and I don't want to be around them. As a matter of fact, I think we should just leave here and go to another bar."

"Ginny!" Hermione admonished. "Regardless of what you think of the Malfoys, we do owe Professor Snape a lot of gratitude for his war efforts and likely things we don't even know about. And since he's made this nice gesture of sending us a drink, we ought to go over there and thank him for it."

Ginny peered around Hermione again to see what the men were doing. "Geez, they're still looking over here at us! What ~~is~~*with* them?"

"Probably because they are waiting for us to stop being so rude and show some sort of manners! They're waiting for us to go over and speak to them."

"But don't you think that's a bit odd, Hermione?" Ginny wondered aloud. "The professor never liked either of us, really, so why would he send us a drink? And furthermore, I know those Malfoys hate me and my family. Something's off. I can feel it."

Hermione sighed. "Ginny. We're just familiar faces in a foreign country. We'll go over, politely thank them, and then leave. If *they* are up to something as you seem to think, then simply thanking them won't give them any opportunity to act on it, will it?"

"I don't know..."

Hermione stood, tired of beating a dead thestral. "Enough! You're being childish. Let's just go!"

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Severus watched Granger stand and badger the Weasley girl into coming over. He never let his eyes leave hers as she walked across the room, watching him warily.

He slightly smiled at her and watched her steps falter. This was going to be very interesting.

Once they'd reached the table, Granger smiled politely while Weasley just stood, looking defiant.

"Hello, Professor. We'd like to thank you for the drink. We didn't expect to see you here."

"You're quite welcome," Severus drawled. "Would you care to join us?" he asked.

"NO!" Weasley yelled, finally looking at him.

"For a moment," Granger said at the same time.

There was a battle of wills with Granger winning in the end as they both sat in the two chairs that Goyle had stood to get when Severus had offered them a seat.

Hermione started to speak and then saw the *Prophet* opened to the headline of her wedding fiasco. She nodded towards the paper. "Have you gentlemen been entertaining yourselves?" she icily asked the table at large.

"I got a kick out of it," Draco said and berated himself as he'd earned a glare from Ginny.

"We can't help what the *Prophet* prints, now can we, Miss Granger? Though, I dare say, you're much better off," Lucius told her. "The two of you aren't well matched."

Hermione turned her furious eyes to the Sr. Malfoy. "Meaning that Ron was better off finding a pure-blood like he is? Came to his senses and left the ~~the~~*mudblood* at the altar?"

Lucius looked shocked. "Nothing of the sort, I assure you! I merely meant that you are far more intelligent than he is, and after a while, you would have bored of him. Besides, according to the paper, it was you who left him."

Severus cleared his throat, taking the paper and putting it in the folds of his robe. Turning back to Granger, he asked, "Are you enjoying your job at the Ministry, Miss Granger?"

Hermione turned to Severus. "I've only been there a month, but yes, I am."

"What do you do at the Ministry?" Greg asked her.

Hermione turned her shocked face to Greg. "Er, I work in the Magical Law Department."

"So, you're one of the ones responsible for this absurd law, then, are you, Granger?" Draco sneered at her. "Causing people to marry before they might be ready or have found someone appropriate."

"No, I'm not. That law was being discussed long before I'd ever been hired, though they did let me sit in on a few of the meetings while it was being discussed and debated."

"What might you do now that Weasley is no longer an option for you?" Lucius politely asked, but the knife had been thrown and had hit bull's eye.

Hermione shrugged nonchalantly, but they could see the misery on her face. "I'm not quite sure yet, but I've time to find someone."

"What about you, Mal...um...Mr. Malfoy? You know, now that your wife is leaving you? Have you chosen one of your mistresses to marry you, then?" Ginny asked, wanting him to feel as bad as he was making her friend feel.

Sharp gray eyes left Hermione's face and landed on Ginny's. "What my wife and I do is not your concern, young lady."

"Oh, I see. Well then, forgive me. I wasn't aware that this was a 'mind your own business' conversation, what with you getting all into Hermione's."

Draco snorted, bringing everyone's attention to him. He lifted his drink and saluted Ginny. "Well done, Weasley."

Severus cleared his throat once more, wanting to take control of the conversation before Lucius lost his temper and ruined everything before he could even get started. "Where are you staying while you're here?" he directed his question to Hermione.

"The Hilton Resort," she answered.

"What a coincidence. We are as well," Severus lied without flinching.

"You are?" Hermione asked disbelievingly, looking at the Malfoys. "You're all staying in a *Muggle* hotel?"

"It's one of the best, isn't it?" Lucius asked, seeming to have gotten his composure back. He glanced at his son and very slightly nodded, knowing that as soon as this little tête-à-tête was over, Draco would secure them all a room.

"I suppose," Hermione said doubtfully.

"The Harpies seem to have had a great season. Sorry to see it's over. I caught the World Series Game and you diving head-first towards the ground to catch the Snitch. I suppose you're ready for the new season to start, eh?" Draco asked Ginny and had the pleasure of her turning her surprised eyes in his direction.

"Well," she began, "I won't be playing this season. Harry wanted me to quit since the Marriage Law demands a child within the first year that you're married."

"What? Is he *mad*?" Draco demanded. "You love playing for the Harpies, it shows! Couldn't you have just played this next season and simply gotten pregnant the last month before the deadline?"

Ginny looked down at the table, not wanting to show any emotion to these men. "Harry didn't want to wait," she said. "We discussed that, and he wanted to begin straight away."

"And what King Harry says..."

"Look, Malfoy..."

"Have you discovered the wizarding bookstore here, Miss Granger?" Severus interrupted, trying to think of a way to get her alone. At this rate, she'd never agree to see him again.

"No! I didn't even realize that there was a wizarding book store here! Where is it?"

"I'd be happy to take you myself," he offered. "Why don't we meet in the Hilton's dining room for breakfast, and then after, I'll escort you to the bookstore."

"Oh, no, I wouldn't want to impose on you. If you'd just tell me where it is?"

"It's no imposition, I assure you. None at all. In fact, I quite insist. Say, nine o'clock?"

"If you're sure you wouldn't mind?"

"Not at all," he reassured her.

"What will you do, Weasley, while they're at the bookstore?" Draco asked, trying to think of something they could do together.

Ginny shrugged, obviously impatient to leave. "I'm sure I can find something to do."

"Draco could show you the Quidditch store they have on the island," Lucius offered, pleased that the girl showed no signs whatsoever of being interested in his son. He wanted Draco to get his foot in the door of Hogwarts. He had big plans for him.

"No, thank you."

"I wouldn't mind," Draco said a little too quickly. "Not at all."

"That's very generous of you," Ginny said, clearly not meaning it. "But the fact is, I would mind. I don't want you to take me there or anywhere. We don't like each other, Malfoy, and I don't trust you or your father."

Ginny stood, picked up her drink, and downed the last swallow. Looking at Professor Snape, she said, "Thank you for the drink." Having done her duty by thanking the professor, Ginny turned to Hermione and said, "Ready to go?"

"Yes," Hermione said and stood quickly.

"I'll see you at nine, Miss Granger."

"Nine, then," she agreed as she followed Ginny out of the bar.

---

Harry sat in his office in the Auror department, finishing up the paperwork on a case he'd just closed. He couldn't get Ginny off his mind and the way she'd looked at him the day of the 'wedding that wasn't.'

Ron and Romilda had gone to Gretna Green and wed a few days after Hermione had left. Harry supposed that that had been the right thing to do with the baby on the way, and he had to admit, Ron had never looked happier, but he still felt badly for Hermione.

He understood why she went on the honeymoon, and he even understood why Ginny had gone with her, but damnit, he wanted Ginny here so that they could get on with their lives.

He was tired of worrying about everyone else. For a change, he wanted to worry about himself. He wanted a home, a wife and children. He wanted Ginny. "When is she coming home?"

"Who?" Dean Thomas asked, working on his own paperwork.

Harry sighed. He hadn't meant to say that out loud. "Ginny."

"Ah, right. How is Hermione doing?" Dean asked with genuine concern.

"Honestly, I don't know. She hasn't spoken to me yet. The whole situation has gone arse up."

Dean chuckled. "As it should when a man tries to juggle two women at the same time, no matter how fun it seems. Ron seems fine now, though, I say."

"Yeah, he does. I sincerely believe he loves Romilda in a way that he never loved Hermione, and I can't believe I never saw it."

Dean shrugged. "Why would you? They had always been together, even before they were *together*, if you know what I mean. It just seemed natural that they'd get married."

"I know," Harry agreed. "I think that was the problem. Ron was just marrying her because that is what everyone expected of him. But I wonder if it was the same for Hermione?"

Before Dean could answer, a huge owl dropped an unaddressed letter in front of Harry. "I wonder what this could be."

"I don't know. Open it and see."

Harry opened the letter after performing various spells to make sure there was nothing untoward about the letter. As he read, his mouth dropped open in shock.

"What is it?" Dean asked. "Are you all right?"

Harry shook his head and read the one sentence aloud to Dean. "Narcissa Black requests the honor of your presence immediately."

"Who's Narcissa Black? I only know of one Narcissa, and her last name is Malfoy."

"It's the same one, though it's curious she's using her maiden name. But now that I think on it," Harry said, scratching his chin as he thought, "it seems like she did file for divorce. Could be that she's using Black rather than Malfoy now."

"What do you think she wants?" Dean wondered.

"There's only one way to find out," Harry said as he rose.

"Depending on how long this meeting lasts, I might be back before heading home," he said as he grabbed his cape and walked out.

---

Narcissa sat, delicately sipping wine, waiting for Potter to come to her. She had no doubt that he would; his curiosity alone would bring him there.

She scowled as she thought of her husband. *Blast that man for ruining everything!*

He hadn't started out cheating and lying to her. When they'd first married, she couldn't have asked for a better husband. And Merlin, he hadn't been able get enough of her!

No, it was after he'd gotten mixed up with the Dark Lord that he'd begun to change. And she could blame herself there, as well, for encouraging him to join the cause, wanting only pure-bloods allowed in Hogwarts for the sake of their future children and such.

Well, she'd learned the hard way and paid for her sins a dozen times over. *The children* that they were going to have had become *child*, as her husband had kept telling her it wasn't the right time. Supposedly, he'd wanted to wait until the Dark Lord had come into his full power.

She'd waited all right. And the more involved Lucius had become with the cause, the less he'd become her husband. It hadn't been long before women were being provided to the most faithful followers with Lucius trying to convince her that he was only using them so that he wouldn't anger the Dark Lord.

It was after Potter had ended that reign of terror that she realized that her husband was still continuing with that specific past time and that he had several mistresses. She had confronted him, and although he'd denied it, she'd known better.

But the breaking point for her had been when she'd come home from a trip early and walked in on her husband and some woman in her own bed. The first words out of his mouth had been, "You're home early."

She'd wanted to kill them both, but instead she had kicked them out and changed the wards. Lucius Malfoy could no longer darken her doorstep.

She had gone directly to the barrister and gotten papers drawn up. Now all she had to do was wait for him to sign them, and then he could have as many women as he wanted. Narcissa Black was tired of playing the fool, and she was not going to do so any longer.

Narcissa jumped when she heard the knock on the door. She took a big drink of her wine, trying to quickly get her composure back.

When Harry walked into the room, she stood and smiled. "Mr. Potter, so kind of you to join me so promptly."

Harry nodded. "Your note said immediately. What can I do for you, Mrs. Malfoy?"

"I prefer Black," she informed him. "Have a seat, and I'll pour you a drink. What can I get you?"

"Nothing really," he told her as he sat down. "Just take care of my curiosity by telling me what you need."

"Do you remember your confrontation with the Dark Lord in the forest, Mr. Potter?"

Harry stared at her long and hard before answering her. "It's not likely that I'll ever forget that. Why do you mention it?"

"Do you recall me saving your life there?"

"I do."

"Then, it would seem that you... owe me, I say."

"Ah, I wondered when you were going to get to that. What is it that you want, Ms. Black?"

"You've heard, I'm sure, through the Ministry's grapevine that I'm divorcing Lucius."

"Yes, I've heard something to that effect. Do you need me to testify against him?"

She smiled as she stood and walked over to pour Harry a shot of firewhisky. "Not exactly," she said as she handed him his drink.

Harry looked at the shot she'd handed him. Shrugging, he drank it all in one gulp.

As he knocked the drink back, Narcissa continued, "No, what I want is for you to marry me."

Harry spewed the drink everywhere and coughed a little. "What? What did you just say?"

"I said that I want you to repay the debt you owe me by marrying me, Mr. Potter."



# Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 3

In the midst of the new Marriage Law, Severus and Draco make a wager against Lucius concerning Hermione and Ginny. Who is really the winner in the end?

**Disclaimer:** Not mine, no money

Chapter 3

Narcissa smiled serenely at Harry, cast a *Scourgify* spell to clean up the drink he'd spewed, and went to sit beside him. "I think that you heard me perfectly well, did you not?"

"No, I don't think so! There's no way you said what I thought you said..."

She laughed, just a little. "I do hate to repeat myself, so please listen carefully. I want you to repay the debt you owe me by marrying me. There. Was that clear enough for you?"

"But... but... I can't... You can't... *We* can't! I'm going to marry Ginny!" Harry yelled, poking himself in the chest.

"We most certainly can! No, you're not going to marry *Ginny*," she told him very deliberately. "You're going to marry *me*. You can research it, but due to the debt that you owe me, you must comply." Narcissa raised her hands and then lowered them as if it was done.

"Why? Why would *you* want to marry *me*? You hate me!"

"Hate's such a strong word, don't you think, Mr. Potter?" she asked as she leaned back against the couch and folded her arms across her chest.

"No, *Ms. Black*, I don't. We both know how we feel about one another. So, I'll ask you again. Why?"

"There are several reasons I have for choosing you, and none of which I'm obliged to share with you. My reasons are my own. All you have to do is pay off your debt. And really, you're getting a much better deal than you thought you would, aren't you?"

"What do you mean 'a much better deal'?"

"Must I spell it out for you, then? Why would you despair over a *Weasley* when you could have a *Black*? You're going from slim pickings to the cream of the crop. Really, you ought to be thanking me."

"No, I won't be thanking you. There must be something else I can do to repay you."

"I'm sure that there are lots of things, but this is what I chose. Once my divorce from Lucius is final, we'll begin making plans."

"No."

Narcissa sighed and then shrugged. Standing, she walked to the fireplace, looking up at the portrait of her current husband. "Fine, do your research then. I'm sure that once you've finished, you will begin to see things my way."

"That's where you're wrong. I'll never see things your way, no matter what I find when I research. I want Ginny. I *love* with Ginny! Would that not bother you? To be married to a man who truly wants another? Who would close his eyes when he was with you and imagine another?"

That hit a bit too close for her. "Enough! I'm growing tired of this pointless conversation, Potter. Leave now; do your research. Say your goodbyes to the Weasley girl. Once my divorce is final, I'll contact you."

Without another word, Harry stood and Disapparated, and Narcissa sighed with relief. She closed her eyes and sucked in a deep breath, glad that was over.

She turned and once again looked up at the picture of Lucius.

"It won't work, you know," Lucius sneered at her from the picture. "That boy will never satisfy you the way I do, and I'm sure I won't allow my wife another husband. I'd kill him first."

Narcissa let out a very unlady-like snort. "For the past few years, you've done nothing to satisfy me because you've been too occupied trying to satisfy all the other witches in England." She turned to go, then stopped, calling a house-elf. Pointing to the picture, she instructed, "Please remove that to storage at once, and all other pictures of Lucius." She paused during her instruction. "Except the ones in Draco's room."

As she walked out, she had the satisfaction of hearing the painting call out to her. "You cannot do this, Narcissa! Cissy! Ciiisssssyyy!"

---

Ginny was just lying down to rest after a long night of trying to talk some sense into Hermione. She had tried her best to talk her friend out of meeting with Snape.

Nothing that she'd told Hermione had swayed her at all. If Ginny didn't know better, she'd swear that Hermione was interested in the bat. Shaking her head in denial, she leaned back on her fluffy pillows. "No, she couldn't be. Not really..."

When she heard the lock on her door, she jumped. Sighing, she flung the covers off of her and stomped to the door, jerking it open.

Her eyes narrowed when she realized it was Draco Malfoy on the other side. "What?" she asked irritably.

Draco smiled and held out a pink tulip for her. "Good morning, Ginevra."

She looked down at the tulip and then back into his eyes. "What's so good about it?"

He raised his eyebrow. "Not your rude behavior, that's for certain."

"Look, Malfoy, I didn't ask you to come here. As a matter of fact, why *are* you here?"

He dropped the hand holding the flower, realizing she was not going to accept it. "I wanted to take you out to breakfast and perhaps to the Quidditch store since Gra...er...Hermione will be busy with Severus." He looked her up and down. "But perhaps you're not feeling well? You look as if you haven't slept all night."

"I feel just fine. No, I don't want to go anywhere with you. What's going on here anyway? Why are you suddenly being nice to me, wanting to spend time with me? You hate me and my family, and you always have. Not to mention Harry."

Draco cocked his head in a considering manner. "School's out, Ginevra, but I do agree about not mentioning Potter."

"I know that school's out! But I think that it's safe to say that our feelings for each other go a bit further than Gryffindor versus Slytherin, don't you think? And stop calling me Ginevra! The name's *Ginny*."

Draco shrugged. "Perhaps they used to, *Ginny*, but things change. People change."

"Not that much, *Draco*. Not really. Our fathers still hate one another, don't they?"

"Yes, I suppose that they do. But do we have to mimic them? It's never been you that I hated anyway, you know."

Ginny leaned against the wall by the door, eyeing him skeptically. "Why do you care? What are you on about?"

"I would just like to get to know you better. That's all. Is that so hard to believe?" he asked her, getting aggravated.

"Yes, actually. It is. And do you know something else?" She leaned forward and poked him in the chest. "I don't trust you. I know that you and your friends are up to something; I just can't figure out what. But you can bet I will." She nodded her head for emphasis.

"Paranoid, are you?"

"When it comes to you and your lot? You better believe it. In the meantime," she said as she backed slowly back into her room, "bugger off!" she told him as she slammed the door in his surprised face.

---

Severus sat, scowling into his black tea while Lucius paced the room. "You know I have a breakfast meeting with the Granger girl, Lucius. If I didn't know any better, I would say that you're purposely trying to... sabotage our little bet."

"Don't be ridiculous, man! Who cares about the bet at this moment? Did you not hear me? Narcissa is up to something. I was informed of a meeting with Potter. What could that be about?"

Severus shrugged one shoulder, unconcerned. "It's none of your business now, Lucius."

"That's where you're wrong, Severus. It's definitely my business."

"Your wife is divorcing you, man!" Severus shouted. "You've done this to yourself. Did you think that she would continue to sit idly by while you had your affairs and do nothing?"

Lucius expelled a deep breath and sank into the chair beside Severus'. "I couldn't stop. I had lived that way and done those things for so long that I didn't see any reason for me to quit. I was happy enough."

"Yes, *you* were happy. Your wife, on the other hand, was miserable. Could you not see it? And then when she asked you for the one thing that would actually make her deplorable life tolerable, you denied her. What did you expect?"

"I just can't believe she's going through with a divorce. I had planned to break off the affairs, you know. Or at least be more discreet." Lucius shook his head.

"Liar," Severus accused. "You say that now because you're being held accountable for your actions. You know, Cissy is a beautiful, loving wife, and most men would be honored to have her. But not you, no, not you. Nothing is ever good enough for you, is it?"

Lucius stared at his closest friend for a moment and then began to laugh. A little at first, and then so hard that he had to bend over to hold his stomach. "Of course! She's not going to divorce me. She knows she can't do any better. This is a scare tactic! She wants me to believe that she will so that I'll give her a baby and..."

"Be faithful?" the headmaster asked sarcastically.

"If she wants another child, I'm amenable. I wasn't before, but I don't see the harm in it," Lucius went on as if Severus hadn't spoken.

"I'm very afraid, old man, that you're in for a very rude awakening. I don't believe that she's going to take you back now."

Lucius smirked and looked deeply into his friend's eyes. "Would you care to make a wager on it?"

Setting his cup down, Severus rose. "No. Now, I've got to go. I'm going to be late as it is, and I don't want the girl to think I've stood her up."

Laughing again, Lucius stood to see his friend to the door. "Yes, run along, Severus. I'm even in a good enough mood to wish you luck. I think you'll need it."

"Less luck than you'll need if you think you're going to get your wife back," Severus informed him as he walked out the door.

Severus still heard the laughter as he walked down the hall towards the dining room.

---

Hermione sat at the table, looking around the dining room. Professor Snape was ten minutes late, and she was beginning to think that he wasn't coming.

She was surprised that she felt disappointed. Standing and putting the money on the table for her juice so that she could quickly leave, she said to herself, "Ginny's right. They must've been up to something."

"I hope you don't mean me, Miss Granger," Severus said from behind her, causing her to startle.

Placing her hand over her heart, Hermione said, "Professor! You scared me!"

"Call me Severus. I hope you're not leaving? I'm so sorry to be late."

"Well, I thought that you'd changed your mind." She smiled. "And I have to say, I'm glad that you didn't. Would you like to sit?"

"I would, yes. Have you eaten?"

"No, I was waiting for you," she admitted and then blushed. "Er, what I mean to say is that I thought it would be rude to start before you'd gotten here."

Severus smiled softly. "Quite right. What would you like to have?"

"I think the seasonal fruit looks good."

He nodded and then motioned for a waiter. "The lady will have the fruit, and I'll have the cheese omelet with tea, no cream, no sugar."

After the waiter left, Hermione struggled for something to talk to him about. She couldn't imagine that they had too much in common. "Um, how are things at Hogwarts?"

He raised an eyebrow at her question. "Perfectly fine, thank you. Even better, perhaps, now that there are less... rule breakers in our midst," he teased.

She cocked her head, knowing very well he was talking about her, Harry, and Ron. "Oh? You mean to say that there is no longer a Slytherin House?" she asked in mock surprise.

He stared at her across the table as the waiter appeared placed their food in front of them. Once the waiter left, Severus picked up his tea and toasted her. "Touché."

Hermione smiled. "I have to admit, I'm very surprised that you wanted to meet me here and take me to the bookstore."

"Oh? Why is that?" he asked and then put a bite of his omelet in his mouth.

"Coy doesn't suit you, Severus. It's no secret that you can't stand me and my friends. Ginny was extremely suspicious, you know, and tried very hard to convince me not to meet you. And though I did meet you here, I have some reservations myself."

Severus picked up his napkin and wiped his mouth. "I see. Well, let's get something clear straight away. I do not, nor have I ever, hated you, Hermione. What I hated was the constant danger that you not only put yourself in, but also the others around you as well. And without any regard for the well being of others."

"I've always considered you an extremely bright student, and I thought you might be an interesting person to spend some time with."

"Bright?" She chuckled. "You mean a know-it-all?" Then she sobered. "I suppose I ought to apologize to you for some of the things that we've done, but part of that's what brought us to where we are now, so I can't regret it."

Severus narrowed his eyes and laid his fork down on the table. "You can't regret it? No, I don't suppose an innocent like you would regret much about that time. When I think of the times I had to go before the Dark Lord and lie and evade, be punished..."

He stopped himself from exploding. He didn't want to lose the bet before he'd even finished breakfast with the girl.

Hermione watched, fascinated, as he pulled his anger back. She instinctively placed her hand over his in a comforting gesture. "Then I do apologize, Professor. I never thought, and I should have, especially after I realized you were a spy."

He expelled a deep breath. "Yes, well. It's done now, and thanks to your buddy, the Dark Lord will never punish anyone again."

Hermione looked deeply into her former professor's eyes. "But it's not that simply, really, is it? You still have to live with the past. And remember."

Leaving his hand under hers, he told her, "You live with what you have to."

"Yes," she agreed.

Severus pulled his hand from underneath Hermione's reluctantly and asked, "Are you ready to go to the bookstore?"

Smiling, she said, "Yes, I am. I can't wait to see it."

He stood and offered her his arm. "Shall we then?"

As Hermione rose and took his arm, she thought, *This is going to be an interesting afternoon*

---

Lucius was livid. He'd spent most of the morning on Floo calls with his contact at the Ministry. He hadn't like what he'd found out about his wife.

He decided he was going to have take a quick trip home to straighten her out before continuing his vacation. The only problem was, he couldn't Apparate directly into the house. He began to bang on the door.

"Narcissa! You open the door this instant! There is something wrong with the wards here! Narcissa! Cissy!"

When the door burst open, Lucius was surprised to see Narcissa rather than his house-elf.

"Must you carry on so, Lucius? Really," she admonished.

"What is the meaning of this? What can I not Apparate into the manor?"

"Honestly. Under the circumstances you can hardly expect me to allow you into my home to come and go as you please."

"Have you lost your mind, woman?" he asked dangerously low. "There are no *circumstances* here."

Narcissa lifted her chin in challenge. "Don't be absurd. I know that you received the divorce papers. Don't try to deny it."

"There will be no divorce. Nor will there be a marriage to Potter. Get notion out of your head now. You are and will remain ~~my~~ wife."

"No, I will not remain your wife. And there *will* be a divorce. You can't stop it, not with the evidence I have on your affairs and your refusal to have more children with me."

"I changed my mind about that. I told you that I would give you more children, Cissy."

"Oh, yes. Someone else for you to abandon and leave all alone while you're out doing Merlin knows what. Well, no thank you."

"This divorce you're after is not going to happen. Face it."

"Make no mistake. It will happen. I've left no stone unturned, Lucius. I'm well within my rights to do this, and it will happen."

"You will not marry Potter! I'll kill him first!"

Narcissa smirked evilly. "Well, you're certainly welcome to try. Better men than you have tried. And failed."

Lucius growled. "You can't convince me that that boy wants to marry you. He wants to live in squalor with the Weasleys. He won't do it."

"Oh, but he will. I've seen to that just as I've seen to you." She lifted her lips. "Kiss me goodbye, darling. It's the very last time your cheating, lying lips will ever touch mine."

Narcissa gasped as Lucius dragged her to him and kissed her passionately. She struggled in vain to fight him off. When he finally released her, she was gasping for breath.

"You're mine. It would be wise for you to remember that."

Narcissa wiped the back of her hand over her lips. "Me remembering that I belong to you was never the problem, Lucius. Our problem has always been that you can't seem to remember that you were supposed to belong to me as well."

She lowered her head and wiped the falling tears. "I've nothing more to say to you. I will have your things sent..." She looked up. "Where are you staying?"

"Never mind about that. I'll be back."

Resigned, she nodded. "With a mistress then."

"NO! Not with a mistress! I'm staying in room 302 at the Leaky Cauldron." He didn't see the need to tell her he was currently on vacation.

"Okay, I'll send your things there. Goodbye Lucius."

"Narcissa..." he started, but she shut the door.

"You may have won this round, my dear, but this war is far from over," he said to the door just before he Apparated back to the Hilton.