

Le prix du désir

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Harry learns the meaning of 'be careful what you wish for.'

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Co-written by *hrmny4etrnty2* (*Wildflower4evr*) and *Dynonugget!* Love and kisses to *mister_otter*, lovely beta and friend. We hope you enjoy!

Calysta knew her mother preferred small, intimate get-togethers, but somehow, parties at Malfoy Manor always resulted in throngs of people moving from room to room, or socializing in the garden. Hermione would always complain, and Draco would say there were one or two people he'd forgotten to invite until the last minute, or Blaise would show up with not one date, but two. And by eight o'clock that night, Calysta saw that her parents' anniversary party would be no different.

When she was younger, she loved watching the women show off the latest fashions or their newest jewels, while Hermione graciously complimented them on whatever they wanted to hear. Calysta knew her mother held no faith in finery, but Hermione was always gracious to her guests, no matter the way she privately felt about them. And Calysta watched and learned.

Now that she was seventeen, she'd lost interest in who wore what dress, or who had vacationed in Bali that summer. It was much more interesting to her now to watch the guests' behavior; it was infinitely more intriguing and, according to her father, much more telling.

"Words are nothing," he had told her time and again, "if the actions don't match. And when they're different, always trust the actions."

She had listened well. She had watched, and there was so much to learn.

She had learned, for example, that Pansy Parkinson Nott harbored a deep loathing for Hermione, as a result of the still burning torch she carried for Draco. Whether Mr. Nott realized this or not, Calysta didn't know; he spent too much time with a glass of Firewhisky in one hand to bother finding out. She had also learned the boys of Hufflepuff could be persuaded to... well, perhaps that story is for another time.

Tonight, she was playing her favorite game. It was beyond enlightening the things one could witness when others thought no one was looking. As she watched, Seamus Finnegan spiked the punch, not knowing that George Weasley had already done it. Albus Potter nipped outside, hand in hand with a witch Calysta had never seen before, who looked about fifteen, if she was any judge of age. And not for the first time, she watched as a particular set of eyes followed her mother.

She'd witnessed this behavior before, and tonight she decided there was definitely something to it. She watched as he approached her mother, wrapped his arms around her and held her just a moment too long. Calysta watched her father's face during this, and he seemed perfectly fine with it. Was he blind? And then, this man kissed her on the cheek, and still Draco said nothing, and a moment later, shook the man's hand.

Calysta shook her head.

For the rest of the night, she watched as this man's wife followed him around before getting bored she could hardly blame her, for the man paid little attention to her and wandered off to visit her own group of friends. Though many of the guests vied for his attention, Calysta noticed that he never strayed far from Hermione.

And when Hermione and Draco stepped into the kitchen alone for a moment, he wandered in that general direction, and stood listening outside the door. Calysta, of course, followed.

"It's impolite to eavesdrop."

"I'm not," he stammered, embarrassed at being caught unawares.

"Where I come from, listening in on a private conversation is called eavesdropping."

"You're right, of course," he answered, but before he could turn away, raised voices from the kitchen caught his attention.

"They've been doing that a lot lately," she whispered, as if letting him in on a secret.

"Well it's really none of my business," he answered, as Calysta stared at him. *When the actions don't match...*

"She's your friend, isn't she?"

He nodded and said, "Of course."

"Maybe she needs one."

"Maybe she does, but no one can force a confidence from your mother. If she needs me, she'll come to me. Now I really must go, Calysta. Good night."

"Good night, Harry."

He paced his office, unable to concentrate on the reports staring at him from his desk; Hermione was due any minute. That alone was nothing remarkable, she and Ron went to lunch with him every week or so.

Today, it would just be him and Hermione. Ron was out of town on assignment for work.

For the third time, he checked his appearance in the mirror and then stopped to laugh at himself. Hermione had certainly seen him at both his best and his worst over the years. And he was forced to admit the real reason for his nerves, though he'd been dancing around the subject for many months now.

His feelings toward Hermione had always been brotherly, until one day they weren't. When the change had taken place, Harry couldn't exactly say. It had snuck up on him so gradually that by the time he realized he felt something more than friendship for her, it was too late.

But Harry was a man of principle, and no matter how difficult the choices were, he always chose the right thing.

Only now, he was confused what the right thing was.

He felt the need to protect her, yes, and that wasn't really new. He felt the same for Ron, or for any of his friends. But with Hermione, he had the urge to touch her, to feel her hair in his hands, and he lay awake at night wondering what it would feel like to taste her lips, to feel her body next to his. And in rare moments, when Harry was at his weakest, he allowed himself to wonder what it would be like to slip inside of her, to watch the arch of her back, to hear Hermione call his name as he...

"Mr. Potter, Mrs. Malfoy is here to see you," his assistant said by way of interrupting a most pleasant fantasy.

"Show her in, thanks."

In the next moment, she was in his arms in a friendly embrace. As much as Harry indulged in his fantasies about her, he knew that Hermione was very much in love with her husband and would never betray Draco. He also knew that he would never risk their friendship by asking for something that wasn't his.

"Where do you want to lunch today?" Hermione inquired.

"Anywhere you want."

"Come on, Harry, it's your turn."

"Actually, I think it's Ron's, but since he's not here..."

Harry led her to a little restaurant he'd been wanting to try but couldn't persuade Ginny to go with him. When they arrived, Hermione saw it was an intimate little bistro, with most of the tables set for two. And they were packed.

The maitre'd assured them that he would find a table for them, and returned a moment later, almost apologizing that the only table left was in one of the private rooms in the back.

"It's fine," Hermione assured him as she and Harry followed the man all the way to the most secluded corner of the restaurant.

If Hermione had thought the seating in the main dining room had been intimate, it was nothing to the room they were in now. There was a single table in the middle, lit by candlelight, and a fireplace at the opposite end. There was also a large sofa in one corner, and Hermione stifled a snicker. If she'd come here with Draco, it would have felt romantic.

After the waiter left with their drink orders they chatted amiably for a while, Harry about Albus' latest escapades at school, Hermione about the latest published discovery in Ancient Runes. She asked after Ginny, but Harry waited until half-way through their sandwiches to ask after Draco. His mouth ran dry when he saw that Hermione hesitated before answering that he was doing fine.

"Since when do you lie to me?" he asked with no malice in his voice.

Hermione pushed away the rest of her lunch and looked away. It was indelicate, to say the least, to say something negative about her husband in public. But as she looked around her, they were quite alone, though only by circumstance, and she really did need someone to talk to.

"I didn't mean to lie, exactly. It's just... difficult."

"You can tell me anything, Hermione. I hope you know that."

"I know, Harry. I do. You know I trust you with my life."

Harry waited and watched while Hermione tried to decide whether to confide in him. After a moment, she got up and took a seat on the end of the sofa.

"It feels safer over here," she explained.

He took the seat next to her and waited, and when she still hesitated, Harry took her hand in his. Clearly, there was some trouble at home, or some issue with her husband that Hermione was having trouble talking about, and Harry would have done anything to take away her pain, if he only knew how.

At long last, she blurted out, "Draco wants to have another child and I don't."

Ah, he thought. *There is trouble with Draco.*

And for the next half hour, he sat next to her and listened. Intellectually, he understood that Malfoy wanted, no, needed a male heir, someone to carry on the Malfoy line, and both of their children were girls. Calysta, who had bloomed into a beautiful seventeen-year-old, was very much a Slytherin, but Dina was still at the awkward age of thirteen.

The thought of Malfoy touching Hermione turned his stomach suddenly, and Harry subconsciously squeezed Hermione's hand.

"So you think so too?" Hermione asked, unaware that Harry's thoughts had drifted.

"I don't think he should pressure you into something you don't want."

"After Dina was born, he... he loves her, I know, but I could tell straight away that he was hoping for a son. And it isn't like we didn't try. We tried... a *lot*."

"Maybe it's just not meant to be," Harry told her as she nodded.

"That's what I think, too. But now he wants to go see someone at St. Mungo's about it, and I don't, and it feels like there's this huge distance between us now, and I don't know how to get over it."

And then Hermione burst into tears and threw her arms around Harry. She needed comforting, he knew, but as she cried and he held her, Harry could not help allowing his mind to drift ever so slightly to what he'd love to do next... but he was her friend first.

He let her go on for a few minutes more, and then pulled her chin up so he could meet her gaze.

"Aside from this issue, how are things between you?"

"All right, I g-guess," Hermione answered with a sniffle. "You know what we went through to get together, what his family thought, how you and Ron reacted at first... and we've been married for eighteen years."

It was a long time, Harry understood. He and Ginny had been married for seventeen years, and some days it felt like he'd only met her yesterday, and others, it felt every second of those seventeen years and then some.

Was Hermione saying she was tired of Draco, as he was on occasion of Ginny? Or was she saying that she'd worked too hard to give up now? Harry wanted to think that maybe, just maybe...

"Maybe you should go away for a couple of days, or maybe a long weekend, just to collect your thoughts," he suggested.

Hermione gave a watery laugh and said, "Where would I go?"

"Anywhere you wanted. I'm sure Narcissa would welcome you to their vacation home in Naples," he said jokingly.

She snickered and said, "No, either I go away on my own, or I need to be near a friend, someone who understands me."

"My home is yours, Hermione," Harry said, but in a completely different tone, and for the first time, showed the first hint of what he truly felt, and Hermione very much noticed.

"We've been friends for what seems like forever, haven't we?"

Hermione nodded, staring into his eyes, uncertain of what she saw there. It was something new, or something she had not noticed before, and she didn't know exactly how to feel about it.

And when he saw that she noticed, Harry decided to risk something small, just to test the waters, and reached out to caress her cheek. As much as she needed comfort, Hermione leaned into his touch for just a moment and exhaled slowly.

It felt so good, for however brief a time, to be held that way, to be looked at with that much love, with no animosity between them.

Hermione reveled in it.

And then she backed away.

"I really should be going," she said at once and walked out the door without looking back.

They really should learn to cast a *Muffliato*, Calysta thought as she listened outside her parents' bedroom door. Perhaps they had simply gotten used to having the house to themselves since both their children had been at Hogwarts these past years.

She knew it would have caused her sister, Dina, major stress to know their parents were arguing, but Calysta had to admit that the fighting was rather recent. She'd heard bits and pieces of the past month or two, something about a baby and an heir, and it didn't take long for her to put the pieces together. It was no secret that her father wanted a son; he needed one to carry on the family line. Some boy at school had said that the Malfoy line was done for, because Draco had married a Muggle-born, and Calysta had promptly showed him what happens to someone who disrespects her family. She shrugged at the memory, brushing off the hint of guilt that crept up when she thought about it. It wasn't like he wasn't able to finish his schoolwork from home, right?

Her ear to the door now, she was surprised to hear them arguing over something new, and as she listened, a wry smile spread across her face.

"I know you have a standing lunch arrangement with your two best friends, Hermione, but *why*, of all the places to eat, would you *go there*?"

"Harry chose the place, Draco, I didn't. And since when have you been jealous of Harry?"

Draco snorted in reply and answered, "How can you ask me that?"

"Oh, alright, you know what I meant. We've gotten past all of that ages ago."

"Be that as it may, Nott told me that you and Harry went into the private room in the back, and you were in there for a long time."

"We had *lunch*, Draco."

"I know that place is new, but it's already got a reputation... or rather, that room does. People go there and, well..."

"It was odd that there was a huge couch in there," Hermione thought out loud.

"See!" Draco steamed. "Now do you see why I'm upset? People are going to be saying you're having an affair with him!"

"People have been saying that for years, Draco. I refuse to apologize for having men as best friends. And it wouldn't be the first time one of us has been subject to ridiculous gossip."

What Draco said next, Calysta couldn't hear, but she didn't need to. She'd heard quite enough. There was no one in the hallway to see the grin on her face.

Harry was sitting in his living room, writing his son James a letter, when Ginny came in with a glass of Ogden's. He didn't usually drink a lot of liquor, but Ginny had noticed he was more amorous with a bit of Firewhisky in him. She looked over his shoulder, read the first few lines of the letter, and said, "Ask him when he's coming home again."

"He's been at University for only two months, Ginny. Give him a chance to stretch his wings."

"I know," she whined. "But I miss him."

"I do too," Harry said absently, trying to concentrate on his letter.

"Well then just do what I..."

She was interrupted by the crack of Apparition, and looked up as someone knocked on their front door.

"It's awfully late," Ginny complained, but Harry ignored her and went to answer the door.

He found Hermione on his doorstep, silent tears streaming down her face. It had been only a few days since he'd seen her, but she appeared to have deteriorated since then. Without a word, he enveloped her in his arms and held her to him while she cried. She laid her head on his chest and clung to him, either completely unaware or uncaring that Ginny was witnessing the entire thing.

"What's going on?" Ginny asked at last, and Hermione stepped back at once.

"I'm so sorry, I know it's late, but I... I didn't know where else to go."

"Come in," Harry said at once. "Ginny, can you get Hermione a cup of tea?"

"Something stronger?"

"No," Hermione answered. "I guess I shouldn't have come, I didn't mean to intrude."

"You didn't intrude," Harry insisted and led her to the nearest chair, where she sat sipping the tea Ginny placed in front of her, her eyes darting between Harry and his wife.

"Do you want to tell us what happened?" Ginny asked at last. She and Hermione were on fairly friendly terms, though they weren't extremely close, but it was apparent something serious had happened.

But Hermione hesitated. This was not what she had foreseen at all. She expected Ginny would be asleep, that she'd have a moment with Harry to herself, to see just how far things would go. But she was nothing if not quick on her feet, and her mind worked rapidly.

"It's... very private."

Though slightly offended, Ginny knew better than to come between Harry and Hermione, or Harry and Ron for that matter. There was a bond there that was unexplainable, and she had come to accept it a long time ago.

"Right, then," she said rather stiffly. "I'll just leave you two alone, then."

"We'll go into the office, Ginny," Harry countered at once, for in there, he could insure some privacy. Hermione followed him, purposely catching Ginny's eye at the very last second. She tried looking thankful but wasn't sure she quite pulled it off.

Once alone, Harry took Hermione in his arms again and stroked her hair. It was very comforting, Hermione found, and let him touch her until she needed to pull away.

"Tell me what happened."

"It's Draco," she told him. "He's given me an ultimatum. Either I go see the specialist with him at St. Mungo's, or he wants a separation."

"Oh, Hermione, I'm so sorry."

"I don't know what to do. I don't like being pushed into this situation, Harry."

He certainly didn't either, and wanted to tell her so, but he contented himself instead by comforting her the best way he knew how. They sat on the loveseat in Harry's office, his arm around her, Hermione laying her head on his shoulder.

"What am I going to do?" she cried and inched slightly closer to him.

Harry found he had no answer. He was quite aware of how close she was, and how she had just scooted a little closer to him. It was wrong, somewhere inside he knew it, but he threw a spell at the door to lock it and silence the room at the same time.

"I don't want to be disturbed," he admitted as he pulled Hermione closer. He felt, more than ever, that something was growing between them, something too early to define, and he didn't question for one moment when she raised her eyes to look at him.

"This is what I needed, Harry. To be here with no worries. You always know what to do to comfort me."

"I'm always here for you," he whispered.

Hermione took in his face, his hair sticking up in odd places, his green eyes piercing hers, and felt exactly what he meant. While one arm pulled her closer, his other hand rested on her knee.

And now there was no doubt.

"Kiss me, Harry."

He could hardly believe his ears, or his luck. It was wrong, it was oh so right, and his heart thudded wildly in his chest and he leaned into her.

Her lips were as sweet and as soft as he had imagined, maybe more. There was a loud buzzing in his ears, and the taste of her was an elixir he wondered if he could live without now. Merlin, what was he doing, he was kissing her, and oh, someone help him, she was kissing him back.

His hand slipped up her leg, feeling the lines of her body, and she pressed herself against him, causing Harry's breath to catch in his throat. She moaned in response, and he dared to slip his hand past her waist, to caress the curves he found there.

My God if her hand wasn't on his thigh now, inching painfully slowly to his aching hardness, and the only thought left in Harry's head was, can this really be happening? Oh, how he wanted her, and he could scarcely believe that she was reciprocating his feelings, and somewhere in his mind he knew they should stop, there was so much at stake. Everything flew out of his head the moment her hand reached him, and he sprang forward, strained to be free in her grasp.

He deepened the kiss as he slipped a hand beneath her sweater... and there was a knock on the door.

"Everything alright in there?"

Hermione jumped back and stood up at once.

"I'm sorry, Harry. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have... I didn't mean... you were so... Merlin, what have we done?"

"Hermione, don't. I want this, I want you. Let's talk about it, please."

"I have to go," Hermione whispered, and ran past Ginny on the way out.

"What the hell was that about?" Ginny asked, noticing her husband's flushed appearance.

"She's... Hermione is, I mean... it's private, Ginny."

She didn't like Harry keeping secrets from her, but she took a quick look around the room. Nothing seemed out of order, and she knew Hermione well enough that she'd never cheat on Draco. They were too much in love. But something had gotten her husband worked up... and then she remembered the Firewhisky.

"Come to bed early?" she suggested coyly.

"Not tonight, Ginny," Harry said, and walked past her in silence. He left the house a moment later. He needed time to think; he needed to know what to do next.

Harry was going positively insane. It had been one week since Hermione's unexpected visit to Grimmauld Place. The walk he had taken after her abrupt departure did nothing to clear his head. In fact, he returned home even more confused than before he had left.

Hermione had owled him a short note earlier in the day, informing him that she would be unable to make it to lunch. He couldn't help but feel a little hurt, just knowing that she was purposefully avoiding him due to what had occurred. Still, he kept his lunch appointment with Ron, hoping that he would possibly be able to momentarily forget his current predicament.

But as Harry sat across from his ginger-haired friend, he knew it wouldn't be possible to forget anything.

"So now, Luna is beyond positive that this fifth one will be a girl. She says that if it's another boy, we're sending him off to The Burrow for mum to take care of. Honestly, she's acting as if it's my fault!"

"Actually, Ron, the male is the one who determines whether the baby is a boy or a girl. In all honesty, your wife is correct."

Ron merely huffed and said, "Take her side, why don't you. And since when did you begin sounding like Hermione?"

Harry momentarily froze, wishing for his lunch hour to be over so he could return to his office and resume sulking. There was really nothing more Harry wanted to say. The subject Ron had chosen to speak of only reminded him of Hermione's current situation. It wasn't her fault if Draco couldn't produce the son he wanted.

Harry had to shake his head, clearing his thoughts of Hermione and Draco producing anything.

"You okay, mate? You look a little off."

"I'm fine, Ron. I'm just thinking about the mountains of paperwork awaiting me when I arrive back at the Ministry." No harm in a tiny white lie.

Ron smiled. "And here I thought maybe you were missing Ginny already."

Of course, he could have used that excuse as well. "I do, but she deserves to have some time to herself." *So do I.* "I think it was a wonderful idea for Fleur to invite her to France for a small holiday."

"Do you have any plans for tonight? Thought maybe you'd like to come over. Or I could come over." Ron looked hopeful at a chance to get out of the house. It almost made Harry laugh.

"I appreciate that, but I think I'm just going to stay in for tonight and relax. It's been a while since I've had the house all to myself."

Harry thought for sure that he would go mad from the absolute silence. Quiet gave him too much time to mull over his burgeoning feelings for his friend and allowed him too many instances to think over what he'd like to do to her.

It was wrong on so many levels. They were both married to different people, had been friends for much too long and acting on any instincts could lead them to nowhere good.

The knock at the door shook him from his thoughts and caused him to become stiff. An internal war raged within him; one side wanting for that knock to signify Ron's complete disregard for Harry's insistence that he not stop by, the other side hoping beyond hope that Hermione had finally returned from her self-imposed "Harry" exile.

Some would say that Merlin had smiled upon him. Others may claim that he was doomed. Because standing on the other side of Harry's front door was none other than Hermione Granger.

Hallelujah and *Bugger* rolled into one.

"Hello, Harry. May I come in?"

"Certainly," he offered, almost a bit too eagerly.

Hermione made her way towards the living room, removing her cloak along the way. "I'm sorry for dropping by so unexpectedly again."

"Rubbish, it's good to see you. Care for a drink?"

She shook her head, taking a seat on the sofa. "No thank you. I just... I wanted to come and see you, alone, after what happened between us."

Harry rubbed the back of his neck, feeling his stomach begin to twist in knots. He knew this was coming. She was going to tell him that what they had done was wrong, that it could never be repeated. She would promise him that their friendship would remain strong, but both of them would know that the foundation would now always be a bit shaky.

He wanted to sit next to her on the sofa, to hold her hand and tell her that everything would be okay and that nothing would change. But try as he might, his feet would not take him to his destination.

Before he knew what had happened, Hermione was in front of him. "I feel so lost. I cannot please my husband despite giving him everything that I possibly can, yet I seem to be able to please you with such a simple act as a kiss." Her eyes were watery as she whispered the pain she felt.

"Hermione, I'm..."

"Let me please you, Harry. Help me to feel wanted again."

Their lips met, igniting the flame to the fire that would consume them. The kiss was slow, both allowing their tongues to mingle and caress. That dance continued as they made their way up the stairs, both refusing to halt in their discovery of each other as his hands traveled the curves of her waist and bottom while hers journeyed his abdomen and chest.

Once they reached the guest bed, they broke the kiss and their eyes locked. A silent understanding passed between the two of them as she made the first move to remove his shirt. Harry was quick to follow, unbuttoning her shirt as well.

Soon, no clothes were left to be discarded and both sets of eyes drank in the form of the other. "You're beautiful," she whispered.

He returned the compliment. "I'm nothing compared to you."

They fell to the bed, limbs entangling as she maneuvered her legs. Her pelvis soon cradled his, and both knew they had reached the point of no return.

"I want you." Her breath was hot against his cheek, his body thrumming with need. When the head of his member brushed against her entrance, he watched her sweet lips open as she released a moan unlike he'd ever heard. Sexual whimpers quickly followed the sound.

He didn't care what noises she made, as long as she continued to make them and he was the cause of them.

Before she knew it, he was inside of her and it felt glorious. Never could she have imagined it would feel like *this*. She released every pent up emotion she had, allowing herself to lose control and voice just how magnificent the experience truly was. Words couldn't describe the sensations. All she could do was persist with her moans and keens, letting Harry know he was doing everything right.

Too soon, he felt her walls flutter around his member, and it caused his pace to quicken. He wanted, needed, to reach that glorious moment with her. In the next moment, time seemed to stand still. As much as he wanted to watch her beautiful face contort in pure pleasure, he found his own eyes closing at the overwhelming bliss of his own orgasm.

He thought for sure that his weight must be crushing her, but he didn't have the heart nor the want to remove himself from her delicious warmth. Those thoughts were swiftly dashed from his mind when he felt her hands pressing against his chest.

He rolled off of her, was about to embrace the lovely witch at his side, when she sprang from the bed and hastily retrieved her clothes.

"Hermione, what are you doing?"

She halted in her dressing and offered him a sad look. "I have to go home, Harry. The girls will worry if I don't return soon."

He nodded his head, though he made no attempt to hide his disappointment. "Reckon you can come by tomorrow?"

Hermione smoothed her shirt and returned to the bed. She touched his cheek and leaned in for a kiss. "I'll see what I can do."

And then, she was gone. Harry would have thought it a dream had he not found her necklace within the sheets. That was okay, he'd give it back to her the following day.

She didn't return the next day or the day after that. In fact, Hermione owed Harry two days later to cancel their lunch once again. He would cancel lunch with Ron as well. There was no way he could face his best mate at a time like this, and without Hermione for that matter.

After the fifth day with no word from her, Harry had enough. No matter what would happen in the future, they needed to deal with what happened already. It was with that thought that he Apparated outside the gates of Malfoy Manor with the misplaced necklace in hand.

Unexpectedly, the gates opened for him, and he made his way towards the Manor. Fidgeting slightly, he knocked on the door. He was greeted by a very disheveled-looking Hermione.

"Harry! What are you doing here?" He found himself being pulled into her comfortable embrace and almost lost his senses. Quickly, he regained his bearings.

"I just thought I'd stop by and see how you've been since it's been a bit."

"Come in, have a cuppa." She quickly gestured him inside with a wide smile. He followed her towards the kitchen and watched as she began to prepare the tea.

"I am so sorry I haven't been able to meet for our lunches, Harry. I feel dreadful about it. I feel even worse for not being able to visit with you since Ginny's been on holiday."

Harry stiffened a bit, wondering if Draco was close by. "It's... uh, it's okay. I've been keeping myself... entertained."

"Entertained or not, I'm ashamed that I haven't been able to make a small amount of time for you over the past two weeks."

Harry furrowed his brow and looked around. "Is Draco home?"

Hermione's bright smile returned. "Actually, he's not. He's busy planning our own little holiday."

At this statement, Harry eyebrows rose. "I'm confused," he admitted quietly.

"Oh, Harry, I'm so sorry. I haven't had the chance to tell you yet. One of the reasons I've had to cancel our lunches is because I did take your advice, in my own way, about getting away. I stayed in another wing of the Manor for a week and did nothing but think over the idea of having another child. After the week was up, Draco and I spent a great deal of time discussing it, and I've come to the decision that I don't really see any harm in trying for another child. If it happens, it happens."

Harry eyed her warily as she poured their cups of tea, wondering what she was on about. He pulled the necklace from his pocket and placed it on the counter when she brought his tea to him. "I wanted to return this to you." He made sure to hide all emotion when making the statement.

She looked oddly at the piece of jewelry. "How in the world did you manage to find Calysta's necklace?"

Harry had never thought it was possible, but at that moment his blood ran cold. It couldn't possibly be...

"I've been after her for months to fix the thing with a simple spell. How did you end up with it?"

Harry's mind reeled and his stomach clenched. He wanted to scream until his voice gave, throw curses until his wand broke and bang his head against a wall until he could no longer remember what a gullible git he had been.

"Harry?"

He was broken from his thoughts and looked Hermione in the eyes. There was no desire for him hidden in their depths, and he felt his world shatter. "I... I should really be going. I'm suddenly not feeling well."

The necklace forgotten, Hermione looked at him intently. "You don't look well at all, Harry. Is there anything I can do?"

He shook his head as he rose from his seat. "No, I'm just going to head home and take a kip. You..." He swallowed the bile that threatened to rise with his next sentence. "You and Draco enjoy your holiday."

Harry immediately Apparated from Malfoy Manor to Grimmauld Place, intent on taking a broom ride to ease the shock.

"Hello, Harry."

He froze mid-step up the stair, not quite believing his ears. His hand tightened around the banister, willing his anger to ebb before facing his guest. He turned around and made his way into the living room. "Afternoon, Calysta. I'd ask what you're doing here, but I believe I already know the answer."

Her sweet smile turned into a smirk that spoke volumes all on its own. "It's quite sad when you think about it. After all these years, you still need her help to solve the conundrums in your life. You really should have been able to figure it out on your own, and I'm a bit disappointed that you were unable."

"I'd say that's hardly fair considering how conniving you were, using Polyjuice Potion to..."

"Ah, yes, it's not the first time someone's been able to trick you with the handy concoction." He eyed her guardedly. "Mum tells Dina and me all the stories of your shared youth. One could say that sharing the story of Crouch Jr. polyjuicing himself as Moody could be viewed as a cautionary tale. Me, I used it as a learning experience."

Harry couldn't swallow past the lump in his throat, and he felt his eyes water with unshed tears. He had been tricked. He felt violated and used, unwilling to comprehend that he had not slept with his best friend, but his best friend's seventeen-year-old daughter. He asked the only question he could. "Why?"

Calysta scoffed. "Come on, Harry. Everyone else may be blind, but I'm certainly not. I saw how you looked at her. I watched *you* as *you* watched *her*. And despite the rough patch my parents have had recently, I knew she could never want you in that way. She loves father with every fiber of her being." She approached him slowly, almost seductively. She lightly touched his cheek and seemed to take no note of his slight flinch from the contact. "So, I decided to give you what you wanted."

"Give me what I... You tricked me!" His words were laced with anger, though he made no move to back away from the warmth of her touch.

"You shouldn't feel guilty. Well, you shouldn't feel guilty about sleeping with me. I am of age. You should possibly feel guilty for wanting to sleep with your best friend who is happily married, but I won't judge you."

He continued to stare at her, his breathing becoming slightly ragged. He searched her eyes imploring. "What happened to the girl I've watched grow?"

Calysta lightly chuckled. "She turned into a woman capable of so much more. I can continue to give you what you want, what you need. No one would ever have to know. I mean, it's not like you can tell anyone. My mother would be appalled by the fact that you not only wanted to sleep with her, but that you slept with her daughter instead."

"I had no idea..."

"That's really neither here nor there. Then there would be father to deal with. Sleeping with his wife or daughter would surely find you staring at the tip of his wand, one of many hexes ready to be spoken. And do you even want to think about repercussions from telling *your* wife?"

Harry's mind swam with the dark possibilities. If any of them found out the truth, he'd be cast aside and left with nothing. The wrath he would be dealt would make him wish that Voldemort had done away with him nearly twenty years ago.

"There's no shame in having a mistress, Harry. In fact, father is the first Malfoy *to* not have one. Don't deny yourself something you want. I'm offering you a chance to continue living your dream. No strings attached."

He stared at her in amazement, unable to comprehend what exactly was happening. He inhaled a deep breath before asking his next question. "What's in it for you?" Hermione may be Calysta's mother, but Calysta was turning out to be a Malfoy through and through. And Malfoys never did anything without expecting something in return.

Her smirk returned again. "I get to bed a man I've desired since I was thirteen. And, quite possibly, one day you'll want to sleep with *me* instead of my mother. Either way, we both win."

"Get out," he spat. "Get out and never come back. I don't know what kind of game you think you're playing, but this is my life you're screwing with!"

"I'll leave, Harry" she said, not at all put off by his rage. She'd expected him to be shocked at first, but when given time, she felt confident he could be persuaded to her line of thinking. "And for a little while, I'll wait, because I think we could really have something. But don't leave me hanging too long," she warned, and Harry knew in that moment that the life he knew was over. Things would never be the same again, no matter what he chose.

It was with great relief that he saw her go a second later, and heaven help him, he couldn't say without a doubt that she was wrong. He simply couldn't think about it.

No walk to clear his head would help him now.

One week later, Harry was no closer to making a decision. He'd considered taking time away from work, but one day home with Ginny was more than he could bear. Every moment he thought she would see right through him and know what he had done.

Never in a thousand years would he have ever thought he'd cheat on his wife. How had this happened to him? How had he let his feelings for Hermione get so far out of control? Looking back, Harry found himself wondering how many times Calysta had polyjuiced into her mother, but there was no way of knowing for sure. How exactly would that conversation with the real Hermione go? *Remember that time in my office when we kissed? When you let me touch you? When you touched me?*

If she said no, she would know something was going on straight away, and knowing Hermione, she'd never rest until she discovered the entire truth.

Harry could not stand the thought.

No, he resolved to admit he would never know the truth; he would only know what Calysta told him. He could ask her, of course... but he'd yet to talk to her since he'd come home to find her waiting for him. She'd given him time to decide, she'd said.

How could he? What possible choice did he have?

On one hand, he could keep her as a mistress Harry allowed his thoughts, however briefly, to wander back to the only time they'd been together, and it hadn't even been her. He'd thought he'd finally found what he was looking for, with Hermione.

He should have known better.

Every single indication said that Hermione was still very much in love with her husband. So what if they argued? What married couple didn't? Yet Harry had somehow fooled himself into believing that her feelings for him outweighed whatever she felt for Draco, but now he was faced with the stark realization that all she ever felt for him was friendship. Whatever feelings he thought he had for Hermione were very much one-sided.

But someone must have noticed. Calysta must have noticed. Had anyone else? Had Draco? Had Ginny?

No, he knew without a doubt that Ginny didn't have a clue. Because if she had, she'd have confronted him. That was just her way. And if Draco knew, he'd have hexed Harry into the second Tuesday of next week.

Harry's other choice was to come clean with the lot of them. But the second he considered it, the long list of ramifications came flooding in Ginny would divorce him, plain and simple. His children would know what he'd done, or at the very least that he'd been unfaithful, and Harry could barely stomach the thought.

He also knew that he'd lose one of his best friends, and possibly both.

No, Harry couldn't have that.

Help him, this was impossible. Whatever path he chose, he felt trapped.

What Harry needed was more time.

An owl he did not recognize landed on his desk, and Harry knew the moment had come at last.

How wrong he was.

Oh, the moment was at hand, but it was not the one he'd expected.

Harry,

Our house, 8 p.m.

Don't be late.

And don't bring Ginny.

Hermione

The strongest sense of foreboding struck him, and Harry couldn't concentrate for the rest of the day. Had Calysta finally told them what had transpired between them? Had she somehow figured out his feelings for her? Why couldn't he bring Ginny?

There was no way he could wait that long.

Without telling his secretary he was leaving, Harry Floo'd over to Hermione's at once.

"Harry! What are you doing here? Did you get my owl?" she asked as she hugged him in greeting.

"I did," he said, pushing her away. "What's going on?"

"Is everything alright? What's the matter?" She was quite used to his affection and surprised that he had pushed her away.

"What's tonight at eight? Why can't I bring Ginny?"

"Oh, that! It's great news, actually, but I thought I should spare Ginny since she's been, ah, wanting another... erm, Draco and I are expecting!" she burst, clearly happy about the news.

Harry slumped over, relief washing over him, the pain of her announcement quickly following and threatening to consume him.

It was over now.

Never had he known until this moment that Hermione had made her choice, long ago, and that he'd been nothing but a fool to believe otherwise. She could never look at Harry the way she saw Draco. He was the brother she never had. She would never love him as anything more than family.

He turned away from her, needing a moment to marshal his thoughts. She hadn't invited Ginny because Hermione knew very well that her friend had wanted another child, that three were not enough for her. To announce their happy moment in front of her, Hermione thought, would have been cruel. She'd have a difficult time enough with it once she found out without having to put on a brave face in front of a crowd.

This had nothing to do with Harry. Nothing to do with Calysta.

And Hermione had never loved him.

Not in the way he wanted her.

"Harry, what's wrong?"

Her voice now was a knife, one he could not bear to hear. He had risked everything to be with her, had convinced himself that she might want him in return, and now he was left with nothing.

Well, he still had something.

It was his for the taking.

"Congratulations," Harry said at last, "but I won't be able to make it tonight. I have other plans."

And without another word, Harry stepped back into the fire.

He had made his choice.

"What's the password?" he asked.

"Fluxweed," she answered, and Harry opened the door to see the woman he loved standing there.

The password he'd given her so he could tell her apart from the real Hermione was the only reminder he'd ever have of who she really was, and once it was out of the way, Harry indulged himself into the fantasy fully.

In the next moment, she was in his arms, and Harry was kissing her, his every thought on the witch very intently kissing him back. She led him to the bed, where they danced the now familiar routine. She was exactly where she wanted to be.

Every week for the last year they'd met here in this Muggle London hotel room, and it was always the same. They shagged until their time was up, and she always left without asking for more. She'd kept her word and kept their secret.

She'd made a promise to him and said she'd never break it.

Some days, Harry was so very grateful for that.

Some days, Harry almost wished she would.