

Much Ado About...

by pokeystar

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"Nothing," said Draco. His tablemates groaned in unison.

"Why do they always say that?" asked Greg. "It's obvious they're angry about *something*."

"You are well and truly bugged, mate," Ron commented.

"You needn't look so happy about it, Weasley," Blaise muttered.

"He's just glad it's not him," said Neville, signaling his wife for another round. It was going to be a long night.

"Do you have any idea what you did?" Harry inquired with mild curiosity.

"Or didn't do?" Ron put in helpfully. "They tend to get angrier about that." His wisdom on this point was hard-earned.

"That narrows it down," Draco tipped his glass at Ron before downing the rest of his firewhisky. "Thanks."

Harry smirked. "Cheers."

Draco sat back and contemplated his companions. Seriously, was he expecting sound advice from this bunch of berks? Just because the majority of them were in solid relationships...only Greg had thus far failed to find Miss Right...did not mean they had all the answers. Far from it, if one happened to overhear what their counterparts discussed in the Burrow kitchen on a post-brunch Sunday. He chuckled a little, remembering some of the more colourful things Pansy'd had to say about Ronald Bilius Weasley.

No, he wasn't expecting sound advice. But he was hoping for some solid support. Maybe even a flash of brilliant insight. It had been known to happen before. They were his closest friends, after all. Had been since Ron, Harry and he had buried the hatchet playing against each other in Hogsmeade's pick-up Quidditch league. Neville had joined the group naturally, as his wife's establishment was a sentimental favourite for their gatherings. And Draco had invited Blaise and Greg in just to even things out a bit. It helped that the ladies got along equally well; the couples could have a night off from one another and no one felt left out.

The women were situated around the coffee table in the Potters' living room, picking at the remains of an excellent take-away meal.

Ginny reclined into her comfy sofa and groaned. "I couldn't eat another bite. Thanks for bringing the food, Padma."

The others murmured their appreciation as Padma, sprawled out on the floor, raised an arm in the air and waved it lazily.

"Where are the boys tonight?" Luna asked distractedly as she tore apart a papadom into her napkin.

Hermione snorted and poured herself another glass of burgundy.

"Well, it's September now," said Ginny, sparing her seemingly disgruntled friend a curious look.

"So, the Three Broomsticks?" Padma inquired. Ginny nodded in reply.

Pansy grimaced. "Poor Hannah. I thought it was bad enough that she had to miss this because her barman Floo-called in sick."

She raised her glass in a silent toast to Mrs. Longbottom's superior fortitude; the other ladies followed suit. The poor thing had to tolerate those idiots en masse and off the leash.

"What was that snort for," Ginny toed the woman reclined on the opposite end of the sofa, "Miss not Granger for much longer?"

Hermione gritted her teeth. "Draco Abraxas Malfoy."

Neville was trouncing Blaise and Greg at darts across the room while Draco, Harry and Ron watched from their table.

"Woo hoo!" yelled Ron, pumping his fist in the air. "Gryffindor rules!"

Harry looked at Draco and rolled his eyes. Then he turned to Ron. "It's not the World Cup, mate."

"Well, no." Ron shrugged sheepishly. "But. It's Neville."

"Woo hoo!" yelled Ron, Harry and Draco.

"You're a badass, Longbottom!" added Harry.

Hannah skipped over and gave Neville a big kiss as he blushed with pleased embarrassment. Blaise pulled the darts from the board and handed them to Greg.

"What if she really meant 'nothing'?" Draco asked. Harry and Ron looked at him with puzzled expressions.

"What are you on about?" Harry asked, showing off his stellar interrogation skills.

"You guys know Hermione really well." He picked a few nuts out of the bowl in the center of the table and arranged them in a circular pattern on his soggy drinks napkin. "Do you think she really meant 'nothing' was the matter?"

"This is Hermione we're talking about, yeah?" Ron said slowly. Clearly, at this point, thinking was an effort.

Harry and Draco nodded.

"No." They all said it together.

"What has he done now?" asked Ginny with sympathy.

"Or what hasn't he done now?" added Pansy, thinking of her own darling husband.

Luna wrinkled her nose. "Draco's middle name is Abraxas? Blaise never told me that."

Pansy and Ginny just looked at her for a moment, and then turned back to Hermione.

"It's both," she said. "Or maybe neither." Her forehead furrowed in thought. "I might be too drunk to figure that out."

Padma propped herself up on her elbows. "I believe it is Arithmatically impossible for those two circumstances to transpire simultaneously."

"Not if you consider Einstein's Ninth Supposition of Coeval Concomitance," Luna commented speculatively. Most of her attention was on the magically stacked papadom crumb tower in front of her.

Hermione sighed. "Arithmancy isn't really relevant unless there's a codicil that addresses interfering relatives."

Padma and Luna both started to speak at the same time, their individual voices merging together in a cacophony of Arithmantical gibberish until a look from Ginny silenced them.

"Interfering relatives?" prompted Pansy. She didn't sound surprised.

Hermione sighed again. "Where do I start?"

Ron tossed a dart at the board and said, "With Hermione, 'nothing' means 'you've been so bloody idiotic I don't even know where to start.'"

Harry nodded in agreement.

"But I haven't done anything!" Draco protested.

"Like I said," Ron pronounced carefully. "Bugged. Well and truly." He would need help Flooing home. And a double dose of Sobering Potion in the morning.

"If you can't think of it, there's no use worrying." Peering at Draco bleakly, Greg threw a comforting arm around his smaller friend's shoulders. "She'll tell you when she's ready."

In Goyle's case, a double dose would hardly make a dent.

"Or she'll call the wedding off," Blaise put in cheerfully. "And then it won't matter anymore."

"I remember when Pans and I got married," said Ron. "Planning was a right nightmare. She obsessed over every detail and almost every little thing set her off. She cried for a whole day when Auntie Muriel sent us that antique banshee clock."

"A banshee clock?" Neville shuddered. "I'd cry for a day too. The worst gift Hannah and I got was a painting of frolicking trolls."

"I love that picture," said Greg a little defensively.

Hannah brought over a bowl of pickled eggs and the tab. "We're really glad you do, Greg." She patted him on the back. "Last call, gents."

"Have you and Hermione received any gifts yet?" Blaise asked.

"Not really. We have about three weeks to go, though." He took a swig of firewhisky. "My parents did give us Tippy."

"Fantastic," said Blaise.

"What's a tippy?" asked Harry. After all these years, gaps in his wizarding cultural knowledge still showed up occasionally.

Draco looked amused. "Tippy is a who. Not a what. My favourite house-elf, in fact."

Ron's head, which had been lolling over the back of his chair, jerked upright abruptly. "Did you just say house-elf?"

"Well," said Padma, still propped up on her elbows, "We already know that Narcissa has been hinting for grandchildren..."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "And we're not even married yet."

"She's also campaigned to have you live at the Manor after the wedding," continued Padma, ticking a finger to keep track of each point. Luna shuddered visibly, but resumed building her crumb tower without comment.

"Until I fainted outside the drawing room and Draco purchased the house in Hogsmeade. She still can't understand why he might want to see me more frequently than the weekends." Hermione took a sip of her wine.

Pansy laughed. "As big as the Manor is, I doubt Lucius and Narcissa see each other more than once a month. And I'm sure she prefers it that way. The Black women always did prefer shopping to sex. At least, that's what Grandmère says."

The women burst into giggles that lasted several minutes and put the papadom tower in danger of collapse.

Padma recovered first and ticked off another finger. "She has practically taken over the wedding plans..."

"Which would be fine by me," Hermione replied, all humour gone from her voice. "If she actually listened to what Draco and I wanted."

"You did manage to talk her out of the singing swans," said Ginny.

"And the guest list of millions," added Pansy.

Luna looked up from her tower. "Are there that many magical people in Britain?"

Pansy eyed her imperiously. "The Malfoys were originally French, you know." She was abruptly showered in papadom crumbs. "Looney, you ruined your tower!"

"It was worth it," Luna responded, regarding Pansy's mussed state with an air of satisfaction. She looked like the "before" witch in a Scalp Draught ad from *Witch Weekly*.

"Now, now, girls," said Ginny, who saw that Pansy was contemplating her options for retaliation. "Let's not fight." She Banished the crumbs efficiently with a flick of her wand. "We're supposed to be listening to Hermione."

"Where were we?" Padma murmured. "Ah, yes. Wedding plans..." She paused a moment in thought. "But we know all that. What has she done now?"

Hermione took a deep breath. "Lucius and Narcissa gave us a house-elf." Luna and Ginny gasped. "As a wedding present."

"Yes," Draco replied slowly, for the benefit of the alcohol-impaired. "I said 'house-elf.'"

"Do you not remember S.P.E.W.?" asked Neville, clearly gobsmacked.

"S.P.E.What?" Draco, Greg and Blaise all had blank looks on their faces.

Harry answered. "She learned how to knit hats..."

"Badly," inserted Ron.

"Badly," acknowledged Harry. "In order to free the elves at Hogwarts."

Draco vaguely remembered jokes he'd heard in the Slytherin common room. That he might have told in the common room.

"Oh, that. I thought it was a phase she grew out of." He winced when he looked up.

Neville, Ron and Harry stared at him in disbelief.

"She's indignant over their treatment and their non-standing in wizarding society. She also feels their servitude is made even more horrific by the fact that the elves seem to enjoy it," explained Neville.

"But she works at Hogwarts, for Merlin's sake!" Draco set his glass down with a thunk. "Hermione is surrounded by elves everyday and she's never mentioned she felt that strongly to me."

Ron sighed. "It was a condition of her employment. The elves themselves demanded it. That finally convinced her they weren't ready for freedom yet."

"But it doesn't mean she'd be willing to own one herself," said Harry.

"Tippy is more than an elf; she's family." Draco was dismayed. "She helped raise me, practically from birth."

"What's the big deal?" asked Pansy. "I'd kill for an elf. No more nagging Ronald to pick up his own stinky socks."

Hermione was too stunned to speak.

Ginny answered. "She learned how to knit hats..."

"Badly," inserted Luna. She shrugged when Hermione frowned at her.

"Badly," Ginny acknowledged. "In order to free the elves of Hogwarts."

"She founded the Society for the Promotion of Elvish Welfare," said Padma.

Pansy remembered the jokes she'd told in the Slytherin common room. She cleared her throat.

"Yeah, but Hermione works at Hogwarts. She's surrounded by elves all the time. So it was just a phase, right?"

"I wasn't hired until I agreed to stop campaigning for elf welfare," Hermione replied softly.

Padma gasped. "McGonagall would never..."

"The elves demanded it," explained Luna.

Pansy looked worried. "Hermione, do you remember the name of the elf that the Malfoys want to give to you?"

"Tippy, I think," she said.

"That isn't just any elf," said Pansy. "Tippy is family and Draco's favourite. She practically raised him from birth."

Hermione bit her lip.

"He's in your corner, Hermione," his oldest friend added. "It just gets complicated when family is involved, especially because you're his family too."

It was three in the morning when Hermione stumbled through the Floo into their house in Hogsmeade. She wasn't particularly quiet because she usually arrived home first, even though her fiancé only had to walk home the majority of the time. The boys took their dart matches Very Seriously.

She was therefore a little startled to see Draco seated on the olive leather chesterfield facing the fireplace. He also appeared to be a titch more sober than she. Feeling slightly awkward and wrong-footed, she lingered over removing the soot from her clothing, feeling his eyes follow the path her hands took. Her cheeks reddened from the scrutiny, but she found it comforting, really. If he was still upset, he wouldn't be ogling her. He cleared his throat and she finally met his steady gaze.

"Draco, I'm sorry I've been..."

"Hermione, I didn't realize..."

They smiled nervously at each other.

"You first," Hermione said.

"No, no. I think I might have heard the beginning of an apology?" He smirked when she nodded reluctantly. "Please, do go first."

She raised an eyebrow at him. "I'm not feeling very apologetic all of a sudden."

He stood and drew her over to the couch, sitting down first and urging her into his lap. He wrapped his arms around her and propped his chin on the top of her head.

"You know I was teasing, love." He squeezed her a bit. "What were you going to say?"

"I'm sorry I've been so irritable and short with you. I misunderstood something and as a result I jumped to the wrong conclusion," she mumbled into his chest.

He kissed her forehead. "I didn't realize house-elf rights were still important to you. If you'd prefer, I'll tell my parents not to send Tippy over."

"Tippy is family to you, Draco. I think I can adjust to having her here. And I'm glad to know you didn't realize how I felt." She nuzzled his neck.

"I know I can be a little self-involved," he said. Draco knew her eyes were about to roll out of her head. "But I realise more than you think I do."

She pulled back to look up at him. "You do?"

"Yes. My mother has been a tad overbearing lately. I'll ask her to back off." Hermione sighed in relief. "She was really thrown for a loop when you fainted at the Manor. She's always been overprotective of me and now that she's been convinced of the depth of my commitment to you, she's put you on her coddle list. Mum feels that she and Father have a lot to make up for, especially in your case."

"Narcissa's been overcompensating," said Hermione with dawning realization.

Draco nodded. "I might have a solution. She and Father need to make restitution, and you are concerned with elf welfare. What if the Malfoys founded a charity to fund a home for abused and abandoned house-elves? It would keep Mum busy, be a start on addressing your ideals..."

"And it wouldn't violate the terms of my employment at Hogwarts!" Hermione cried, throwing her arms around Draco in a smothering hug. "You are absolutely brilliant!"

He preened as best he could with a bushy haired witch clinging to him. "Just do me one favour, Granger."

She wrinkled her nose. "What?" she asked.

"In the future, when I ask you what's wrong," he said as he kissed her nose smooth, "please, for the love of Merlin, don't say 'nothing.'"

A/N: Title borrowed from some famous play written by a Renaissance-era hack known as William Shakespeare.

Based on following prompt and kinks: (3) They'd been getting along so well, so what the hell was up with Hermione's behavior?

Additionally, my mystery recipient wanted meddling Malfoys, a tale about everyday life, intelligent yet snarky Draco, smart/classy Hermione and excellent grammar. I hope you are pleased with the results.

A big thank you and hug-o-rama to inadaze22 and corianderpie for looking this over and laughing at my silliness.