

Pesky Pecks

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Series of drabbles written for Dramione Drabbles - 7 Kisses Challenge Valentine's Day 2010. Through the prompts, follow Draco and Hermione's osculation experimentation.

Plans

Chapter 1 of 7

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Draco rushed to the lift in a futile attempt to catch it before it began its descent. He saw a hand stick out and stop the doors from closing as his shoes slid on the marble floor.

"In a hurry, Malfoy?"

He smirked at the man inside the lift.

"Yes, actually," he replied. "My fiancée is waiting for me, Potter."

Draco saw his former schoolmate roll his eyes, and his smirk turned into a wide grin. He pushed a button on the wall, ready to pretend Potter wasn't sharing his air, but it seemed as though his plan to be on time wasn't the only thing he wouldn't be entitled to that evening.

"The latest intelligence has it your department is slacking off, Malfoy."

He wondered idly if Gryffindors were innately unable to issue a convincing threat.

"We're going through a dry spell," he drawled. "You would know what I'm talking about."

Potter frowned. "Why should I?"

"No need to get all defensive on me," he replied. "I'm sure you and your wife will rekindle the flame! After all, Valentine's Day is not too far ahead."

Draco didn't listen to whatever insults the other wizard threw at him because the lift had finally reached the Atrium and he was racing again; he was late already, but he'd better not make matters worse by appearing to have taken his time. His was not the right woman to cross.

He reached the prearranged spot. It was dark all around him due to the fact that nobody used those Floo fireplaces anymore; some were out of order, others hadn't been cleaned in years, and the Ministry had other things to worry about than dusty old fireplaces in the back of the Atrium. Draco glanced around, and sure enough, a cloaked figure was leaning against one of the walls. He tidied his robes, racked his brain for plausible excuses, and walked forward.

His plan was simple enough, in his opinion. He'd sneak up on the unsuspecting and probably annoyed witch, take her in his strong, muscular arms, and snog her senseless. She wouldn't even remember why she had been angry with him! It was perfect.

Draco advanced on her and grabbed her by her shoulders, bringing their faces mere inches from one another.

"I'm here, honey," he whispered huskily.

He leaned in and brushed his lips against hers, muffling her response. He manoeuvred his arms around her slim figure, biting her lower lip like he knew she liked; he congratulated himself when the witch moaned softly.

He released her from his grasp a moment later, listening closely to her heaving.

"Draco!" He heard someone call from behind him.

He turned around, curses for whoever was interrupting them already forming on his lips, but the words died in his throat when he realised who had been calling him.

"A-Asteria?" he stuttered.

The blonde giggled as she jogged up to her fiancé.

"Of course! Who else?" she said. "I'm so sorry I'm late, but Mother wouldn't stop talking about the flowers..."

Draco tuned the witch out to focus on the other one, standing right behind him. He stared at her blankly until she lowered her hood; at that, he gasped.

"Draco, don't be rude!" Asteria chided him. "It's a pleasure to see you again, Miss Granger."

"Likewise," she said.

"I trust you received your invitation to the wedding?"

Granger smiled. "We did, thank you."

Draco couldn't take his eyes off the bushy-haired witch talking to his fiancée. There was no way he had been kissing Granger! Her lips couldn't have been that soft. Asteria! His fiancée's lips were what he should be thinking about, not Granger's!

"Well, Draco, let's go," Asteria said at last, tugging his arm.

He followed her, glancing one last time at the other witch.

Granger was wickedly smiling at him.

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Prompt: First Kiss.

Pie

Chapter 2 of 7

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He tucked his hands into his pockets and looked up and down the street. It was pouring; he could hear the raindrops against the window of the restaurant and on his hat as they trickled down on his face.

Draco was no smoker, but that day he would have given anything for a fag. His eyes travelled up Diagon Alley to land on the signpost of Ollivander's. He had been meaning to have his wand checked, though with the upcoming wedding and everything... He shook his head. He had left the restaurant to *stop* thinking about the wedding!

He started walking towards the store, trying to remember at what time the elderly-looking owner closed for lunch. They had started at half past eleven, so it couldn't be later than twelve now. Draco's hopes were crushed though when he reached the front door, as the sign clearly read *closed* in fancy lettering.

He sighed.

"Malfoy?"

At the sound of her voice, he suddenly realised the other reason why he had abandoned his own rehearsal luncheon. He felt like cursing. He turned and found himself staring into the eyes of Hermione Granger, the very witch he had inadvertently kissed a few weeks prior.

Draco was still at a loss as to why Asteria had invited Granger and her good-for-nothing boyfriend to the wedding. Although, he supposed, his fiancée didn't know of his predicament.

"Yes, Granger, that is my name," he said with all the coldness he could muster.

He noticed she was wearing the cloak she sported every day at the Ministry. He had never paid the slightest attention to her clothing before, but after their ~~encounter~~, his eyes had unconsciously begun to follow her.

She huddled under the awning of the shop and produced a plate from under the cloak. A slice of the apple pie Asteria had been so insistent about.

"Your mother," she explained.

He stepped in the dry alcove too, took the proffered plate and stared at the witch. How was he supposed to eat?

"Granger," he charged, "where is my fork?"

"There is no fork," she said. "Use your hands."

He widened his eyes, but before he could say anything to her, she had lifted the slice off the plate and sunk her teeth into it. The sickeningly sweet stuffing of the pie dribbled out of her mouth as she chewed, and Draco positively shrunk when she replaced the slice on the plate. He couldn't believe he had entertained the notion of Granger being anything less than irksome in the past few weeks.

"Like this, see?" she asked, innocently.

The cart of a passing hawkers hit the muddy pond in front of them, splashing dirt all over their legs. This time, Draco couldn't help cursing out loud. As soon as his gaze fell on the witch standing next to him, his already wide-opened eyes widened even more.

There, on her chin and under her nose, stray drops of custard and apple pieces had mingled with the muddy water of the pond. That woman was gross beyond nature! She and that brawny, uncouth boyfriend of hers deserved each other.

Draco closed his eyes.

He was startled to hear Granger's voice next to his ear.

"Malfoy," she breathed. "Is something the matter?"

"You're filthy," he said simply.

He didn't hear her recoil from him, so he peeked through his left eye only to learn she had pushed up to her toes and was impishly staring at him. Mud and custard and all.

"I've always been filthy to you," she said. "I guess it's about time you get filthy too."

Draco tried to back away from her, but there was only a solid wall behind him and seconds later, her mouth was on his. He kept his arms to his sides, determined not to repeat his actions in the Atrium; that is, until she brushed her tongue against his lips. He caught a bit of that apple pie he had dropped in his attempt to shrink from her and opened his mouth slightly to taste more; he got his wish.

Later, upon re-entering the restaurant, he found a droplet of custard on his cheek and shuddered.*Gross.*

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Prompt: Dirtiest Kiss.

Plant

Chapter 3 of 7

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The fireplace roared to life, and seconds later he was stepping out of it to welcome the quietness of his office. He checked his watch, and sighed. The meeting wouldn't start for another hour.

Draco strode up to his desk and winced at the sight that welcomed him. Between his monthly report and his neatly organised pens, a flowerpot had recently taken its place, and the plant was softly impregnating the air, the office, and his clothes with its unmistakable perfume. It had been *her* idea, of course.

"An Asteridae to remind you of me," she had said, handing him the pot plant.

He felt the sudden urge to squash it now. She was being unreasonable! It reminded him for the umpteenth time what a spoiled little child she was. Draco pinched the bridge of his nose, slumping into his chair. He knew the argument had started out of nothing; he knew they hadn't meant half the stuff they had yelled at each other; he knew it was the huge ceremony planning they had undergone in the last two months taking its toll on their sanity... He knew it, yet he couldn't shake the feeling that something had changed. Draco lazily tore a leaf from the plant to fiddle with it.

There was a knock on his door.

"Mister Malfoy?" His secretary sounded miffed. "There's someone here for you," he said, and then paused. "She hasn't got an appointment," he finished accusingly.

Draco tilted his head upwards and stared at the ceiling. He was in no mood to entertain, but the choice was not his; if his boss decided to send him someone, he had to at least listen to the woman.

"Send her in," he said a little loudly.

The door clicked open. He stood, preparing himself to make a show of his good manners before sending whomever it was on their merry way; he brushed the leaf against his lips, hiding a smirk at his own shrewdness.

"Granger?" he asked, surprised to see *her*, of all people.

The witch smiled, taking off her cloak and her hat and placing them carefully on the hook behind the door.

"I met Harry on the way to my office," she said. "He asked me to deliver a message."

Draco relaxed, if only slightly, and stepped away from his desk; the residual anxiety at seeing Granger on his territory caused him to bump his hand against the flowerpot, and several of the scarlet blossoms plummeted to the floor.

"Bugger," he muttered.

"What is it?" Granger asked.

He stared at her. "Bittersweet."

She frowned. "You mean belladonna."

Draco wasn't listening anymore; his mind had gone back to his argument with Asteria, and a small, but persistent voice, was telling him ~~he~~ she was the reason why he had wanted to pick a fight with his fiancée. He hated her for it. What right did she have to come between them?

Granger's lips were moving. His brain told him he should stop brooding and listen to her; that was the sensible thing to do. However, if he wasn't in the mood to entertain, he was even less in the mood to do the right thing. His eyes fell on the bittersweet, and he considered how fitting it was that she'd usurp the Asteridae part of the plant and highlight the poisonous quality of it instead.

"Are you even listening to me?" he heard her ask.

He spun his head in her direction and closed in on her in two quick steps. She gulped. Still, it was only a moment's hesitation, and then her eyes locked on his, conveying the message he had been resentfully waiting for.

It was an angry kiss, meant to tell her how much he despised her; Draco didn't go for sweet or soft. He battled with her tongue and bit down on her lip. He resolved he'd punish himself later for the ignoble pleasure he got from hearing Granger whimper, or he'd get a house-elf to do it for him.

"Draco," she whispered, breaking the contact.

Her lips were bruised, and her lipstick smeared. He took her face into his hands and rested his forehead against hers; he smelled the scent of the plant in the air around them, and it prickled his nostrils.

He thought that if he stared at her long enough, the rest of the world would disappear.

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Prompt: Bittersweet Kiss.

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A/N: *Bittersweet, or nightshade, is a plant related to the potato, typically having poisonous black or red berries. When not in bloom it is often confused with the belladonna variety of the same plant.*

Pawn

Chapter 4 of 7

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Asteria would cry, but not because she was madly in love and couldn't bear to live without him. She would cry because Draco was going to cancel the wedding, three days before it was due to take place.

He stared at the door of his office, replaying the events of a mere half hour before in his mind. Granger's words had cut deep, reminding him of the stereotype she still thought him to be; being his mistress wasn't an option, as she had told him before exiting his office. Had Draco considered it? He had to admit it would have been the easy way out of the mess he had got himself into, but no, she deserved better than that. Hell, *he* deserved better than living with Asteria by day and cheating on her by night.

He heard his secretary's voice through the door. "The meeting, Mister Malfoy."

"Postpone it," he ordered, walking out of the office.

The lift at the end of the corridor took an incredible amount of time to reach his floor, allowing Draco a minute to sort himself out. When the golden grilles trembled, signalling the arrival of the lift, he tried to relax his shoulders. It was going to take a good deal of resolve to go through with what Granger was asking of him.

The singsong voice of the announcer rang through the empty hall as Draco stepped inside the lift and surveyed the other occupants. The Chinese-looking witch in the back looked faintly familiar, but he kept his mouth shut lest he made a fool of himself by talking to her; unsurprisingly, the Fates had decided otherwise.

"Malfoy, right?" the witch asked. "Su Li."

He gave her what he hoped was a blank look.

She sighed. "I work with Asteria in the Department of International Magical Co-operation."

Of course you do, Draco thought bitterly.

"It's a pleasure to meet you," he said, shaking her extended hand.

Li congratulated him on his engagement, then she confirmed that she would be at the ceremony on Sunday and inquired about their honeymoon plans. Draco smiled politely, coolly replying to her questions even if his insides were squirming; he was exceptionally glad when the lift reached the Atrium. Everybody got out, but Li trailed after him as he trekked down the hall towards the fireplaces.

This was exactly why Draco always used his own Floo connection.

"Oh, look who's here!" the Chinese witch exclaimed, pointing ahead of them.

Asteria and Granger were walking towards them, deep in conversation. He blanched. The party of four greeted halfway, next to the Fountain of Magical Brethren, and Draco had to admire his fiancée for putting up the façade that things were just peachy between them. If he didn't know her, he'd have known that her voice was so hoarse because of the vicious yelling.

He pointedly refused to even acknowledge Granger's glare instead.

"Hermione and I met at Fortescue's," Asteria was saying. "Had a little chat over coffee." She looked at the other witch for confirmation. "Girl talk, you see."

Draco nodded. Li cut in to share her useless insights on the newly re-opened parlour. He wished he knew where the switch to turn her off was; she was more annoying than Granger had been in school. *Granger...* She had bored a hole into his head by now. What did she expect? He couldn't very well say anything there and then in front of half the Ministry.

He got an uncomfortable feeling of foreboding when the bushy-haired witch cleared her throat; it was an impressive imitation of that Umbridge person he had had to endure in his fifth year. His eyes turned to look at her against his better judgement; she wouldn't dare, would she?

Several things happened at once, and Draco had barely the time for a stray consideration; this was one of those cases where a Pensieve would come in handy. Granger grabbed his arm forcefully, pulling him closer; he heard Li gasp and Asteria's quiet laughter cut short by an indescribable noise. Draco felt his ears ring and his pulse quicken as the witch before him pecked his dry, thin lips with her plump, soft ones, letting go of him in less than a heartbeat.

He expected a stunned silence and, possibly, a sound slap, except neither came.

"Draco!"

He spun on his heels to stare at his fiancée's... hair? He blinked. Asteria was standing with her back towards him and Granger, completely and inexplicably drenched. Li, right beside her, wasn't faring any better. Asteria turned with a glum look in her eyes and she stepped forward to hug him tightly; her wet clothes hung on her figure like dirty rags.

"I am so cold!" she cried. "What a stupid joke!"

Draco glanced around. Ministry employees were busying themselves around the Fountain, shouting orders and reproaches at one another; witches and wizards dripping water complained animatedly with those who, like him, had retained their dryness.

He sighed in relief.

However, as Asteria detached herself from him, he caught sight of Granger, and the brief respite was undoubtedly over. The sly demeanour she was broadcasting confirmed his fears. Her public display of affection had been meant to send a clear message: though this was no game to her, she wasn't going to play nice.

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Prompt: Public Kiss.

Power

Chapter 5 of 7

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The flowerpot smashed on the wall beside his head.

"Asteria!"

"Rot in hell, Draco!"

One of the china plates they had so carefully picked at the store missed him by a mere inch, but the fiasco didn't deter Asteria's wrath; if anything, it spurred her into using the *whole* set as bullets. Draco dodged, thanking his training in the Quidditch team with every collision he managed to avoid.

So, his calculations had been wrong, and his fiancée had yet to shed a tear since he had broken the news to her. Her delicate features had morphed the instant the words 'cancel' and 'wedding' had left his mouth, and she now resembled a hideous mélange between a Banshee and a Veela.

"Get out of my house!" she screamed at last, aiming the serving plate at him.

Draco hurried over to the fireplace, grabbing a handful of Floo powder from the mantelpiece. He heard the china crash at his feet and realised he couldn't hang around much longer if he wanted to make it out alive. He threw the powder into the fire and stepped forward, shouting '*Malfoy Manor*' over the sound of Asteria's angry shrieks.

She hadn't even wanted to listen to him; she had started yelling and chucking things at him instead. Not that it mattered now, but it was a side of her he wouldn't have minded never getting to know. He looked around the huge room he had arrived into and tried to reason with the guilt he was feeling. Their marriage hadn't been exactly *arranged*, but then it needn't have been. They had known each other, liked each other to a certain extent and they were pure-bloods. Both families couldn't have asked for more in the post-war world they were living in.

His hand had just closed around the binding of a book when green flames erupted in the fireplace. Asteria had followed him? Had the witch no pride left? Obviously she had, because it was The Boy Who Lived who was standing in his living room when he turned around.

Trust the saviour of wizardkind to abuse his powers as Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement and come barging into his home. Draco stared at him confused and vexed at the invasion.

Potter looked even more incensed than him.

"You are despicable," he seethed. "I saw you yesterday! I bet you're doing it out of spite, just to get at me." He took one menacing step forward. "You're *resing* her."

At last understanding whom he was talking about, Draco rolled his eyes at the theatrics. Granger had told him she had no intention of hiding any longer after he had delayed confessing to Asteria for another day and that she was going to tell her friends; Potter had been the first of the list, he supposed, along with his red-headed wife. He hadn't exactly expected to be welcomed with open arms, but this pantomime was pitiful.

He was so busy thinking about Gryffindors' talent for misunderstanding and misinterpreting information that he didn't notice how with that one step Potter had taken, they were now too close for comfort. He was standing before Draco with his fist in the air ready to strike. He heard, rather than felt, the blow a few seconds before it made contact with his nose.

"Harry!"

Granger was hardly out of the flames when she lunged towards her friend, yanking him away from Draco. Her looks – shabby pyjamas and hair even messier than normal – didn't suit the ire etched on her face.

Her slap echoed through the empty room; even if he hadn't been on the receiving end, to Draco the action itself brought back memories of his third year that he had wished to bury in the deep recess of his mind.

"Why?" she asked him with tears in her angry eyes. "I made my choice, Harry, and I told you he has nothing to do with it!"

Draco advanced on the duo. "Nothing?"

"Oh, you shut up!" she snapped.

Potter seemed to think the exchange was only further proof of what he had been looking for, and he disentangled himself from his friend's grasp.

He looked at Draco.

"I'm going to tell you something your own father would tell you," he said. *"I forbid you to go anywhere near Hermione."*

Maybe it was his tone or the uncanny situation they were in, but Draco felt something upon hearing Potter's last sentence, as if more than mere vocal activity were taking place in his home. Those were not the words of a protective friend or a trained Auror; that had sounded more like an order, as if – dared he think it – *The Boy Who Lived* had used an Unforgivable on him, trying to get him to obey his directive.

"Malfoy," Granger started, "are you all right?"

Potter grinned in triumph when Draco failed to answer her. Draco decided there and then that if The Boy Who Lived didn't like seeing him with his friend, he would have to set him straight. Granger, who seemed to have sensed something was off, came to his side. Draco smirked at the other wizard as he slid one arm around her waist.

"*Don't you dare...*" Potter said in the same domineering tone.

"You don't get to choose for me," Draco lashed back.

He positioned his hands on Granger's hips and looked into her eyes. He immediately felt a tug, something that attempted to rid him of his desire for the bushy-haired witch; a voice was telling him that he wasn't allowed to touch her and that he needed to step back now to avoid nastier consequences than the Mark he bore on his arm. He shook his head and looked back at Potter. The man was gripping his wand and muttering under his breath; his green eyes were shooting daggers.

"Kiss me," he heard Granger whisper.

He nodded and hoped it would make the voice in his head stop. As they closed the small distance between them, he brushed her lips carefully but wasted no time in deepening the kiss once nothing too painful happened; the voice was still there, but Granger's rushed heartbeat against his put a damper on everything else. He savoured kissing her for the first time, allowing her tongue to explore his mouth but demanding the same in return. Draco's senses were amplified by his desperate need to fight the pull Potter was keeping on him, and the liplock grew hungry until they both ran out of breath; they separated, still keeping their eyes closed.

"As I said, you don't get to choose, Potter."

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Prompt: Forbidden Kiss.

Prospect

Chapter 6 of 7

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"*Episkey!*"

The loud crack of his nose mending made Draco's skin crawl, but he bit back a curse and touched his face tentatively. He peered at the witch sitting next to him on the sofa, venturing a wan smile in her general direction.

"Thanks."

Granger waved her hand. "Don't mention it."

It seemed strange to have her there, in his home, in a room that was very much similar to the drawing room in which she had been tortured by his aunt. Mainly, it was her attire, or lack thereof, that stood in stark contrast with the lavish furniture all around them. It was also the mere fact that, in the years they had known each other, they had never had a real conversation. Even now, after sharing a total of five earth-shattering kisses, Draco couldn't recall talking to her for more than three minutes, in his office, about the blasted bittersweet plant.

"*Alea iacta est*," he muttered.

The die has been cast.

"I gather you told her," Granger said; her gaze was scanning the books of his personal library with a critical eye.

He nodded. "She threw china at me," he told her.

The corner of her lips curved upwards, but she didn't comment; instead, she breathed deeply and rested her back against the sofa. Draco imitated her, stretching his arms into the air and lowering them slowly as his body fell back, not so subtly sneaking his left arm behind Granger's shoulders. Her small smile widened a little, and she began nibbling her lower lip with her teeth, suppressing a chuckle.

"What?" he asked, intent on keeping the volume of his voice to a quiet murmur.

"Draco Malfoy." She turned her head slightly to look at him. "Are you hitting on me?"

He didn't even try to hide his smirk. "Maybe," he said.

There was a gleam in her eyes that he had never seen before; she gave the impression of being faintly amused by his surreal attempt at romanticism. He had to admit he was a little puzzled by his behaviour too. He had been taught how to court a woman, but Granger was nothing like Asteria. His former fiancée had been meek and unassertive, hence his surprise at her earlier outburst of rage.

"You don't need to play these games with me," Granger said.

"Hermione," he said softly, "I'm not playing games."

"We're already past the unspoken attraction," she countered. "I already know you want to be with me and..."

"I want to do things the right way," he interrupted.

Granger blinked twice in a terribly slow motion. She nervously licked her lips, and Draco saw the fingers of her right hand fidget on her knee. Her eyes were searching his own, though he couldn't understand what she was looking for, and when she spoke, it was in a faint whisper as if she were afraid of her own words.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

Why the sudden change? Draco wondered. Her mischievous, confident side he had had the pleasure of observing in the weeks she had pursued him had been incomprehensibly overruled by this less spirited half of her; he was slightly taken aback and thoroughly confused.

"I plan to date you properly, now that I'm a free man," he said.

Her hand gave a small spasm that his keen eyes did not miss, and without knowing the reason for it, he finally understood. It was fear. Granger was afraid of him taking control; it was something she had cleverly avoided dealing with in the past by making sure she was always the one to set up their encounters. However, now that she had got him to do the one thing she couldn't do herself – dispose of Asteria – she had realised she wouldn't be the one in charge of their *relationship* any longer; the prospect had driven all her confidence out of her.

Draco smiled.

"What?" she asked, thus mirroring his own previous confusion.

"Do I have your permission to kiss you?"

Granger bit her lip, clearly trying to decipher his intentions.

"I guess so..." she said.

She didn't sound at all convinced, but he supposed in the state she was in, he couldn't bank on anything more than a diffident consent. His arm, still behind her shoulders, served as leverage to press her flush against him, and he searched her fidgeting hands with his own left hand. He held her, waiting for her to figure out that he was letting her be in control of the situation. Her overactive mind was still doubtful of him though, and when she moved forward, her kiss was timid, and she kept her eyes half-open for a few seconds longer than usual.

Usual. Draco couldn't wait to apply that word to more aspects of their relationship.

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Prompt: Shy Kiss.

Potential

Chapter 7 of 7

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There was a perfectly good explanation as to why dating came as natural as breathing to Draco: he had had an exemplary upbringing, and courting women was part of the

package. Asteria, in his parents' eyes, should have been the feather in his cap; dating her had been easy. However, predictably enough, Granger didn't even begin to compare with the other witches he had gone out with in the past. To put it simply, she didn't play by the rules.

They had gone out on four dates already. Draco would owl her, suggesting a reasonable time when he could swing by and pick her up at her flat; Granger would refuse, claiming they would only waste precious time. Instead she'd write a time and a place to meet at. Upon greeting her, he would peck her almost imperceptibly on the cheek, but she would withdraw almost immediately, diverting his attention to the uncanny chill of the evening or to the latest issue of the *Daily Prophet*.

Draco had long agreed with himself that if his 'doing things the right way' had been interpreted as doing things *her* way, so be it. Nonetheless, it was how their outings together always ended that irritated him; this was not the *usual* he had been planning to achieve with her. Before midnight struck, when he would gentlemanly offer to take her back to her flat, his offer would be politely declined. She was a grown woman, she would tell him, and she didn't need a bodyguard to escort her home.

Well, Merlin be damned he didn't manage to walk her to her door that night.

"Here I am, sorry to have kept you waiting!" she greeted him cheerfully.

Draco smiled pleasantly. "I haven't been here long," he lied.

He put forward his arm, which she took with a playful curtsy, and they started walking down the street.

"So where are we going tonight?" she asked.

"The theatre," he said simply.

It had taken him some effort to plan the evening. It was Valentine's Day and while he couldn't care less about the silly tradition, they had already agreed to go out that Sunday without bothering to check a calendar. Draco had therefore had less than two days to arrange everything, but that was part of the challenge with Granger and he revelled in it.

"Here?" She looked puzzled. "In Soho?"

"Yes."

The challenge tonight was to show her he had *truly* changed, and seeing as part of her heritage was Muggle, going into Muggle London seemed like a good idea. He was just lucky that the entrance to the Leaky Cauldron was so close by to the city theatre district; they arrived at the playhouse in no time.

Granger was still looking at him warily as he collected the tickets and led her into the hall, but when the lights dimmed she had to put a damper on her doubts to enjoy the performance. Draco was quite pleased with his choice and even more so after stealing a glance at his date to find that, by the end of the second act, she was clutching his arm in sheer excitement; Hamlet had just revealed his plans to *catch the conscience of the King* and, in Draco's opinion, the play had barely begun.

"I thought that was an interesting adaptation," he said.

He really did. In the four hours they had sat in there, Granger hadn't been the only one enjoying herself.

"Yes," she replied, "yes, it was."

Her voice was subdued and her gaze was downcast; he stopped walking.

"Did you not like it?"

That seemed to rouse her, and she lifted her head with a jerk. She asked him to forgive her, that the play had affected her more than she could have anticipated, and she just needed a moment to process it all. Draco smiled at her and when they started walking again, they were conversing about the actors' performance and the choice of costumes. He went as far as to suggest they might stop by a pub and talk a bit more over drinks, but Granger heard a distant clock chime the hour and dismissed the idea; it was getting late, and they were both working the following morning.

Charing Cross Road was, for the most part, empty and near the Leaky Cauldron, there was no one in sight. They lingered on the sidewalk for a few minutes, their conversation slowly dying; Draco could see Granger's fingers itching to grab her wand and Disapparate away.

"I had a good time tonight," she said.

"Me too," he replied.

She caressed his cheek with a small smile in her eyes. He had learnt to recognise the signs of her departure, and he knew exactly what she would say, how she was going to break it to him that then, like on any other of their dates, she would be taking herself home. In turn he would make a half-hearted attempt at changing her mind, but Granger would huff and be on her way.

He saw her lips move, but the sentence she was supposed to be uttering wasn't in sync with the movement. Draco blinked.

"I'm sorry, what?" he asked, leaning closer.

Her smile grew wider. "I said," she began, "take me home, Draco."

Maybe she had been waiting for something, he considered, or perhaps she had still been testing the waters and allowing him to determine when the date ended meant giving him more power than she deemed advisable. He had gone over the details of their outings, but other than her already established desire for control, why couldn't she give him an inch? He was ready to swear he wasn't going to take the rest of her arm, if that was what she was afraid of.

All that thinking and now she was giving him what he wanted. And this time, he hadn't even asked. He grinned at her, hugging her briefly and Apparating them both just outside her flat; he had only seen it once when they had met up not too far from it and he had insisted she'd show him the place. As soon as they arrived, Draco expected her to step back and regain the boundaries, but she surprised him once more by remaining within his reach.

"What changed?" he asked, genuinely curious.

"Five dates," she said. "I always wait five dates before I really give the guy a chance."

Draco frowned. "But... I left my..."

She shushed him with a finger. "I know, I know," she told him. "We didn't go about this the conventional way, but now the test is over, you passed," she smiled again as she went on, "with flying colours."

He couldn't help smiling too, and though part of him desperately wanted an invitation to join her in her flat, his manners reined him. He brought both her hands to his lips, softly kissing her knuckles; Granger shivered slightly, but her smile didn't falter.

"Is that how you plan to wish me goodnight?" she teased him.

"What did you have in mind?" he countered. "It's only our fifth date, after all."

"No, it's not *only* that," she said. "It's Valentine's Day."

Her hands broke free of his grasp and she clasped her arms around his neck, toying with his hair while she locked lips with him and pushed him gently against the door to her flat. Draco thought he liked this unconventional witch, and he deepened the kiss to show her just how much he liked her; his hands stroked the small of her back, and the frustration he had felt waned with the satisfaction of kissing her properly after his previous failed attempts.

When he was the one to withdraw from the kiss first, his first thought was of how to turn *that* into a regular occurrence.

"Goodnight, Draco," she said breathlessly, cutting into his thoughts.

He pecked her once more on the cheek. "Goodnight, Hermione."

*

Prompt: Goodnight Kiss.