

The Last Dance

by Anthony Devon

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Hermione sat at the edge of her bed, staring blankly out the window into the moonlit skies over the listless grounds. The Yule Ball was over. The night's events had left her physically exhausted, yet emotionally charged and infuriated. Unwilling to relinquish the night, she slipped out of her gown and into a comfortable pair of slacks and sweatshirt before heading out of the dormitory and wandering through the dark halls of Hogwarts. It was a reckless action that seemed to suit her circumstance more than her person.

"Idiot," she gritted to herself as she relived her earlier argument with Ron in her head. "I'm off the point? What nerve!"

She kept on through the halls, careful not to encounter any Prefects along the way, unsure as to where her destination was or how long she was going to pursue it. She simply felt as though she needed to be in motion. In her mind, she was convinced that somehow this process would help her sort everything out.

Mulling to herself, it was not long before she realized that she was entirely unaware as to where she had wandered. Hogwarts was vast and expansive. Hermione never fooled herself into believing that she knew of every nook and turn. This area of the castle seemed dark and unfamiliar. She found herself at the top of a short stone staircase that descended to a floor with halls exiting in the four corners.

Already frustrated, Hermione had allowed her emotions to disorientate her, further fueling her fury. Her first thought was to backtrack until she found something familiar. Perhaps the library would allow for some relief.

"Fraternalizing with the enemy," she huffed, again mocking Ron's previous statements as she turned back towards the hall from whence she came, shifting from one foot to the other as she contemplated her next direction.

"Talking to oneself is often the foremost sign of insanity," came a voice from the base of the stairs.

Hermione spun around, instinctively drawing her wand, and saw a fifth year wheel around from under the stairs with several books under his arm. He was rather tall and slender, almost to the point of delicate. His dark, fine hair was pulled back into a tail that hung just beyond his shoulders, exposing the hollowed and defined features of his face. His bright green eyes were evident, even from the distance, although they seemed to possess an unnatural darkness about them. It appeared that he had attended the Yule Ball, as he was still wearing his long dark dress robes. Aesthetics aside, however, he was currently an unwelcome obstacle in Hermione's evening.

"What are you doing here?" Hermione asked angrily, her wand still at the ready.

"I could ask you the same," the boy replied calmly as he ascended the stairs.

"You're not supposed to be in the halls after hours!" Hermione went on.

"Again, the same," the boy countered, ascending further.

"Stay where you are!" Hermione threatened, rearing her wand back in lieu of an offensive strike.

The boy put his free hand up defensively and smiled with a devilish grin that, for some reason, raised a desire in Hermione to strike at him then and there.

"Surely, you're not going to attack me right here in the stairway?" He smirked. "We've barely met."

"Just ..." Hermione shouted. "Just go away!"

The boy raised an eyebrow and shrugged.

"Normally, I am not one to be confrontational," he began, although Hermione highly doubted this to be true. "However, I was here first. So I am afraid that, per proper protocol, you should be the one who leaves."

Proper protocol? Hermione began to second-guess her decision not to jinx the boy when he stepped out from under the stairs. How incredibly rude of him to even insinuate she leave.

"I'm not going anywhere!" she retorted in spite. "You leave! It's proper manners!"

"That's a strong argument, but I disagree," the boy said with a grin that made Hermione's face burn with irritation. "So I guess we're at an impasse," he added.

What have I gotten into? Hermione thought. This was not what she had intended at all. She was not exactly sure what she had intended, but it certainly was not this. She was now forced, on principle, to stand her ground in an area she had intended to leave just moments before.

"Perhaps we should start again?" the boy suggested, lowering his hand.

"Start again?" Hermione asked, unsure as to the boy's intentions.

"Yes," the boy smiled, "we can start with introductions first, with wild accusations to follow. Very formal."

Hermione sighed and shrugged, seeing no other alternative at the moment. She lowered her wand and took a few steps towards the boy as he did the same, meeting in the middle.

"Killian," the boy said with the same devilish grin he presented earlier. "Killian Finn."

"Hermione Granger," Hermione offered.

"Hermione Granger," Killian echoed, his grin remaining in place as his head bowed ever so slightly. "Yes, I believe I saw you at the ball with Krum."

"Did you?" Hermione cocked her head with marked sarcasm. "So I can assume you were at the ball as well."

"Only briefly," Killian answered honestly. "I left shortly after the opening dance. No offense to those participating, of course. You, for instance, looked rather radiant."

A warmth rose in Hermione's cheeks. She had not expected such a comment and quickly turned away in a feeble attempt to hide her embarrassment.

"But alas, I soon found myself less than entertained," Killian added. "So I left to find solace in some quiet reading."

"I'm sure your date appreciated your lack of enthusiasm," Hermione mocked in direct reference to Ron's attitude during the Ball. Although not privy to the reference, Killian did not fail to grasp the sarcasm.

"You would almost certainly be right," Killian conceded, "had I actually attended the ball with said date."

"You went alone?" Hermione asked, her tone much more condescending than she had intended.

"I would not have attended at all," Killian explained. "I'm not much for formal engagements. However, Professor Snape instructed us all to make a showing."

"Snape?" A sinking realization arose in the pit of Hermione's stomach.

Killian nodded in agreement. "Who would have thought that he would have such an interest in a display of unity and glad tidings?"

"Then ... you're a Slytherin?" Hermione asked rhetorically.

"And you're a Gryffindor," Killian pointed out. "I guess there are no more secrets between us now."

She had hoped that her instincts had been wrong. He was a Slytherin. Now, Hermione ~~was~~ fraternizing with the enemy. She could hear Ron's voice in her head. Yet, even in light of this revelation, she could not get her mind to accept it. Killian was certainly arrogant, dark, and assuming. All excellent qualities for the House of green and silver. On the other hand, he was articulate, proper, well groomed, and seemed, at first impression, to lack the mean-spiritedness that Hermione had grown to recognize through her previous experiences with Slytherins.

"So what to do now?" Killian went on. "A Gryffindor and a Slytherin? They could not possibly hold an amiable conversation. The Houses would never allow for it. It's one of the unwritten rules."

"I wouldn't say that," Hermione defended, although she did not actually believe it even as the words escaped her mouth.

"Of course you would," Killian retorted. "And you would be right. However, as I see it, you and I are currently the only ones accounted for, and I, for one, consider my House to be nothing more than the place where I lay my head at night."

"That's an interesting perception," Hermione said, allowing her defenses to weaken slightly with a soft smile.

Perhaps he was right. In the very least, Killian outwardly appeared to be different than any Slytherin that Hermione had ever met. She decided, at least for the moment, that she would accept him at his word. If nothing else, it allowed her to stay and continue the conversation without any thoughts of betraying her House. As it was, her desire to be alone was slowly beginning to evaporate.

"So, I've explained myself," Killian said. "And what of you then? You seem to be a bit on edge for someone who was the envy of every girl at Hogwarts this evening. I would have thought by this time you would be long and fast asleep with visions of Viktor Krum dancing through your head."

Hermione paused and gritted her teeth as images of Ron with his inflammatory remarks spewing from his lips passed through her mind. Her expression did not go

unnoticed by Killian, who responded with a raised eyebrow.

"It appears that the Yule Ball did not go as anticipated," he said. "Krum did not get ... inappropriate, did he?"

"No," Hermione defended. "Viktor was a complete gentleman. I wish I could say the same about another certain somebody."

Killian shifted on his feet, rubbing his chin in contemplation while shaking his head with disapproval.

"This is tragic," Killian gasped with theatrical jest.

"What is?" Hermione asked, puzzled at Killian's reaction.

"No girl should leave a ball with an ill memory ingrained in her mind," Killian answered. "No, no, this will not do at all. This must be remedied immediately."

"Really?" Hermione folded her arms, although smiling much more warmly now. "And I suppose you have a suggestion?"

Killian lifted his books, and they slowly floated from his hands, finding a resting place at the base of the stairs. The trick was slightly impressive, although Hermione repressed any expression as such. He then adjusted his robes and straightened his shirt.

"You know," he smirked, "I once had an aunt who often bragged that I dance with an extraordinary grace."

"Is that right?" Hermione laughed.

"Of course, that particular aunt had the grace of a three-legged hippogriff," Killian added. "So her perception may have been slightly unreliable."

Killian extended a hand towards Hermione, who withdrew.

"You're not serious?" she asked. "Here?"

"What better place?" Killian asked in return, glancing about the stairway.

"A Slytherin and a Gryffindor?" Hermione went on. "Your House will definitely not approve."

"Come now," Killian went on. "We're in the middle of the Triwizard Tournament. *International magical cooperation*. Isn't that what they've been preaching all year?"

Killian again offered his hand.

"It's only a dance," he explained with a grin that caused Hermione to blush uncomfortably.

Hermione slowly took Killian's hand and they walked down to the base of the stairs. It was not an enormously large area. Nothing like a dance floor. But it was enough for two people to maneuver around with little difficulty.

"This is silly," Hermione mused. "There's no music."

Killian removed his wand from his robes and gave it a quick flick. *'Cantus Silentium'*, he cast. The soft tones of a string trio emanated from the air. "Remedied." He smiled, returning his focus to Hermione.

Again, Hermione was slightly impressed, but not willing to be outdone.

"I would care for a harp as well," she said as she echoed Killian's charm.

Immediately, the enchanting echo of a harp joined in the trio of strings, filling the air with music fit to dance by. Killian, seemingly equally as impressed, put his arm around Hermione's waist. Now caught in the moment, Hermione put her arm around Killian's shoulder and they began to sway and turn on their own private dance floor.

It's only a dance, she thought, justifying to herself. Just two people sharing a dance. Nothing more than a chance to release some of the emotional stress that she had been collecting throughout the night. There was nothing wrong or improper about it.

As they danced, Hermione noticed immediately that it felt different than when she was dancing with Viktor earlier that evening. While Viktor did not lack grace, he was much larger than Killian, almost overwhelming. Killian's slightness seemed to conform well with Hermione's figure as they swayed together to the soft music playing in background.

"So what troubles would cause a girl such as yourself to wander the halls?" Killian asked after a few moments of silence between them.

"Nothing more than would cause a boy such as yourself to avoid the Yule Ball, I'm sure," Hermione answered.

"Ah, but I attended," Killian came back.

"On orders of Professor Snape," Hermione argued.

"True," Killian conceded. "I had a responsibility to represent the Slytherin House."

"Even though you don't consider yourself a Slytherin," Hermione asked, reminding Killian of his previous statement. "Your House is merely the place where you lay your head at night, right?"

Killian did not respond immediately to Hermione's comment. Instead, he looked away, biting his lip, before returning his gaze upon her. Hermione could tell that she had hit a tender subject and now regretted mentioning it. She half expected Killian to stop and walk off in anger. After a few moments of intensity, however, Killian simply shrugged and sighed.

"I will not deny that I was disappointed when I was sorted into the Slytherin House," Killian finally said. "I had always hoped myself to be a Ravenclaw."

"Why?" Hermione asked cautiously.

"My parents were Ravenclaws." Killian smiled, although his smile seemed to be less confident and more regretful. "My sister was a Ravenclaw as well. I suppose that I just naturally assumed I would follow in their footsteps."

"Maybe you were sorted to the wrong House," Hermione offered. "It's happened before, I'm sure."

This was entirely untrue to the best of Hermione's knowledge, but she could think of nothing else to say. Although she knew that the Sorting Hat chose the House, the wishes and desires of the student were often taken into consideration. This being true, however, it did little to explain Killian. He clearly did not seem to desire his current alignment. This was all very strange. Hermione had never encountered a student who bared any regret regarding their House. Especially not a Slytherin.

"I struggled with that notion myself," Killian explained. "I had hoped that I embodied intelligence, creativity, wit, wisdom; the virtues of a proud Ravenclaw. But, in time, I

came to accept the truth. Ambition, cunning, resourcefulness, and pure blood. I was sorted properly."

"Those are your values then?" asked Hermione, leaning away from Killian and looking him square in the eyes.

"Not my values," Killian reassured. "But they are who I am. I've come to terms with it."

Hermione continued to stare into the eyes of this odd Slytherin, trying to see beyond what he was saying. She wished she could say that his eyes were lying, but they were not. Still, she refused to believe that Killian embodied the values of a Slytherin. It felt wrong. His distaste for the Slytherin House alone would appear to contradict one's membership within.

"And aside from that," Killian added with a smirk, "there's a certain satisfaction of living life on edge of righteousness."

"You mean breaking the rules?" Hermione scoffed rhetorically.

"I would say bending," Killian retorted. "A possible fracture here and there. Like wandering the halls after hours, for instance."

Hermione crinkled her nose at Killian's point.

"Or being a student in possession of a Time-Turner," he added coyly.

Hermione's heart stopped as she froze in mid swing, staring at Killian in bewildered astonishment. Her mind raced with possible responses, but failed at presenting one.

"I don't ... what are you talking about?" she bumbled ineffectively.

"Oh, come on." Killian grinned. "It's understandable though. I'm sure you must have been carrying quite a load last year."

Hermione's comfort level dropped through the floor. What else did Killian know? Why did he know it? Was this nothing more than an elaborate scheme by Malfoy and the Slytherins to get some sort of upper hand on the Gryffindor House?

"Have you been stalking me?" Hermione questioned, pulling away from Killian.

Killian laughed and raised an eyebrow.

"Well, someone thinks very highly of herself," he answered as Hermione suddenly felt quite foolish about her assumption. "It just so happens that I am rather observant. When a pretty brown-haired girl appeared out of thin air in what she thought to be an empty hall, my first thought, naturally, was that I was dreaming. Having eliminated that as an option, the only other logical explanation, outside of Apparating, which we both know to be altogether impossible within Hogwarts' grounds, would be that the aforementioned girl was in possession of a Time-Turner."

There was a moment of silence as Hermione gathered herself, before they began, once again, to sway and turn to the music.

"For your information," she said at last, "My possession and use of the Time-Turner was fully authorized by the Ministry."

"Not every time you used it," Killian quickly added.

Hermione nearly froze again, her heart jumping.

"How do you know all of this?" she asked, exasperated.

"I didn't," answered Killian as Hermione gritted her teeth, realizing that she had walked right into his lead. "It was a calculated guess."

"Wonderful," Hermione huffed. "So you're observant and calculating?"

"I suppose I am," Killian answered proudly, holding his chin up in jest.

Normally these would be traits that Hermione admired. However, she had never had them used against her, and under the circumstances, she did not welcome them at all.

"And what else have you observed?" she asked, her eyes narrowing slightly.

"Honestly?" Killian asked, as if surprised at the request.

Hermione merely cocked her head, waiting for a more appropriate response. Killian chuckled and rolled his head back in thought. After a moment, he returned his gaze upon Hermione, who was now smirking in anticipation.

"All right," he began. "Have a go at this. I believe the Triwizard Tournament is showing the true colors of the champions."

"Oh, really?" Hermione said in a condescending tone meant partially in jest. "Do go on."

"Your friend Krum, for instance," Killian went on. "That hulking mass of testosterone is competing out of fear."

"Fear?" Hermione mocked, smiling. "Very observant!"

"Fear of failing his Headmaster," Killian continued. "As bold and strong as he is, Viktor fears Karkaroff."

"And who wouldn't," Hermione retorted as Killian dipped her unexpectedly, causing her to gasp and slap him on the shoulder.

Hermione was really beginning to enjoy the game they were playing. It was not often that she could hold such a conversation with someone. Most times conversations such as these would end with a vast amount of yelling and one or both participants storming off in separate directions. Killian was turning out to be an excellent counter, something she had not had in the past.

"And Cedric," Killian sighed. "He competes for his father. He competes because he knows of the pride his father feels in all of his accomplishments. Catching the Snitch against Gryffindor, for instance."

"Extenuating circumstances," Hermione pointed out, referring to the Dementors that had stormed the Quidditch Field.

"Explain that to Mr. Diggory," Killian grinned. "And Fleur, she competes to set an example for her sister. She wants to demonstrate grace and strength. Excellent qualities for a young Beauxbaton."

Although Hermione contradicted Killian at every remark, she knew that he actually was pretty well on with his assertions. Perhaps he had oversimplified, but his observations had merit. Of course, she would not give him the satisfaction of agreeing with him.

"And that leaves your friend Harry," Killian went on.

"And why is Harry competing?" Hermione inquired, eager for the explanation.

"That is a very good question," Killian answered. "A glutton for punishment, perhaps."

"That's your observation?" Hermione asked with feigned surprise.

"Don't get me wrong," Killian began. "I believe Harry can fly one hell of a broom."

"Oh, you are observant," Hermione laughed. "Did you notice he has a scar on his forehead as well?"

Killian smiled and narrowed his eyes as he, again, dipped Hermione unexpectedly.

"I also believe," he explained quite articulately, "that Harry Potter is the luckiest person I have ever witnessed."

This comment hit a nerve with Hermione. Her expression dropped suddenly, an icy glare fixed upon Killian.

"Harry is a great wizard!" she defended.

"Great wizards," Killian countered, "are often found to be merely surrounded by greatness."

"I don't know if you're trying to be clever or insulting," Hermione snapped.

"I'm trying to dance," Killian answered in a nonchalant tone. "How am I doing?"

"Moderate," Hermione lied.

"Better than I expected then." Killian smiled. "And I stand by what I said. Harry is surrounded by greatness. Do not sell yourself short."

Hermione wrestled with emotions inside her head. She should defend Harry. She believed Harry was a great wizard. She believed that one day Harry might be considered the greatest wizard ever. But the offhanded compliment had caught her unaware. For the moment, it was not about Harry. She put him out of her mind, absorbing the idea that someone had noticed her, appreciated her, flattered her. No, this moment was not about Harry.

"And what else have you observed?" she asked, almost timidly, unsure as to whether she wanted to pursue this any further.

"About whom?" Killian asked, pulling Hermione closer as they moved about the floor.

Hermione felt her breath shorten and her heart begin to race. Her hand trembled slightly within Killian's.

"About Hermione Granger?" Killian asked rhetorically.

Hermione did not respond. Her eyes were now fixed upon Killian's. She should have felt awkward or uncomfortable, but she did not. What little defenses she had left were fading, and at the moment, she did not care. It was as if the entire world had fallen away around her.

"Hermione," Killian began, "strives for perfection. A madman's quest, as perfection can never be reached. Yet, Hermione fails to recognize her own strengths, instead focusing on her weaknesses."

Hermione felt as though Killian was reading her thoughts and speaking them aloud. A part of her felt violated, a part of her felt exposed while yet another part yearned for more as a fire grew within her.

"Is that all?" she asked softly.

"No," Killian answered, holding Hermione ever closer, his voice almost a whisper. "I believe that true perfection is in the eye of the beholder."

"Do you?" Hermione asked, close enough now to feel Killian's breath upon her lips.

"Yes," Killian assured. "And I believe that you are far greater than you give yourself credit."

"And I don't believe that you are truly a Slytherin," Hermione whispered.

"Perhaps we're both right," Killian suggested.

"Perhaps we're both wrong," Hermione warned.

"Perhaps."

They were so close now that Hermione could feel the warmth of his face on her own. She was barely aware of the music in the background, her heart pounding through her chest with such a force that she prayed Killian could not sense it. Images and thoughts flashed through her mind as she dared herself to continue.

Gryffindors and Slytherins. The Yule Ball. Viktor. Ron. The anger and frustration. What was she doing and why did she not care? She closed her eyes, embracing the moment, waiting for it to happen, wanting for it to happen. She felt Killian's arm tighten around her waist.

"Fraternalizing in the halls after hours, are we?" came an unwelcome hiss from the top of the stairs as the music immediately died away.

Hermione and Killian relinquished each other with a start, awkward and breathless. Hermione tried desperately to control her breathing as her face burned red with embarrassment. Professor Snape, his hands folded curtly in front of him, looked down on the two of them with his usual lack of endearment.

"Mr. Finn, Miss Granger," he said coldly. "I assume there is an exemplary explanation for your presence in this stairway."

"Studying, professor," Killian quick-wittedly responded as Hermione gathered herself.

"Studying," Snape echoed, narrowing his eyes. "Interesting subject. Dance classes, I must assume?"

"Yes," Hermione answered without thinking. "I mean, no, Professor," she quickly corrected before quickly as Killian gathered his books from the stairs. "I'm taking several of the same classes that Killian took last year. We were ..."

"Spare me the collusion," he interrupted sternly. "I might remind you that this is an institute of education and not the place for adolescent experimentation."

Killian and Hermione stood in silence, waiting for the ensuing punishment.

"Although I must say I am surprised, Mr. Finn," Snape added in a cold and malicious tone. "I would have thought your tastes to be less ... studious."

Killian looked at Hermione, whose expression had fallen. She knew what Snape had wanted to say and loathed the idea that a professor could make such comments about any student.

"Well, you must forgive me, Professor" Killian said, his devilish grin returning once more. "But, I believe my tastes to be exceptional."

Hermione's face lit up as Killian took her hand with a bow and kissed her softly across the fingers.

"Goodnight, Hermione Granger," he said as he stood and released her hand.

"Goodnight, Killian." Hermione smiled.

With that, Hermione and Killian parted ways. Given the circumstances, there was little that Snape could do at the moment but sigh and roll his eyes in disgust. He could not very well take points from Gryffindor without taking points from his House as well, so it appeared that the evening's escapades would go on unnoticed.

Before long, Hermione was back in Gryffindor tower. As she made her way to her bed, she passed a mirror and stopped to look at herself. Her hair, which had been done up so nicely for the Yule Ball, had begun to fall. Her cheeks were rosy, her lips frozen in a smile that would not melt away.

As she stood there, recalling her unlikely dance with an even more unlikely Slytherin, Hermione wondered whether Killian had made it to his dorm yet. She wondered what he was thinking about. She wondered if he was thinking about her. As she gazed at the girl smiling back at her from the mirror, Hermione suddenly felt very pretty. For the first time that she could remember, she felt pretty.