

Leap of Faith

by Sirius Girl 08

Hermione struggles to put her the betrayals of her past behind her.

One-Shot

Chapter 1 of 1

Hermione struggles to put her the betrayals of her past behind her.

Disclaimer: Everything you recognise belongs to JK Rowling.

Author's Notes: This one-shot was written for Liz (Twilexis) - the prompt she gave me is at the end. *hugs to Liz* Also, I have to thank Southern Witch for her beta skills and kind comments and encouragement.

Leap of Faith

It would be fair to say that I am having a classic case of a "Bad Monday". Coming off the back of an emotional weekend, I'd slept in that morning, and in my rush to get ready I'd accidentally stood on Crookshanks' tail. He'd taken particular offence to that and had clawed at my leg, slashing up my last pair of clean stockings which had resulted in a complete change of clothes.

When I'd finally made it to my office in the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, I was late for the meeting that I had called to discuss centaur rights. Feeling flustered as I tried to ready myself to lead the meeting, I'd accidentally knocked over my glass of water, resulting in not only my notes becoming sodden but also two of my team members. I'd left the meeting with a pounding headache which still refused to budge despite the vial of Pain Relief potion I'd taken at lunch time.

The afternoon had been just as bad as the morning, filled with a never-ending stream of tedious pieces of paperwork, along with constant interruptions from co-workers asking the most inane questions imaginable. Now that it is quarter to five, I decide enough is enough and pack up for the day. I will make the time up tomorrow when I have half a brain to think with.

Just as I am pulling on my cloak, there is a knock on my door what feels like the fiftieth one of the day. 'What?' I snap, tugging on my collar to pull it straight, turning to face the door.

'Charming, Hermione. I didn't realise knocking on your door was a punishable offence,' Draco states from the doorway.

I pause slightly, a moment of insecurity as I think of how to react before I steel myself once more. 'With the number of idiots that have knocked on my door today, it should be,' I retort.

'Bad day?' he asks, stepping in the office fully and pushing the door closed behind him.

'You have no idea,' I reply, letting all my weariness show in my voice.

Draco says nothing. Instead he opens his arms to me, and I allow him to envelope me in a reassuring hug. As I stand there with my head resting against his chest, I close my eyes, willing all the tension and stress from the day to leave my body.

'How about I cook you dinner tonight?' Draco offers, his voice soft, almost timid if one could ever imagine Draco Malfoy displaying such vulnerability so obviously.

There is a large part of me that wants to say yes to him not only because Draco is a surprising good cook but also because of the company that he would give me.

It is still slightly surprising to me that I've formed such a close friendship with Draco after all that had happened between us while we were at school. I still remember clearly the scepticism I had over the "new-and-improved" Draco Malfoy that I encountered after the war had ended, but Draco really had changed for the better.

He'd moved out from home, ending up in a flat in the same building as me. I'd been less than thrilled with the prospect of running into Draco Malfoy on a daily basis at the time, but now, five years down the line, I can admit that I'm glad he moved into that flat. He is now probably the closest friend I have.

But however much I want to say yes to his offer of dinner, there is a part of me that is pulling away after the events of the weekend that I am trying to forget. I guess Draco sees the hesitation in my face and speaks quickly to reassure me.

'Please, Hermione.' His grey eyes lock on mine. 'Please, let me do this for you?'

I take a measured breath, giving myself some time before nodding slowly. 'That would be lovely, Draco,' I reply, though my smile is tight.

He releases me from his arms, but grabs a hold of my hand as he smiles broadly. 'Come on, then,' he says, his voice bright. 'Let's get you home and fed.'

As always, we return to my flat, it being the cleaner of the two. I often joke that Draco can't care for himself without the aid of house-elves to clean on his behalf a claim he refutes completely, teasing me in return, saying that I'm simply anal about housework and that a little bit of mess never hurt anyone. Yet, for all our jokes, the fact remains that we still wind up in my flat nine times out of ten.

I lower the wards and open the door, Draco following me in. Upon seeing us enter, Crookshanks immediately sits up from his relaxed position in "his" armchair, glaring at me for a moment before jumping down and stalking off to the small study room next door, his bottle brush tail held high. You definitely know when you have been snubbed by a feline, especially a half-Kneazle feline.

'I see someone is still in a strop,' I mutter under my breath.

'What was that?' Draco asks as he makes his way to the kitchen.

'Nothing,' I reply, dropping my bag on the floor by the sofa. 'What are you going to cook for dinner?'

'Don't know yet,' is Draco's answer. I can hear cupboard doors opening and closing as he makes his way round the kitchen.

'I'm going to get changed while you whip me up something delicious,' I shout as I head through to my bedroom.

Draco's reply of, 'Okay,' is nearly drowned out by the sound of pots banging against the worktop and the tap running.

As I pull my work robes off, I think of Draco in my kitchen. He's cooked for me many times over the years, and I've never really thought much of it before tonight. In the past, I had always been sure that his motivation was simply friendship. Draco had admitted to me one night that all of his previous associations had been just that: associations. He'd never had the sort of friendship that Harry, Ron and I had shared. Even in the early stages of our own friendship that we had forged, he'd always remained ever so slightly distant, never quite showing me all he had to give. That had all changed the night I'd finally left Ron three years ago.

After that, Draco was, strangely, the only person I had left. I couldn't blame Harry, he was stuck in the middle, and I'd never told him the full story behind the split. I guess I was too ashamed. Even Draco didn't know all the gory details, but he had been there for me in a way that Harry hadn't.

For three years Draco and I have lived with this friendship, growing closer, trusting one another. It had all seemed so easy, so straight forward, and so peaceful. But now I can't shift the certain sense of unease I feel as I think about him moving about my kitchen with the surety that comes from being deeply involved with someone else's life. The same feeling assaults me as I think about how he'd treated me back in my office, the way he knew that what I needed was physical comfort, not words, the way he knew that I would be too tired to cook for myself tonight and offering to feed me. Draco *knows* me and suddenly, I find the thought terrifying.

Gathering my strength, I walk back to the living room. The room is a semi-open plan, blending easily into the kitchen where Draco is working. I walk to the side board and switch on the wireless radio, allowing the soft music to fill the silence and set my nerves at ease. I cannot abide silences, but equally the thought of striking up a conversation seems to be beyond me tonight.

I know better than to get involved with Draco's cooking; I know he'd hit the back of my hand with a spoon if I dared to touch anything he's done it enough times before for me to learn my lesson. So instead, I settle, somewhat hesitantly, into my own role in this scene of domestic harmony, flicking my wand and Summoning the place mats from their home and setting them on the oak table.

Draco notices my movements and flashes me a smile as I come up beside him to get the cutlery from the drawer. No matter who you are or how skilled you are with a wand, there are some things you don't Summon knives are one of them. As I concentrate on getting what I need from the drawer, Draco passes behind me, a gentle touch of his hand on the small of my back as he does so, causing me to take a sudden intake of breath.

Hastily, I shut the drawer and turn my attention back to the table, lest Draco notice my momentary flush. Thankfully, he's too focused on draining the water from the pasta, and I use the time to compose myself again.

As he puts the finishing touches to our meal, I lay the plates on the table, casting a gentle warming charm over them as I do before finding a bottle of wine. Again, I'm forced to catch myself when I realise, belatedly, that this is another area Draco has influence me the wine having been a bottle from his father's collection. He'd spent a lot of time trying to teach me the finer points of wine tasting before allowing me to sample one of Lucius' more expensive bottles. Now, I could appreciate the complexity of the wine and the way it complimented the food it was served with whilst also appreciating its ability to wash away a bad day. Different levels of enjoyment, but enjoyment none the less.

I pour the wine and then settle myself at my place at the table, allowing Draco to serve me the Spaghetti Bolognese my favourite kind of comfort food. He quickly levitates the pan to the sink and sits down opposite me.

'Tuck in,' he says proudly, and I can only smile my response, picking up my fork and mixing in the pasta.

Draco asks me about my day, so I fill him in from beginning to end. It would be so easy for me to allow the frustration to take me over again as I recount my tale to him, but his sympathetic laughter at all my misfortunes allows me to see the humorous side, and soon I'm laughing with him. Feeling more light-hearted and at ease now, the dinner conversation moves easily from one benign topic to the next, and soon we have both finished the delicious meal and are contentedly sipping our wine.

It's while in this calm, peaceful state that Draco lowers his glass, his head dipped to the table before he looks up at me through his lashes. Once again, I tense, immediately knowing what he is going to say.

'Are we really going to ignore the great big metaphorical Hippogriff that has been in the room all night?' he asks.

I cast my eyes downwards away from him, picking up my plate before slowly moving to the sink. Only once my back is to him do I dare speak. 'Draco, please.'

'Hermione, if you think you've managed to fool me and hide the fact that you've been reluctant to talk all evening and that you've tensed up every time I've come near you, then you're wrong,' he states, his voice sounding harsh through his frustrations at my behaviour. I hear his chair scrape against the floor as he stands, his measured steps

bringing him closer to where I stand frozen. 'Please, Hermione,' he whispers in my ear, his breath warm against my neck causing me to shiver in more ways than one, 'we need to talk about this.'

He doesn't touch me, just continues to stand so close to me that I can feel the heat from his body on my back. I wait an inordinate amount of time before I can finally speak again. 'Draco, I can't do this I'm sorry, but I can't ... I don't have the strength.' I don't cry, I don't even sound upset despite the pain I feel at saying those words. Instead, my voice sounds so hollow I barely recognise it myself. I leave my plate in the sink and quickly slip out to the side, suddenly feeling very alone without Draco's warmth behind me, but I push that thought roughly to the side.

'Damn it, Hermione,' Draco mutters, bowing his head as he leans forward against the worktop. I can hear him draw a deep breath, but once again, I busy myself with clearing the table.

'You know what you're doing, don't you?' he asks.

My gaze flicks in his direction. He's turned around now, his arms folded over his chest a commanding picture of self-assurance as he challenges me. I decide it's better not to answer and so continue with my jobs.

'You're running away.'

Ouch, that one stung, just as he knew it would.

'You don't know what you are asking of me, Draco. You can't understand,' I reply, my voice even, and I look at him from my place by the table.

'What I'm asking for is a chance. Name me one time in the last three years that I've let you down name me one time, and I will drop this right now. I promise.'

As I think, I continue to clear the table. I know I could use magic to do this, but at the moment, I need the comfort of a job to keep me in control of my emotions. I pick up the few remaining pieces of crockery from the table and take them to the sink, bringing me back to Draco.

'You haven't,' I reply, placing down the plates with a small, unavoidable clatter, 'but that doesn't mean that what you are asking is easy for me to do.'

'Hermione.' His voice is so gentle, a pleading note in it as he reaches out to touch my elbow with his fingertips. I turn my head to him and see his grey eyes filled with a desperation I didn't think I'd ever see. 'Please give us a chance at this. You say I can't understand, but do you really think I've ever forgotten the way you cried when you ended up on my door step the night you finally left that prat Ron? I swear to you, I will *never* hurt you like he did. You know how I feel about you, you know I would spend my life loving you, trying to make you happy if only you would let me.'

And that was the problem that I'd been trying to ignore since Saturday night. Draco had been here then, too. We'd spent the evening in each other's company, sharing a delightful bottle of wine he's pilfered from the Manor that day when he'd visited his parents for lunch. He'd regaled how the singular topic for the lunch time conversation had been his love life or lack there of, bemoaning the fact that Narcissa had been subtly suggesting women that she could set him up with should he so wish. He'd also added how Lucius' silences on the matter had clearly indicated that his father joined his mother in thinking it was high time he find a long term partner who would become his wife and who he would produce an heir with.

As we'd drunk glass after glass of the luxurious wine, both our tongues had become looser and looser, and that's when it had happened. As we were discussing the types of women we were sure Narcissa had in mind for him, I'd asked Draco what he himself would look for. He'd turned to me, his face surprisingly sober given the amount of wine we'd drunk, and uttered one word 'You.'

Up until that point I'd never had any idea that he'd harboured anything more than friendly affection for me, and the revelation had left me reeling. I'd tried to turn his admission into a joke, a desperate attempt to protect myself, but he'd not been so easily dissuaded, insisting that lately he'd felt like he was falling in love with me.

I'd listened to his confession, part of me still numb from shock I think, or maybe that was the wine's affect, slowing down my ability to think clearly. As he listed off all the things that attracted him to me, I'd allowed myself to forget all the events from the past, all the reasons why embarking on a relationship with him would be a bad idea. I allowed him to show me how he envisioned our life together, and for just a moment, I allowed myself to believe I could be that happy again.

But then, in the cold light of Sunday morning, I'd realised that everything Draco had shown me was a dream that would never come true. When he'd come knocking on my door, I'd stayed silent, hidden in my den where I was safe, safe in my loneliness.

Now though, he was here, looking at me, touching me, pleading with me to think about the possibility of a future together.

'Draco, I can't do that because I can't take the risk. I can't risk falling in love with you because I can't risk having my heart broken again I know I wouldn't survive it a second time.' I can hear the pleading note in my voice as I speak, willing him to understand. Knowing that he is about to speak, I jump in before he gets the chance. 'You don't know everything that happened between Ron and I, no-one does. He broke me, Draco. He broke me mind, body and soul. You say you love me? Well, so did Ron. Every time I found out about another one of his affairs, he would tell me it didn't mean anything because it was me he loved. When I finally left him and ended up on your doorstep that night, I was a shell of myself.' I pause, trying to find the words to express the gut wrenching pain I went through all those years ago. 'He was my be-all-and-end-all, and he took what I gave him and crushed it to dust. I've rebuilt myself once; I don't think I could do it again if anything were to go wrong,' I finish sadly.

'You don't know that it would go wrong. This could be the best thing to happen to both of us, but we won't know unless we try,' Draco says. His earnestness is slowly chipping away at my armour, and my breathing starts to become shallower. I can see his body is beginning to ripple energy as he tries one last time to convince me. He reaches out his other hand, cupping my cheek and turning me to face him fully, tilting my head back so all I can see is him as he looks down into my eyes. 'Ron might have *said* he loved you, but I *do* love you. If you would allow it, you would be *my* be-all-and-end-all. Hermione, I will do *whatever* it takes for you to be happy. Please give me the chance to prove myself worthy of you. We can go as slow as you need, but please let us *try*.'

The intensity of his gaze burns through all the layers of my defences, lighting a spark in my soul. He is right; *he* wasn't the one who'd hurt me, *he* wasn't the one who'd given me false confessions of love, and *he* certainly wasn't the one who had cheated on me. I am hit then with the same vision I'd had of Draco and myself just a few days ago. A vision of a long and happy future stretching out in front of us, and I am filled with such a longing that I take a leap of faith.

Slowly, still afraid but no less determined, I raise my hand to cover his where it rests on my cheek. My eyes close at the contact, and I feel all my insecurities flood over me again.

'I'm scared,' I whisper, ashamed to admit such a weakness but feeling strangely liberated now it is out in the open.

'I know.' Draco's reply is hoarse, rich with emotion. 'Trust me, Hermione.'

I do, by Merlin I do. I know I trust him with every cell in my body. I snap my eyes open to see him once more, my breath coming in harsh pants now as the adrenaline kicks in. Staring at him all the while, I nod my head and take that leap into the unknown.

Written in response to the following prompt from Liz (Twilexis):

~ Hermione/Draco one shot

~ Learning to trust again and falling in love after being hurt in the past.

~ Draco cannot use his wealth to try to convince her, and he can't refer to different houses.

~ Has to be fluffy!

Thanks for reading and I'd love it if you left a review to let me know what you thought of it. :-) xXx