

Redemption

by phoenix

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

It was the final straw. He had murdered, stolen and gone to Azkaban for his Master, but this was the final straw. It shouldn't have been a total surprise...he knew how brutal his Master could be, but he had never believed the Dark Lord would stoop that low. The Dark Lord had sent Draco to certain death. When the boy had somehow survived, it had not stopped the Dark Lord from venting his wrath on Draco. While he didn't receive much information from the outside, his captors had taken great pleasure in showing him the pictures of his son's mutilated body. Had they not told him it was Draco, he never would have recognized the body.

Draco had failed at a mission that even the Dark Lord had not been able to carry out. This had been particularly hard on Narcissa. With Draco dead and no one to console her Bellatrix had insisted that Draco had earned his punishment and spurned her sister for showing weakness she had wasted away. Once again, his captors had been ecstatic about informing him of a death in his family.

When Lucius learned of the circumstances of the deaths of his family, he made his decision. If his Master would nearly destroy one of the oldest, most prominent pureblood families, this was not the man he wanted to follow. He had heard the claim the Dark Lord was a half-blood, but Lucius had not believed it. After losing his family, he began to re-examine all that he knew, and found much of it to be inaccurate.

Now, he sat in a waiting room. They had told him that someone was coming to talk with him. He knew whoever it was would not likely trust him. Why should anyone trust him? He was a convicted Death Eater, one that had already lied once about his past association with the Dark Lord in order to escape incarceration. Surely, they would believe this was more of the same. Even though the chance was slim that he would be permitted to help bring down the Dark Lord, he knew he had to make his offer of assistance.

He looked up when he heard the door open. Minerva McGonagall's stern face was glaring at him. He smiled pleasantly. "Professor McGonagall? What a surprise to see you. I had expected someone from the Ministry, not a Hogwarts professor."

She took the seat on the opposite side of the table from him. "I come as a representative of the Order of the Phoenix, not as a professor. The Ministry has expressed no interest in your services."

"And the Order has? Well, at least there is someone out there with some sense." He was not surprised the Ministry wanted nothing to do with him. They had already informed him that his previous protestations of innocence had embarrassed them, even though it had happened nearly twenty years ago.

She was not amused by his comments. "Mr. Malfoy, you claim you intend to provide information that will be useful in defeating You-Know-Who."

"Yes, I do. Though, I would like a few reassurances."

"You are in no position to bargain, Mr. Malfoy. There is very little reason to believe that you are sincere."

He leaned forward and spoke in a low, serious voice. "I assure you, I am quite serious. I was misled and confused by the lies spun by the Dark Lord. Ever since the murder of my son and death of my wife, I have recognized his words as the lies they are. I will do whatever I can to see that he does not achieve power. I can give you the names of thirty society Death Eaters. I can tell you where the giants are being kept. I can tell you what werewolves Fenrir Greyback has recruited and where their base of operations is. I will give you one piece of information to prove that I am trustworthy. All I want is to be out of this dismal prison. I will consent to house arrest. I am not asking for my freedom."

Minerva considered him in silence for several long seconds. She then conjured a map and spread it on the table. "Show me where the giants are. If your information is accurate, I will see what I can do about having you released to my custody."

He pointed to a remote section of Wales. "They are either here," he moved his finger to northern Scotland, "or here. As for my release, it would, of course, be best if it were kept quiet. If the Dark Lord or his followers were to learn of my release, they would surely change anything that I know."

"Don't worry about discretion. No one will know that you aren't here. If your information is correct, I'll be in touch."

He watched her leave. He knew it was unlikely the giants had moved. There just weren't many places you could hide giants. Smiling smugly, he knew she would be back.

A week passed, and Lucius once again found himself in the waiting room. He smiled confidently as Minerva entered the room. "Ah, Professor, how good to see you again. I trust you found my information accurate?"

She didn't look entirely pleased as she took her seat. "I did. The Ministry was able to capture most of the giants. A few escaped." She frowned as she looked at him. "I have arranged for your release."

"You have my deepest appreciation."

"As you can imagine, it is a conditional release. You will be confined to Order Headquarters."

"Perfectly understandable."

"It will be based on your cooperation."

"As I have said, you have my complete cooperation."

"And naturally, you will not be permitted to have a wand. When it's over, members of the Order can testify on your behalf, if they choose. Your cooperation may convince the Ministry to pardon you."

"I am your servant," he said smoothly.

Once again, she gave him a disapproving frown. He seemed sincere, but you could never tell with someone like him. "Your release is being processed. You will be taken to the dock, and from there I will transport you to Headquarters. You will be expected to contribute to the upkeep of the house by cooking and cleaning."

"Excuse me?" he asked, not sure if he had heard her correctly. Malfoys did not do chores! Then Minerva gave him a meaningful look, and he realized he had to stay on everyone's good side. He was at their mercy. "Of course. I understand completely."

Since he did not know where they were going, he was forced to suffer through Side-Along Apparition, not his preferred method of travel. Even though it was dusk, he could tell that they were in a run-down section of London. He recognized the street from his youth. If memory served, the Black house was on this street, but he didn't see it.

Minerva turned to him and said, "The headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix can be found at number twelve, Grimmauld Place, London."

He watched as the building squeezed into existence. "Ah, yes, the Fidelius Charm. Very wise decision."

She glared at him before leading him up to the house. Rather than risk him learning how to unlock the door, she knocked. After a few seconds, the door opened. "Miss Granger, show Mr. Malfoy to his room."

"Yes, Professor," Hermione replied politely. She headed up the stairs, not waiting to see if he followed. They had all known Malfoy would be arriving, and none of them were looking forward to it.

Having been stuck in prison for more than a year, Lucius couldn't help but admire the way her jeans hugged her backside. True, he was old enough to be her father, and she was Muggle-born, but that wouldn't stop him from admiring a beautiful, young woman, and that's exactly what she was. As he climbed up another set of stairs, he continued to think about her. She was quite intelligent, despite her heritage. If she was staying here, he would have to get to know her better. Draco had talked about her, and not always disdainfully. It seemed his son had had some respect for her. He wanted to know why.

She stopped outside a small attic room on the fifth floor. He immediately recognized it as servant's quarters. There was a small bed, desk and wardrobe. While Spartan, it was more than he had had at Azkaban.

"The washroom is at the end of the hall," she said as she pointed at a closed door. "Follow me and I'll show you the kitchen and laundry."

He raised his eyebrow at the mention of laundry. He had not expected that to be one of the chores. "Of course," he replied politely. *Patience*, he reminded himself. *I must exhibit patience to earn my freedom.*

As they walked down the stairs, she said, "Do you even know how to cook?"

"I know many things that would surprise you, Miss Granger."

She glanced back at him and was surprised that he was not being smug. McGonagall had already warned them that Malfoy seemed to be acting overly cooperative and that she did not entirely trust him. Once in the basement, she pointed at the far side of the room. "The laundry is back there. If no one is around to do it magically, you will have to do it manually. Obviously, this is the kitchen. You can start on dinner."

He tried to maintain a pleasant demeanor. "Of course. Miss Granger, I was wondering if you could give me a hand this evening, just so that I can learn where everything is kept."

She looked at him suspiciously, but decided that it wouldn't hurt to help and that someone should keep an eye on him.

Lucius decided that biding his time and being polite was in his best interest. If they chose to think he was up to something, then that was their prerogative. After months of inactivity at Azkaban, he found it refreshing and relaxing to cook dinner. He noticed that the stores available were incredibly basic. If he was going to cook, he would require better supplies. "Would it be permitted for me to make a grocery list?" he asked.

"Why?" she asked cautiously.

"Despite what you may think about me, I am trying to be helpful. You may not believe it, but I have always had an interest in the culinary arts, despite growing up in a home with house-elves."

She tried to judge his sincerity. "Fine, make your list."

He bit his tongue, holding back a scathing remark. He knew that they all had their reasons to hate him. It would take time to earn their trust. "Thank you," he replied politely. This would not be the first time he had to be forced to flatter people for personal gain.

Lucius sat on his bed; the chair was incredibly uncomfortable. He considered the last two weeks. They had been a long and tense. The Order members didn't allow him at their meetings. Instead, they brought him down when they had questions and then sent him away. That was really the only contact he had with anyone. They ignored him most of the time. Of course, because they ignored him, it allowed him to overhear a lot of information. None of it was tactically interesting, but he was able to learn about interpersonal relationships.

On more than one occasion, he had heard Granger arguing with the youngest Weasley boy. He had learned that at one point, they had been a couple, but the stress of their search for a way to defeat the Dark Lord was taking its toll. This could work to his advantage. He knew that he had to attach himself to someone respectable, and while she was young, he was sure that her association with Potter would make her incredibly respectable.

It would take time to earn her trust, but he had nothing but time. Besides, he was truly happiest when he was scheming. Ingratiating himself to Granger would give him something to do with his time, and he thought it would be quite the challenge.

Hermione was packing up for school. Thankfully, she, Ron, and Ginny had been able to convince Harry to return to Hogwarts. They all knew that Voldemort was interested in the founders of the school and thus the school itself. She had convinced him that there was ancient magic in the school and that if they could unlock it, it might be useful in defeating You-Know-Who. Besides, there was the possibility Dumbledore's portrait had woken up. It might have the knowledge that the headmaster had been trying to teach Harry last school year.

Picking up the last of her dirty laundry, she headed down to the basement. When she opened the door to the laundry room, she paused at the sight of a bare-chested Lucius bent over the laundry tub. She had not expected him to have such a well-defined physique. "I, er," she started, but found herself unable to complete the sentence.

He looked up and gave her a warm smile. Pointing at a basket, he replied, "The dirty laundry is over there."

"Right," she replied quietly. Even after putting her laundry in the basket, she remained. The lamplight in the room was reflecting off the sheen of sweat on his chest. "I could, er." She pulled her wand out of her pocket. "Here, let me. I had planned on doing it anyway."

Obligingly, he backed away from the washtub as she cast the spell to magically do the laundry. "Thank you," he said sincerely. He picked up a towel and dried himself before slowly putting his shirt on. He was keenly aware that Hermione was watching him. Noticing that she was washing her school robes, he asked, "Have you decided to return to Hogwarts?"

"Yes, it's for the best. Education is very important." She found herself wishing that he would leave, but instead he started folding the already clean laundry.

"A good education is the foundation for a solid future. In addition, I think it is best that as many as possible remain at Hogwarts to protect the school."

"What do you know about You-Know-Who's plans for Hogwarts?"

Lucius chuckled softly. "Nothing, unfortunately. All I know is that he has an interest in the school and its connection to the founders. It was one of the many things he had us researching. Unfortunately, very little exists outside of Hogwarts. I think we all know that very old magic is resident there, magic that the Dark Lord hopes to tap."

"Yes, you would know all about that," she said snidely.

He sighed. "Yes. I regret that decision. At the time, I thought it was for the best. I'm not the same man I was then. I know that none of you believe that. I have tried to apologize to Miss Weasley, but naturally, she has been unwilling to listen to my apology," he said sadly. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see that Hermione's expression had softened. "I was wondering if you might answer a simple question for me?"

"Go ahead," she said warily.

He smiled warmly. "It's nothing of any real importance. I was just wondering if the information I have been giving has been useful? I am quite understandably restricted from your meetings, but I would like to know whether or not I am having a positive impact. I know that nothing I tell the Order can atone for my reprehensible behavior, that nothing can bring back my victims." He paused, giving time for his words to sink in. "For now, I am nothing more than your humble servant."

She considered him carefully for several seconds. Surprisingly, he seemed sincere. "It is making a difference." She was unwilling to give him any more information.

"That's good to know. If you will excuse me, I must deliver the laundry." He gently brushed against her as he exited the cramped room.

Hermione watched him leave. It seemed so... impossible. Lucius Malfoy was willingly doing chores. He had been nothing other than helpful and polite since his arrival. For the last two months, she had been waiting for him to do something deceitful, but he had not. Could he really have changed as he claimed?

With Hogwarts back in session, Lucius found he had a great deal of time to himself. At the beginning of his confinement, Remus Lupin had been a permanent resident at number twelve, Grimmauld Place. They had never interacted much, but at least there had been another person around. The idea of living under the same roof as a werewolf had been distasteful at first. Over time, he came to realize Lupin was not much different from a normal person. While Draco had never spoken highly of Lupin as a teacher, his son had grudgingly admitted the man was competent, unlike their other Defense professors.

Lately, he had not seen much of Lupin. When he told the Order where the werewolves were based, they did not seem to be surprised by the information. He could only assume that the Order was using Lupin to spy on the werewolves. That was what he would have done.

He sat in the drawing room, staring into the fire, lost in his thoughts. The members of the Order came from diverse backgrounds, yet they had come together for a common cause. He had learned they were a decent and honorable group. They were also a family. He found he was jealous of the closeness he saw. While he had always looked down upon the Weasleys, he now saw that he had been wrong. Arthur had been right in choosing family over riches. Of course, Lucius hoped to one day have both.

He looked up when he heard someone enter the room. It was his niece. "Tonks, is there anything I can help you with?"

She glared at him. "Nope." She sat the desk, intent on ignoring him. She refused to acknowledge him as a relative.

"There's something I think you should know."

"You can tell it at the next meeting," she replied shortly.

He rose from the chair and moved closer to the desk. "It's nothing to do with the Order. It's personal." He waited for her to look up at him. "It's about your mother. I know that Andromeda was disowned from the Black family. What you may not know is how much that hurt Narcissa. My dear wife loved her sister and regretted that she was not able to see her again."

Tonks snorted. "I doubt that."

Lucius pulled up a chair. "Please don't. Narcissa always admired and looked up to her older sister. She told me of many wonderful memories she had from their childhood. When she learned of your birth, she wanted to go to Andromeda, to congratulate her, but I would not let her. Now, I wish that I had let her go in secret. There are many things I wish I had done differently. I just thought you would like to pass on to your mother that Narcissa never stopped loving her."

"It's all a lie. You're just telling me what I want to hear so that I will trust you."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Believe what you will. When this is over, I will give you Narcissa's diaries, and you can give them to your mother." He returned to his seat by the fire.

Over the course of the rest of the year, Lucius reached an uneasy truce with the adult members of the Order. From time to time, he was able to read a copy of the *Daily Prophet* and could see that the tide was turning against the Dark Lord. He wasn't sure how much his information was contributing, but he knew the giant threat had been largely removed because of his actions. He had made at least a small contribution.

As winter break approached, he put the finishing touches on the bedrooms. It had been decided that it would be safest for Potter to spend the Christmas holidays at Grimmauld Place. He paid special attention to the room Hermione and the Weasley girl would be occupying. If only he had a wand, he could have conjured some flowers. The room looked better than it had. It should after the hours he had spent scrubbing the grime off the wallpaper. He doubted anyone had suspected there were flowers on it. The room now looked very feminine.

Having finished preparations for the new arrivals, he retired to the drawing room to read. He found that he was running out of books to read, as the Black library was not very large. Perhaps there was something he could do to change that? All he needed to do was to devise a way to convince them to let him return to his manor. He frowned, knowing that could prove extremely difficult.

In the middle of that afternoon, he heard the front door open. Moody and Tonks had gone with the elder Weasleys to escort the four children no, they were hardly children anymore young adults from King's Cross. True to form, Tonks knocked over the umbrella stand and set off Mrs. Black's portrait. He wondered not for the first time why they simply didn't remove the umbrella stand. Nobody had an umbrella.

As they tramped upstairs, he heard a conversation coming from the hallway.

"Dinner smells good. What is it, Mum?" asked Ron.

"It does smell good, but it's not my doing," replied Mrs. Weasley.

"What? You mean Malfoy cooked dinner?"

"Oh, come off it, Ron. He did a lot of the cooking this summer, but since you never pay attention to anything, you wouldn't know that," Hermione chided.

As their voices faded, Lucius smiled. He was pleased that it seemed like the two of them were still at odds. And even better, she had defended him. His thoughts the last few months had been filled with plans to earn her trust. Of course, whatever he did, he couldn't make it seem as though it had been planned.

At first, he did his best to make his presence as unobtrusive as possible. The second day, he was doing laundry and had the door to the laundry room cracked. He heard Ginny and Hermione in the kitchen.

"Did you see that wallpaper?" Ginny asked.

"I know. The room looks so much better. I never imagined there were flowers under there. If I had, I would have cleaned it myself."

"Like Mum ever gave us the chance. We didn't have much time for our room with all the other cleaning we were doing."

"That's true..." replied Hermione.

"Why did he do it? I mean, who would expect someone like him to actually do chores. I'm sure he's never worked an honest day in his life."

"Who knows? Maybe he was bored. Well, at least he's done something productive." Hermione thought back to the year that Sirius had spent here. She knew that Harry had been close to his godfather, but Sirius hadn't done much with his time here. Of course, Sirius had been an unwilling prisoner. For Malfoy, this was much better than being at Azkaban.

"Yeah, who would have believed that he would actually be helpful?"

"It is a little surprising, isn't it? I guess he actually did care for his family. Did you hear what Tonks said about Narcissa?"

He continued to work quietly as the two girls devolved into gossip. Yes, the small things he had been doing were starting to pay off.

After dinner, Lucius was reading in his usual chair by the fire. The others had stayed in the kitchen, talking with each other. They had maintained polite conversation while he was there, but he could tell they were still not entirely comfortable with his presence.

He noticed a subtle change in the lighting of the room and glanced around. Hermione had picked up one of the lamps and was examining the bookshelves. "Might I be of some assistance?" he asked as he rose from his seat.

She jumped slightly. "Oh, I didn't see you there."

"I am here most evenings. I take pleasure in reading, and I find my room rather confining. As I have had time to go through most of the books here, perhaps I can help you

find what you are looking for," he offered.

"Well, it's nothing specific. I just thought I would see what sort of books on Dark Magic were here."

He reached over her shoulder, lightly brushing against her, and pulled a book of the shelf. "This is one of the better ones here. I have found that most of them are sub-par and even inaccurate. If you are interested in researching Dark Magic over the holidays, I have an offer for you." He could not believe his luck. She had provided him with the precise opportunity he needed.

She took the book from him and held it protectively against her chest. His brief touch had caused her pulse to race. "Oh?" she asked cautiously.

He moved back to a non-threatening distance. "As you can imagine, I have quite the collection at my manor. I offer that collection to you and the Order."

"Why haven't you offered this before?" she asked suspiciously.

"No one has expressed any interest in conducting research. I've noticed most of the others prefer action."

"Thank you for the offer. I'll pass it on."

"Oh, but, no, it's not possible, really...." He watched her raise her eyebrow inquisitively. "You see, I would have to accompany whoever goes, and I would need my wand to pass through the gates. That is certainly out of the question."

She considered him for a few seconds. So far, he had been nothing other than helpful. "I don't see why that would be a problem, so long as you swore to give up your wand when you entered."

"I wouldn't dream of doing otherwise, madam."

"All right, then. I'll tell Professor McGonagall."

He pulled a few more books off the shelves. "These should provide a little light reading this evening." He returned to his chair, pleased that she had not outright discounted his idea. He knew of her love of books and learning and that his library would be irresistible to her.

After breakfast, Hermione held the other members of the Order back. "I've had an idea." She thought it would be best if it seemed like her idea and not something that Malfoy had offered. "We've been looking for information on the spells that led to You-Know-Who's current state. The Restricted Section at Hogwarts hasn't turned up much, and the books here aren't very helpful either. Malfoy was a Death Eater, and we know he's been fascinated with the Dark Arts. Last night, I learned from him that he has quite a collection of books on Dark Magic. I think we should see if there's anything useful in his library."

"Sounds like a good idea," said Moody. "The more we can learn about the enemy, the better."

"Who's going to go?" asked Ron.

She began nervously, gaining confidence as she spoke. "Well, I thought I would. After all, I'm better at research than anyone else. Of course, I would welcome any help."

"I think you're the perfect choice," replied Ron. His disdain for books was well known.

"There is one thing, though. Malfoy would have to come along to let me in the manor."

"Makes sense. The Ministry's been trying to get in there since Narcissa died, to give the place a thorough search, but no one's been able to get in. To the best of my knowledge, no one's been in there since her funeral. I guess with Malfoy still alive, the gates won't let anyone else in," replied Moody. He thought for a few more seconds before adding, "He'll probably need his wand, too, though."

"That's what he said," Hermione replied.

"You're going with an armed Malfoy, alone, to his house?" asked Ron incredulously.

Hermione was exasperated. "Oh, grow up, Ron. You didn't seem interested in coming. Besides, we can charm his wand so he can't perform any offensive spells, and he's agreed to give it up once inside. Anyway, I think he's proven himself to be quite trustworthy."

Molly chimed in her support. "He has been incredibly helpful. Not only with providing us information to use against the Death Eaters, but he's done a better job keeping this house up than...anyone else." Even though Harry wasn't there, she didn't want to say anything bad about Sirius. While they hadn't gotten along well, she had realized he had been through a lot.

"Molly's right," Moody added. "I've spent a lot more time with him than you have, Ron, and I have to say I trust him as much as I ever will. I think Hermione will be fine with him if we charm his wand. I'll bring it over after lunch."

After lunch, Hermione found Lucius in one of the upstairs toilets, cleaning. She watched for a few moments in silence. His hair was tied back, but a few locks had come loose. A part of her wanted to brush them behind his ear. She banished that thought and focused on what was before her. Here was a formerly proud aristocrat, seemingly content to do mundane chores that most avoided. "Excuse me... Mr. Malfoy?"

He turned to face her and noticed her eyes had caught sight of the Dark Mark. He angled his body so that it wouldn't be visible. After quickly washing and drying his hands, he rolled his sleeves down. "How may I be of service, Miss Granger?"

Forcing herself to regain her composure, she announced, "We are going to your library this afternoon. I'll meet you in the drawing room when you are ready."

"I shall be down momentarily," he replied. Once she was gone, he smiled smugly. Phase one of his plan was complete, and with much less trouble than he had anticipated. Hopefully, the rest of it would progress as smoothly.

A/N: This is not a pairing I originally envisioned, but after reading through a few fics, it's grown on me. Feedback is very much appreciated and I'm always open to concrit.

It was originally started as a bit of Lucius seduces Hermione fluff, but it has morphed into something quite a bit more than that over time.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic.

Chapter 2

Hermione was waiting in the drawing room, holding Lucius's wand. She was pacing, trying to calm herself. Unfortunately, the fact he had been in many of her fantasies ever since she had seen him shirtless in the laundry room was not helping. Even now, his bare chest kept intruding on her thoughts. None of the boys at school had a physique like that, and they were all boys in comparison.

When he joined her, she said, "I'll give this to you when we get there." She didn't tell him it had been charmed so that it would not cast offensive spells. This would be a good way to test his loyalty.

"Of course. I understand." He could tell that she was flustered and wondered if he was the cause.

"Good, now follow me."

Following her was something he thought he could do for quite some time. While he was normally a traditionalist, he had to admit Muggle clothing did have its advantages. And she was wearing those wonderfully tight Muggle blue jeans.

Once outside, she held out her arm. "Hold tight," she said.

"Why do I have to do that?" he asked, not really minding at all. He hoped this was the first of many times he would hold tight to her. Unfortunately, she quickly pulled away from him once they Apparated outside his front gates. Without responding to his query, she handed him his wand. If she would permit him to Apparate them, they could go straight to the grand foyer. Rather than bring this up, he decided they would walk up from the front gates. While the weather was cold, it was dry, calm and not entirely unpleasant. He saw her staring at the large edifice. "This is the first time you've seen my manor, isn't it?"

"Yes. It's..." For once she was at a loss for words. She had seen country manors before, but never one of this magnitude. She had to admit, magical buildings had their advantages.

He smiled at her innocence. "It is a bit overwhelming until you get used to it. It's been in my family for nearly six hundred years and has been expanded a few times over the years, though the front façade has remained the same. I would love to give you a tour, but I fear our research will prevent that," he sounded disappointed.

"Yes, that it will," she replied absently.

He had hoped to use this time for idle conversation, but she was distracted by her surroundings. They finished the walk up the drive in silence. At the door, Lucius performed a complex unlocking charm. Once the door was unlocked, he handed her his wand before she could ask for it. He made sure to hold it in a way that she would have to touch his hand. He smiled at her and watched her quickly look away from him. Before he could say anything, they were immediately met by a house-elf.

"Master, Gupper was not expecting you. Had Gupper known Master was coming..."

"It's perfectly understandable, Gupper. Miss Granger will be our guest this afternoon. We will be in the library. I would appreciate some hot butterbeer to take the chill off." He knew of Hermione's feeling toward house-elves and that it was in his best interest to be polite to them. He knew it would not be any one thing that earned her confidence, but a series of small actions.

"Of course, Master." Gupper disappeared.

Hermione was stunned. Harry had told her how Malfoy had treated Dobby. She began to wonder if he had changed. Her musing was interrupted by his voice.

"Miss Granger? Are you well?"

"What?" She realized that was not the first time he had called her name. "Oh, yes, I'm fine. I'm sorry. Where is the library?"

He smiled warmly at her, suspecting what she was thinking. "This way." He placed his hand on the small of her back and gently guided her further into the house and to the library. When he opened the doors to the library, he watched her expression and was pleased at the glee that he witnessed.

"This is marvelous," she remarked as she tried to take in the sheer enormity of the room. She couldn't imagine a single person owning this many books. She had seen libraries that didn't have this many books.

Lucius felt an enormous sense of pride. "The books that will probably be of the most assistance are not in the main part of the library." He crossed to the far side of the room and activated a latch. "For security reasons, I keep the books on Dark Arts here."

Looking into the smaller room, she saw that the shelves held over a hundred books. She could spend days pouring through them. "Very interesting decision to use a manual latch instead of something enchanted." Her intellectual curiosity made her forget that he had been hiding this illegal collection for years.

"It is more secure this way. Magical latches are more easily located. Allow me to help you select some books. I believe you will be more comfortable reading in the main library." As she examined some of the titles, he made sure the books he selected were close to her so he could brush his hand against her. After he had selected a half-dozen books, he said, "I think this will be a good start." He saw that she had selected a few books of her own and reached for them, once again ensuring his hand touched hers. "Permit me," he offered in a polite whisper.

Hermione was used to doing things for herself. Harry and Ron had never been much on manners. When she realized he was touching her hand, she relinquished her books and hurried out of the small room so he couldn't see her blushing. Why was she having these thoughts? She chided, *First of all, he is old enough to be my father. Though he is still quite handsome and masculine. He is also a convicted Death Eater. He has changed sides. Look how helpful he's being. People do change. Lucius Malfoy does not change.* No? Look at how he has treated you, a Muggle-born, and his house-elf. Tell me hasn't changed. *It's all an act. He's up to something* What could he be up to? Why are you afraid to see the good in him?

She shook her head to clear her mind. She couldn't believe she was arguing with herself. Lucius had placed her stack of books on a small table next to an overstuffed armchair that looked perfect for reading. "Thank you," she replied politely, not sure of anything else to say.

Hermione began taking furtive glances at Lucius, hoping he didn't notice. She tried to convince herself that she didn't want to tear his robes off, to leap into his lap as he sat there, but she failed miserably. She kept thinking of the way he looked when he was doing the laundry, mainly to keep herself from picturing the slight bulge in his robes just below the waist. How many times had she thought about that moment the last few months? His muscles rippling as he rubbed the clothes on the washboard, the sweat

glistening on his broad chest, the fine hair that she longed to run her fingers through... But she couldn't think about those things, not when she still couldn't afford to trust him.

A tray appeared on the main table, and Lucius picked up the mugs of butterbeer, handing one to Hermione. "If there is anything else that I can do for you, do not hesitate to ask."

She took the proffered mug. "No, there's nothing right now. I will ask that you remain in the library."

"Of course," he replied smoothly. Not that there was anywhere else he would have preferred being. He returned to his seat and resumed reading. Sipping at the butterbeer, he mused that he would have preferred something stronger. He could see the cognac decanter sitting on the shelf behind the desk. It had been so long since he had partaken of the finer things in life, but he could wait. He had to seem harmless.

Once he was sure she was engrossed in her books, he moved to the far corner of the room, where she would have to look over the back of the chair to see him. "Gupper," he called softly.

"Yes..." Gupper was hushed and continued in a whisper, "Master? What can Gupper do for you?"

Lucius crouched down so he could speak quietly. "First, I want you to pack a bag for me with some of my clothes and toiletries." He was tired of how he was living and wanted as much luxury as he could manage. "Simple clothing, nothing ostentatious."

"Yes, Master," Gupper replied obsequiously.

"Second, I would like a nice intimate dinner for two prepared. Select a nice wine out of the cellar. We will dine at seven. Use the family dining room, not the main room." He knew the main room was too extravagant and the large table too intimidating.

"Yes, Master. Gupper will have dinner served at seven."

Lucius had a smug grin on his face as he returned to his chair. He thought he caught a glimpse of her watching him. Phase two was progressing nicely.

When it was nearly seven o'clock, he set his book down. "Miss Granger?"

She looked up from her work, annoyed at being disturbed. "What is it?"

"I don't know if you've noticed the time, but it is getting quite late. I thought perhaps you might like something to eat?"

She looked at the clock, surprised at how much time had passed. "Oh, yes. I'm sorry. I just lost track of time. I suppose we should go," she said reluctantly. She hated the idea of leaving so many books unexplored.

"That won't be necessary. I took the liberty of having dinner prepared for us here. Thankfully, the estate is quite self sufficient." He gave her ink-stained hands a quick glance. "Perhaps you would like to freshen up before dinner?"

She looked embarrassed as she saw her hands. "Yes, of course."

Lucius waited outside the door to the library. While Hermione was cleaning the ink off her hands, Gupper informed him dinner was ready.

Hermione first tried the soap to wash the ink off her fingers. When that didn't work, it occurred to her that she was a witch and could charm her hands clean. Once again, she could feel the heat rising in her cheeks. What was it about him that flustered her?

"You are attracted to him," answered the voice. *I am not. It's the house. Being here is overwhelming.* "Then what are you doing to your hair?"

She realized that she was trying to charm it into some semblance of control and stuffed her wand away. "I am not trying to impress Lucius Malfoy," she said aloud, hoping the conviction in her voice would silence her inner voice. Before she could get in another argument with herself, she left the washroom.

When she emerged from the water closet, he offered her his arm. "If you will permit me, my lady?"

Hermione was flattered at the way she was being treated. It was not at all what she had expected from Malfoy. She temporarily froze as she saw the setting of the dining room. There were several large floral arrangements on the sideboard that filled the room with a pleasant aroma, and a single candelabrum on the table lit the room. As Malfoy led her to her seat, she said, "You didn't have to go through all this trouble for me."

"I cannot take any credit. I merely instructed Gupper to prepare a dinner for two. Had I known this is what he planned..." He tried to give an innocently surprised laugh.

"No, no. There's nothing wrong with it. It's just more than I'm used to." Even the fancy restaurants her parents had taken her to had not been this nice.

"If it makes you uncomfortable, I will have them change the room," he replied as he pulled out her chair.

"No, I don't want them to go through any more trouble for me." Her eyes momentarily locked with his when he placed the napkin in her lap. She looked away in embarrassment when he smiled at her. For some reason, she felt she didn't deserve that smile.

Dinner was exquisite, and the conversation was harmless enough. While the wine was excellent, Hermione limited herself to one glass. As they were waiting for dessert, she asked, "Why did you decide to join our side, Mr. Malfoy?"

He wanted to tell her to call him Lucius. He longed to hear her say his name, but the time was not right. Patience was the key. "I finally realized that I had been deceived. For years, the Dark Lord told us lies. Telling us how he would save the Wizarding World and preserve our ways. What he did," he paused briefly to regain control of his emotions. "What he did to my family proved that he preached nothing but lies. I now know that to preserve our world, he must be destroyed. If anything I have or know can aid in the destruction, it is yours."

She was stunned by the conviction in his voice. "I'm sorry you had to learn the hard way."

He gave her a weak smile. "My ego prevented me from seeing the truth long ago. I fear that I have more than earned my punishment."

"Well, you are atoning for it now. Perhaps the fates will smile more favorably upon you now." She tried to sound upbeat, but the resulting tone was cheery and shallow

He replied sadly, "One can only hope."*Little do you know that they are already doing so. In time, you will see this.*

They finished dinner in silence. He knew that Hermione would want to return to the library. "Perhaps you should send a message to the others letting them know you are still researching in the library? If you would like, I could have a guest room prepared, and you could stay the night. It would save travel time as I assume you will want more than one more day to go through the books."

As he waited for her reply, he could see her indecision. "I am willing to allow you to search my room and lock me in for the night."

"Well, all right," she replied reluctantly. She followed him up the stairs and down the hall.

He stood by the fireplace as she began inspecting his room. As she inspected the bed, he moved behind her. "There's nothing dangerous about the bed," he said in a husky whisper.

She turned to face him. "I'll be the one to determine that, Mr. Malfoy."

"Please, call me Lucius. Mr. Malfoy is far too formal. And I hope that you will permit me to call you Hermione." He brushed her hair behind her shoulder so that he could see her creamy, white neck.

"Mister..."

"Lucius," he interrupted.

"Lucius, I need you to permit me to finish the inspection," she protested.

Hearing her say his name was very arousing. She was so very young and beautiful. He momentarily wondered if she was a virgin, and he found that thought *very* arousing. "Do you really need to do that? After all, you do trust me, don't you?" He reached out and brushed her cheek, which he noticed was flush.

She backed against the bed, with no way to escape. "Of course I trust you," she replied nervously.

"Very wise of you. I could never cause you any harm." He leaned forward, eager to kiss her lips. He was quite pleased to see her close her eyes and tip her head up. Clearly, he was not the only one eager for the kiss. At first, he pressed his lips gently against hers. When he met no resistance, he laced his fingers through her bushy, brown hair and pressed his lips more firmly against hers. Using his tongue, he gently forced her lips apart and enjoyed the taste that was uniquely Hermione.

He gently lowered her onto the bed, pleased with her response...

"Mr. Malfoy?" Hermione's voice interrupted his daydream. "I'm ready to lock you in."

"Of course." Soon, that dream would be reality. Unfortunately, he was left in a highly frustrated state. "Good night, Miss Granger. If you need anything, Gupper will see to it."

"Thank you. Good night," she said pleasantly before departing the room.

Once he was alone, he moved to the mirror. "Patience, Lucius. You must show patience. If you are too aggressive, you will drive her away."

A/N: Thank you to those that have left reviews. I hope that you will continue to enjoy this story. In this story, we get to see a different side of Lucius. Sneakiness comes in all forms, and sometimes you can get more flies with honey. This is a Lucius that has nothing and is trying to regain everything. That controls a lot of his behavior.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. As for the 'knight in shining armor' part, I don't know what to say. I'm not a person that reads romance novels, but I will instead blame Fred and George. I love the twins and I had to find a way they could contribute to my story. This was about all I could come up with. LOL

Chapter 3

It was past midnight when Hermione retired for the evening. Even as exhausted as she was, she could not immediately fall asleep. Her thoughts kept her awake. 'He is quite handsome and gallant, isn't he?' *Be quiet. He's old enough to be my father.* 'Yes, we discussed that. Does it really matter? Is there a rule that says you can only fall in love with someone your age? After all, your father is older than your mother.' *He's only eleven years older than Mum. Malfoy is more than twenty years older than me.* 'Then why do you think about kissing him? Wondering how kissing an experienced man will feel?' *I do not!* 'You can't lie to me. You do. You wonder how it will compare to Ron's kisses.'

She rolled over in bed and beat her pillow, hoping to quiet the voice in her head. 'I've seen the way he looks at you' *You're imaging things. He's a pureblood and I'm a filthy little Mudblood.* 'I don't think he cares anymore. You heard what he said.' *Yes, and he didn't mention anything about changing his opinions on blood.* 'Not directly, but you weren't listening close enough.'

She tried shifting again. 'I'm still here. You can't ignore me.' *Yes I can!* 'As you wish. I'll come back later.'

Lying still for a little while longer, she realized that the voice had gone away. Why part of her mind thought that thinking about Malfoy was acceptable was beyond her. Unfortunately, between the romance novels she had read and Fred and George's daydreams, she had a very vivid imagination, even without the experience to back it up.

As she drifted off to sleep, the little voice in her head decided that experiencing the Prince Charming fantasy, with Malfoy in the starring role, might be helpful.

Hermione was trapped in a high tower. The Black Knight had captured her after the king refused to allow him to marry his daughter. Now she was pacing the tower, hoping for a way out. They were to be wed at sunset. Outside the window, she heard someone call her name. Running to the balcony, she looked to the ground and saw a knight in shining armor astride a white steed. As she looked down at him, he doffed his helmet and shook out his luxurious, long, blonde hair.

"Hermione! I have come to rescue you," he shouted up to her.

"Oh, Lucius. You must leave. If he finds you here, he'll kill you."

"I would die for you, my love. I cannot live without you. I will slay that knave where he stands." He slid down off his horse and drew his sword. "Where is that ruffian?"

From the base of a tower came a deep, menacing voice. "Who dares to trespass on my land?"

"It is I, Prince Lucius, and I have come to return Princess Hermione to her father."

The black knight drew his sword. "She is mine. If you do not leave now, you will never leave."

"You are mistaken. You are the one that will not leave." He made a fancy flourish with his sword.

"Be careful, Lucius," Hermione called down. She watched in horror, occasionally hiding her eyes behind her hands, as the two knights fought. The clangs of the swords were vicious, and on more than one occasion, Lucius was nearly decapitated. She saw him get hit on the leg and crumple to the ground. "NO!" she screamed before fainting.

When she opened her eyes, she was looking up into Lucius' face. There was a small cut on his cheek. "You're hurt," she said weakly as she reached up to brush his cheek.

"It's nothing. How are you?" His voice was filled with concern.

"I'm fine. Is it over?"

"Yes, my love. It's over." He bent down and pulled her into a passionate kiss.

As she wrapped her arms around him, she noticed that he had removed his armor. She felt him pick her up and carry her to the bed.

"I was so concerned about you. He didn't touch you, did he?" He trailed his hand across her body.

She shook her head and found that she couldn't keep her hands off her savior. Quite deftly, she undid his shirt and pulled it over his head. She was keenly aware of his hand sliding up her skirt. He nibbled at her neck, and she moaned in delight. His hand was rubbing the sensitive skin between her legs, and she pulled at him, wanting more.

When Hermione woke, she was drenched in sweat and passionately embracing her pillow. She could feel the throbbing and wetness between her legs. Disgusted with what she had dreamt, she threw her pillow across the room and shouted, "NO! I will not think about him like that."

'Too late,' chimed the voice.

Choosing to ignore the voice, she got out of bed and decided to take a cold shower. That should put an end to the voice.

When she stepped out of the bathroom, she looked around the room for her clothes. They weren't on the chair where she had left them. She saw a set of robes hanging on the bathroom door. Picking them up and examining them, she saw that they were tasteful, and since she had little choice, she put them on. Examining her reflection in the mirror, she thought the robes fit reasonably well, though they were a little short. The gold color reflected off her eyes and complemented her coloring. She was tempted to believe this was Malfoy's doing, but she knew that he couldn't communicate with the house-elves from his room.

Once she removed the locking charms, she knocked on his door.

"Come in," Malfoy replied. He rose as she entered his room. "Good morning, Miss Granger. You look lovely, though I will apologize for the house-elves. You see, they are used to collecting laundry at night. They must have noticed you didn't have a change of clothes and brought you the lovely robes you are wearing. I can have Gupper return your clothes immediately."

She tried not to blush at his complement, memories of her dream running through her mind. "No, that won't be necessary." She still didn't like the idea of house-elves, and she didn't want to do anything to further burden them. She noticed that he looked more like the master of the house in his crisp shirt and smoking jacket. Yesterday, he had been wearing rough looking second hand clothing.

"I hope you slept well."

Her cheeks flushed as she momentarily thought about her dream. "Yes, very well, thank you. Are you ready for breakfast?"

"Of course, my dear. After you." He gestured towards the door. Watching her backside, he opined that he definitely preferred her jeans. Of course, the bodice of the dress was much more flattering than the jumper she had been wearing yesterday. He was willing to make the trade since she would spend most of the day sitting.

Since there were once again fresh flowers at the table, he decided to discuss the gardens and hothouse. As they finished eating, he said, "Perhaps you would like to take lunch in the conservatory? It's far less formal than the dining room, and it looks like we might have some sun today."

"That sounds...pleasant," she replied.

He grinned at her. "Excellent. Gupper! We will take lunch in the conservatory. Sandwiches will be sufficient."

"Yes, Master."

"Shall we return to the library?" he asked after the elf was gone.

"Of course," she replied. She paused momentarily when he offered her his hand to help her out of her seat, and could feel her pulse begin to race in anticipation of his touch. Taking a deep breath in the hopes of burying the voice, she accepted his hand. "It's really not necessary."

"Nonsense," he replied nonchalantly. "While we may be in a time of war, that's no reason decent manners should be ignored. I would betray my upbringing if I were rude to my guest."

A part of her wanted to ask him outright what he thought about those that weren't purebloods, but she didn't want to risk losing access to the library. "I'm just not used to it."

"Ah, yes, I have noticed that Muggles seem to have abandoned some of the gentility of the past. I would imagine that there are still things about the wizarding world you find foreign." He paused thoughtfully. "If you would like, I would be willing to tutor you. It may prove beneficial when you seek employment." He paused again. "Forgive me

for being forward."

"That's all right."

"I don't even know what your intentions after this is all over are. If you don't mind me asking, have you given any thought to your future?"

"A little, but not enough. There has been so much going on. At one point I thought about being a Healer, but now I'm not sure."

"A noble profession. Have you considered private practice?" He knew she could be more, would be more, but now was the time to be supportive. He knew that she had not received much support from her friends.

"There's such a thing?"

"Of course. I have heard that you are incredibly bright. It would be a shame to waste your talent at St. Mungo's. I'm sure you would be interested in research, and that would be much easier to accomplish if you controlled your own schedule. Of course, you would still have to do your internship at St. Mungo's, but afterwards, you would be free to do as you wish."

"I had no idea," she said as she released his arm.

Now that he had demonstrated that she still had much to learn about the wizarding world, he would continue to draw her toward him. "My offer still stands. Have any of the books been particularly useful? I could select some others covering the same subjects if you would like."

"Oh, thank you." She picked up three of the books. "Do you have any more like these?"

He took the books from her and read the titles. "I'll be back shortly."

She watched him walk back to the secret chamber. 'He smiled at you.' *He smiles a lot.* 'Only at you, at least a sincere smile. Watch his eyes.' *I will not watch his eyes.* 'Chicken.'

She continued to try to deal with the absurdity of these conversations she was having with herself. She looked up when Malfoy returned with the books.

"I hope you will find these useful," he said cheerfully.

Despite her promise, she looked into his eyes. The smile on his lips was sincere; the eyes never lied. 'See. I told you so' *Oh, shut it.* "Thank you, Mr. Malfoy."

"My pleasure, Miss Granger." He made sure he brushed his hand against hers. "If I can be of further service, please ask."

"I will," she replied and cringed as her voice cracked. His touch had felt electric, eliciting unwelcome reactions from her body.

Shortly before lunch, Gupper entered the library carrying a letter on a silver tray. "Master, Gupper apologizes, but Miss Granger has received a letter."

She looked up as Malfoy waved the elf toward her. She picked up the letter and said, "Thank you." The letter was from Moody, just checking to make sure everything was fine. He alluded to some of the others being concerned when she had not returned last night, despite her message explaining the situation.

Picking up quill and parchment, she penned a reply, reassuring everyone that her research was going well, and that she would probably be here a few more days due to the sheer number of books she had to go through, but that she would definitely be back for the Christmas feast. "Would it be possible to post this?" she asked.

"Of course. Gupper. Miss Granger has a reply to be posted."

"Yes, Master. Gupper would be happy to post the letter for Miss Granger. The owl was refusing to leave." He nodded obsequiously, took the letter, and vanished with a pop.

She watched where the house-elf had been. "Have you thought of freeing them?"

"I had, but what would they do? I have changed, and I think they will find service here much different than it once was. Incarceration has a way of changing a person. I had a great deal of time to reflect on my past and..." He looked away from her. "I'm not proud of much that I did. Once I am allowed my freedom, I will give them time to see how I have changed and offer them their freedom after a six-month period. If they accept, I will allow them to continue service to the Malfoy family if they wish. Though, I don't think you entirely understand the importance of the loyalty that house-elf servitude brings."

"You mean slavery," she retorted.

He replied neutrally, "As you wish. If I may ask you a question, have you discussed this proposed freedom with the house-elves? You may be offering them something they don't want."

"Well..." She thought back to how the house-elves in the Hogwarts kitchen had reacted to her discussion of having them freed. "It's only because they don't know any different."

Watching the determined look on her face, he forced himself not to smile at her naivety. "As it stands now, house-elves have guaranteed employment for life. They are housed, clothed, fed and given medical care, all in exchange for their unbreakable loyalty to their family and their service." He could tell she wanted to interrupt and continued quickly. "It is a beneficial magical contract for both sides. It is true that I used to treat my elves rather poorly, and I am not the only one. Some may be better off granted their freedom, but others are not. Each of us has secrets that we wish to keep. Servants are in a position to hear those secrets."

"Did you know that before wizards and house-elves formed their alliances, that human servants were bound by a similar contract? By freeing house-elves, families would be less likely to hire them, as their confidence could not be guaranteed. Before you pursue this endeavor in earnest, you should consider the consequences. Would you really make their lives better?"

"I believe that you should instead concentrate on house-elf treatment. If owners could be convinced that a healthy and happy servant is more efficient, would that not serve the same purpose?"

She considered his words carefully. She knew that Ron and Harry had insisted time and again that the elves did not want their freedom, but listening to Malfoy, she considered ramifications that had not occurred to her. "I suppose so," she replied meekly. Now that she had found her voice, she continued, "But Dobby is happy free. He's proof that it can work."

He tried not to react at the mention of the elf Potter had tricked him into freeing. "That may be true, but I believe he will be the exception rather than the rule. Was there not another house-elf that didn't react well to being free?" Lucius was glad that the others had ignored him; he had learned much through overhearing conversations.

"Well, yes, but that's different," she insisted.

"How so?" He wanted her to seriously consider the ramifications of her house-elf freedom crusade. If she pursued such a hopeless and laughable cause, she would lose some of her respectability, and he couldn't allow that.

"Well, she was..." Her voice trailed off as she really couldn't come up with an explanation.

"This is why I think you would find it far more effective to campaign for better treatment. You would be hard pressed to find aristocrats willing to part with a faithful servant. But those same people would be amenable to changing their treatment if there was a benefit. I would be willing to assist you in this venture."

"You would?" she asked incredulously. No one had ever taken her house-elf crusade seriously.

"Of course, my dear. Why don't we finish this discussion over lunch?" He offered her his hand and escorted her to the conservatory. "I'm sure that you have noticed that the manor is pristine. Truthfully, this is cleaner than I have seen it in quite some time, all with no supervision. Obviously, the traditional punishment that we have been taught that house-elves require for obedience was an incorrect belief. Ah, here we are." He released her arm and pushed open a set of heavy double doors.

While Hermione had not thought the rest of the manor was cold, she was hit by a blast of warm, fragrant air, and she closed her eyes to enjoy the scent. She felt an arm wrap around her waist and opened her eyes.

"I think you will find the garden more enjoyable than standing here in the hall." He led her into the brightly lit and extremely colorful room.

Hermione looked around the room, surprised that such beauty could exist at Malfoy's manor. In the distance, she could hear the bubbling of a fountain. "It's amazing."

He replied proudly, "It is, isn't it? This has always been one of my favorite rooms." He plucked a flower from a vine, stuck it behind Hermione's ear and gently smoothed her hair. "Now you truly belong in the garden."

She looked away from him and blushed. 'Why won't you believe me? He likes you.' *It has to be an act.* 'Must you be so logical? Fine. He is mature, intelligent and he did not immediately ridicule your idea. He is willing to debate with you. Unlike Ron.' *What would he want with me? What could I have to offer someone like him? I don't fit into his world.* 'But he's offered to teach you. Think of the opportunities.' *What opportunities? He's disgraced, a former convict.* 'Ah, but if he still has money, that will make all the difference. Remember, they forgave him last time.'

"Hermione? Are you well? Is the scent too much?"

She gave him a reassuring smile. "No, I was just lost in the beauty. It's easy to forget it's December in here." Had he just called her 'Hermione'?

"That it is. This way. We are dining by the fountain." Once again, he placed his hand on her back. He fought the desire to pull her against his body and capture her mouth in his.

She stared in awe at the fountain. It was a green marble willow tree with water flowing from many of the branches. Perched in the branches were birds carved from various precious stones. "Amazing."

He stood just behind her left shoulder. "I was quiet pleased to find a stone carver who could make it, a nice old man from Italy. The others had all told me I was insane. It took five years from the time I had the idea until it was delivered."

She thought it looked almost alive and she reached out to touch it, to reassure herself it was just stone. "Incredible." As she turned to look at Malfoy, she noticed he was incredibly close. She could feel her body reacting to his closeness. Licking her lips, she looked around the room, saw the small table set nearby, and walked around him to take a seat. "I think we should eat so I can get back to work."

Lucius was quite pleased by her reaction, though he was careful not to show he had noticed. "Of course," he replied innocently. She might feel the same way he did, but she obviously harbored reservations that he did not. "If you would like we can take all our meals here. I believe you will find the conservatory quite enchanting at night."

Looking around, she much preferred this room to the dining room. "I think I would enjoy that."

"Then I shall see that it is done."

'He's romantic, too. Can you say that about the others?' *I'm not listening to you.* 'No, of course you're not. Give him that shy look again. I think he likes it.'

Trying to ignore the voice that was becoming more insistent, she glanced up at Malfoy and saw that he was indeed watching her. She quickly returned her gaze to her plate.

Lucius was amused by her shyness. When he could get her to relax and be herself, she was quite pleasant to be around. He gave her a few minutes to try some of the sandwiches before asking, "Are they to your liking?"

"Oh, yes. They're quite good," she replied without looking up. She felt like she should say more, but she couldn't think of anything to discuss. 'Say something' *What?* 'Anything. It doesn't matter.' *You know, you are absolutely no help.* "Mr. Malfoy, do you have outside gardens as well?"

He set down his cup of tea. She seemed to have completely forgotten their conversation at breakfast, but he didn't mind. "Oh, yes. There's a lovely rose garden out that door, though it isn't much to look at this time of year. And of course, there is the classic hedge garden. I think you would find the manor a truly lovely place in spring. Perhaps you would like to continue your research over the Easter Holiday, time permitting." He saw her giving him a confused look. He chuckled softly. "While the Order as a whole tries to keep me in the dark, I do manage to keep appraised of what is going on outside the house. I have seen that the number of attacks and amount of Death Eater activity is increasing. I know the final battle is coming. Oh, don't look so surprised. I'm a survivor, and I've learned that information is the key to survival." He sighed. "I only wish I could do more."

She reached across the table and placed her hand on his. "You are doing far more than anyone had anticipated. The intelligence that you have given us has saved many lives, both Muggle and magical. And your library here is giving me plenty of new ideas."

He turned his hand over and gave hers a reassuring squeeze. "Thank you for making me feel like I'm making a difference. Are you ready to return to the library?" She was reacting exactly as he had expected. His ploys to earn her sympathy and trust were working perfectly.

When Lucius returned to his room that night, he felt that he was definitely making progress. Whereas before he hadn't noticed her watching him, he had caught her on numerous occasions this evening. Yes, phase two of his plan was progressing nicely. Tomorrow morning, he would see what benefits he had reaped.

After pouring a glass of cognac, he sat back on his bed, enjoying being home. He knew it was temporary, and he would soon have to return to his cramped room at Order Headquarters, but once the Dark Lord was vanquished, he would surely be pardoned. Hermione was on his side, and she could convince Potter. He had spent the first half of the school year working to convince the adults of his trustworthiness. Ever the politician, this had been a relatively easy task.

He had an idea to help cement the adult support. Moving to his writing desk, he wrote a letter to Andromeda. He would, of course, deliver the package through Tonks. She would see that he was a man of his word.

Andromeda,

I know that we have never met, something I hope to rectify in the future. I mentioned to your daughter that I would like for you to have the opportunity to read Narcissa's

diaries. You may not believe it, but she never stopped loving you.

She spoke fondly of her childhood, and you in particular. Now that she is gone, I regret never giving her the opportunity to see you again. I was far too concerned with appearances.

He paused for a few moments to choose his words carefully.

Please, take your time reading through the diaries. I find that I cannot bear to open them at this time. The wounds are too fresh. I hope that you will find some comfort in them, and they will allow you a glimpse into your sister's life.

When this is all over, I would be honored to spend some time with you, sharing memories of dear Narcissa.

Your servant,

Lucius

He reread the letter and thought that it sounded sufficiently sentimental. He did not care one way or the other if his sister-in-law accepted his offer. It only mattered that he had made it.

He sneered as he evaluated his plan. Yes, his freedom seemed assured. Now, there was the matter of his future.

Hermione was the key to that future. Of course, there was also the question of his financial situation. He knew the wards were the only thing that had kept the Ministry from seizing his manor. He would naturally petition to have some of his assets returned, but he wasn't foolish enough to believe they would all be restored. He knew the Ministry would make him pay reparations to the families of his victims. Even if they only restored a portion of his assets, it would be enough. He had offshore holdings, and with time, he could regain access to them.

Shifting his thoughts to something more pleasant, he tried to decide what he had to offer Hermione as a Christmas gift. It should be something personal, but not overly ostentatious. Jewelry was out. That would be too forward. Besides, the jewelry he had available were either family heirlooms or pieces that he had purchased for Narcissa, neither appropriate. Since she revered knowledge, he decided a book or a scroll would be the perfect gift. Now, it was just a matter of choosing which one. That would be tomorrow's project.

Once again, it was close to midnight when Hermione crawled into bed. She couldn't believe how luxurious the bed was. It was like sleeping on a cloud. She slid her hand under the pillow and was surprised to find a piece of parchment. Pulling the parchment out from under her pillow, she relit the lamp to see what Malfoy had written her. He must have arranged with Gupper to have the note delivered.

Miss Granger,

Once again, I apologize for the house-elves taking your clothes. They have been returned. In case you wish to continue wearing robes, I have had them place a selection in your wardrobe. I know how tiring wearing the same clothes day after day can be.

I have been remiss by not asking you if the room is to your liking. If not, do not hesitate to ask one of the house-elves. I know you don't like to trouble them, but they really do enjoy having people to serve.

On that note, I hope that you don't find the food too rich. They have always enjoyed making elaborate meals, and as the manor has been empty for so long, I believe they are making up for the inactivity. I have told them that simpler meals are acceptable.

Please, do not hesitate to ask if there is anything I can do for you.

Sleep well and pleasant dreams.

Your servant,

Lucius

She read the note several times. At first she was suspicious, but upon rereading and considering his behavior over the last couple of days, she came to believe that he was sincere. Perhaps he really had changed.

'Of course he has.' *I thought I told you to go away?* You should know by now that I don't listen to you. Someone has to tell you what is best for me.' *You have no idea what is best for me. You just make your decisions with your emotions.* And you ignore those emotions. Logic alone cannot make all your decisions.'

She turned the light off and tried to get comfortable. She wasn't going to dignify the voice with a response. She hoped that she would not have another dream like she had last night.

Lucius was pleased to notice that Hermione was once again wearing the robes that had been provided. The set she had chosen today was a deep midnight blue. "Good morning, Miss Granger," he said warmly when she entered his room.

"Good morning." She wasn't sure what to call him. He had signed the note 'Lucius', but she rationalized that signing a note 'Mr. Malfoy' was rather formal. "I found your note last night. I haven't had any problems since I've been here."

"That's good to know. I hope that you feel comfortable enough to let me know if there is anything I can do for you."

She noticed that he was dressed. "Are you ready for breakfast?"

"Of course." As usual he offered to escort her. "Did you sleep well?" he asked sincerely.

"Oh, yes. I slept just fine." Thankfully, there had been no dreams last night. She wasn't sure she could have handled another night like that.

"I was concerned that you looked tired. Your room wasn't too cold, was it?"

"No. I was just up late last night."

"You don't have to stay up all night. The books aren't going anywhere, and you still have quite some time until the next term starts, though I would imagine you would want to spend Christmas with the others."

"I suppose you do have a point. I just get lost in books." She froze as they entered the library. An elaborate Christmas tree was set to one side of the fireplace.

"Miss Granger, my apologies..." His voice trailed off as he saw her move to the tree to examine the decorations.

"No, it's my fault. I made an off-handed comment to Gupper last night on how it didn't feel like Christmas without decorations." She carefully examined the enchanted crystals that lit the tree. "It's marvelous."

He smiled at the joy she found in the tree. Through her presence, he was seeing his manor as though for the first time. To him, this had always been just another seasonal decoration. Now, he saw it as the beautiful, enchanted tree that it was. He found himself reaching out to examine the decorations. "It is, isn't it?" Turning to face her, he smiled warmly. She met his gaze for several long moments, and he was just about to reach for her when she finally broke contact and went to get more books.

The rest of the day, they worked in an uncomfortable silence. She concentrated on the books to keep her inner voice from talking to her. Every now and then, she would glance up at Malfoy. If their eyes met, she would quickly look away. Even meals were relatively subdued. Hermione would answer questions, but seemed lost in thought.

After dinner, Hermione abandoned her usual armchair and moved to the couch so that she could have easier access to multiple books. She was comparing two books, and found the information contradictory. Shoving one of them away, she leaned back and closed her eyes in frustration.

She opened them when she felt the couch move and saw Malfoy sitting on the far end.

"Is there something I can assist you with?" he asked gently.

She picked up the books in question and moved a little closer to him so that she could show him the passages in question. "Look here. These two books contradict each other. This could be useful information, but I have no idea what is the truth."

He took the books from her to examine them. After a few seconds consideration, he handed one of them back to her. "It has been my experience that this book is more reliable, though there is a chance they both tell some semblance of the truth. As you can imagine, the Dark Arts are carefully guarded, and some authors are not entirely truthful." He leaned over and pointed at a specific paragraph in the book he had not handed back. "I believe this paragraph serves no purpose. It was merely placed in the book to deceive the reader."

"What do you mean? The author would just write in random paragraphs?"

"Yes."

She threw her hands up in frustration. "So everything I've done the last three days has been for nothing? You let me waste my time?"

He placed his hand on her knee. "No, you didn't waste your time, Hermione. The books I chose for you were ones that I know to be accurate. Had I known you were using this book, I would have warned you."

"I've still wasted my time. I've looked in a number of books that you didn't know about. I've stayed up late the last two nights wasting my time."

She looked like she was on the verge of tears, and he instinctively wrapped his arms around her. "Let me take a look at what you've gathered and from what source. I'll help you sort through it."

"Will you, really?" she asked as she looked up into his eyes.

Using his thumb, he gently wiped the lone tear from her cheek. "I will. It should not take long. I am very familiar with the books in my collection." He continued to rub her back. "Let me help you," he whispered. Looking into her eyes, he longed to kiss her. Giving in to primal urges he thought she reciprocated, he leaned down and pressed his lips against hers. He could tell she was initially shocked, but she quickly relaxed, and he used his tongue to pry open her lips and deepen the kiss.

When he pulled away, he affected a look of horror. "Forgive me, Miss Granger," he said quietly and swept from the room.

Hermione pressed her fingers against her lips, savoring the kiss. It was much better than she had imagined. Watching Malfoy retreat from the room, she was tempted to stop him and tell him he had nothing to apologize for, but she found she couldn't move.

Lucius grinned as he walked up the stairs toward his room. He hadn't expected it to happen so quickly, but the time had been right. "Gupper!" Once the house-elf was at his side, he produced a note from his pocket and said, "Place this note under Miss Granger's pillow."

"Yes, Master," Gupper replied before disappearing to do his master's bidding.

Now, all Lucius had to hope was that she didn't immediately return to her room. If she found the note too soon, she would know that he had been planning her seduction.

A/N: Thank you very much for reading. I hope that you have found this latest installment enjoyable. Poor Hermione is learning that she really has underestimated Lucius. Of course, that's because he's being sneaky. Nothing quite like a little Slytherin manipulation, is there?

I hope you are enjoying her inner voice. I think it's a little fun part of the story. I can completely imagine her logical and emotional sides being at odds with each other. As for the 'knight in shining armor' scene, I love it even though I can't recall ever having read one of the stereotypical trashy romance novels that I was trying to model it on. I will blame Fred and George and my desire to have them contribute to the story in some way. This was the best I could do.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic.

A/N: Many thanks to those that have taken the time to review this story. It's nice to see there are so many LM/HG shippers out there. I only recently discovered this ship and have found so much potential in it. I think most of you have found my other Malfoy/Granger fic, "To Regain Glory". It's a different tack than this one and was a case of when plot bunnies attack. I normally don't try to do two same pairing fics simultaneously, but it happened.

Chapter 4

Hermione was not really able to concentrate on the books in front of her. In part because she wasn't sure which ones were reliable anymore, but mostly because she kept thinking about the kiss. Finally, deciding she wasn't accomplishing anything by sitting in the library, she decided to go to her room.

Her hand froze as she reached for the doorknob. Looking down the hall, she tried to see if there was light coming from under Malfoy's door. And if there was? Then what? She started to walk down the hall and stopped after ten steps. *No, it's wrong.* 'What's wrong about it? You're both adults, and it seems to me you both feel the same thing.' *It's just a foolish teenage fantasy.* 'Then how do you explain his behavior? He's not a teenager.' *Just...I need time to think. I can't. Not with him* 'Why not? Oh, yes, because of what your 'friends' would say. They've always sought your approval for their relationships, right?' *Well, no.* 'Then why would you seek their approval for yours? You've already learned that Ron is too immature, and Harry holds a grudge with unbelievable ferocity.' *I need to sleep on this.* 'That's right. Why do today what you can put off until tomorrow?'

Hoping that the voice would leave her alone, she quickly got ready for bed. When she lay down, she was surprised to find another note under her pillow. True, she hadn't locked Malfoy into his room, but he shouldn't have been able to get into her room. Of course, one of the house-elves had probably delivered it for him.

Nervously, she opened the note.

Miss Granger,

My most sincere apologies for my behavior earlier this evening. I don't know what came over me. It was incredibly presumptuous of me, and I hope that you will forgive me. I know that I am not worthy of your attention. You are a bright, young witch with your future ahead of you. I, on the other hand... Well, my future is uncertain. It would not be fair for me to presume you return my affection. Even if you do, surely there is someone better suited for you than me.

I shall do my best to tempt you no further. If you wish to leave, I fully understand. Or, if you desire to continue your research, I will stay in my room. All you would need to do is allow the house-elves to deliver my meals.

Again, if I have done anything to make you uncomfortable, I am profoundly sorry. My action this evening was incredibly foolish.

Apologetically yours,

Lucius Malfoy

She read through the note three times. He had misunderstood. She wasn't upset. *I should go explain to him* After a moment's thought, she reconsidered. *No, perhaps not tonight. I'll clear it up in the morning.* 'Why wait until morning? Shouldn't you tell him it's a misunderstanding now so he can sleep peacefully? *I am not going to a man's bedchamber this late at night. It wouldn't be proper.* 'You were about to go down there before you read the letter.' *You just had to throw that in my face, didn't you?* Yes. I will do so until you admit what you feel.' *Are you implying I feel something for him? You're delusional. I don't feel anything for him!* Then why did you dream about him?

Hermione pondered a few seconds before answering. *Easy. You know I have dreams based on those daydreams Fred and George sell. Normally, it's just some cute actor in the lead role. While Malfoy has many faults, he is still good looking.* 'Uh-huh. Keep telling yourself that. You should go explain it was a misunderstanding.' *In the morning.*

She didn't think it would be appropriate to see him in her pajamas, and she didn't really want to get dressed. Besides, she wasn't sure she trusted herself. What if the voice was right?

Lucius was sitting by the fire, reading a poetry book, waiting to see if Hermione or his breakfast would show up. He hadn't expected to see her last night; he knew she had too many reservations. It would have been a pleasant surprise, but if she were truly receptive to his advances, she would definitely come by this morning.

When he heard a knock at the door, he had his answer. He closed the book and went to answer the door. Before opening it, he made sure he had a properly repentant look on his face. "Miss Granger, once again, allow me to apologize. My behavior last night was inappropriate."

"May I come in?" she asked nervously.

"Of course." He stepped aside and gestured for her to enter his room.

She entered and started pacing by the fireplace. "I'm here because of the letter you wrote last night."

He led her over to the sofa. "I cannot express how profoundly sorry I am."

She placed her hand on his knee. "Please, Mister...Lucius, you have nothing to apologize for. I...I enjoyed last night." She smiled as she looked into his eyes. "And it wasn't unwanted."

He returned her smile and tried not to act overjoyed. Picking up her hand, he said, "I'm glad you didn't find my actions too forward. Though, what you could possibly see in me, I do not know," he said modestly.

"I could say the same thing," she said shyly.

Attempting to brush a lock of her hair behind her ear, he replied, "You are a beautiful woman with an amazing intellect. I have thoroughly enjoyed our conversations. Being with you..." He pulled away and walked over to the fire.

Rising to follow, she reached out and touched his shoulder. "Being with me what?" *He called me a woman. Very few of the others seem to realize that I have grown up.*

He turned to face her, a forlorn smile on his face. "Ah, Hermione. It's very foolish." He brushed her cheek with his thumb. "It's nothing more than the fancies of an old man trying to cling to his youth."

She placed her hand on his, to hold it to her cheek. "I don't think it's foolish. And how can you call yourself an old man?"

"Well, perhaps I'm not old, but you were my son's classmate. I thought you might find that...uncomfortable."

She led him back over to the sofa. "I did at first, but then I realized that was silly. Did you know that you are the first person that didn't laugh about my ideas for house-elves?"

"I find that hard to believe. Your initial idea was flawed, but not fatally so."

"I don't really want to talk about house-elves, do you?" she asked.

"Not particularly." He let his hand run down her arm. "Is there something else you wanted to talk about?"

"Why me?" She could feel the gooseflesh forming where he had touched.

"I thought we covered that. You are beautiful, intelligent, full of youthful energy. It's very hard to explain," he whispered as he leaned closer and brushed her hair. "What is it you see in me? After all, I am a disgraced convict."

"I-I-I'm not sure. I don't care about the convict part. We can clear your name. You're handsome, more intelligent than I had thought, and there's a side of you, a softer side..." She leaned forward and pressed her lips against his.

He could feel the fire in his groin and wanted take her right there, but he knew the time wasn't quite right. Exhibiting great restraint, he pulled away. "We shouldn't."

She replied breathlessly, "Right. I know. It just... I'm sorry."

He couldn't believe she was apologizing. This was going better than expected. He saw her biting her lower lip. "Is something bothering you, my dear?"

"Well, it's just I don't have a lot of experience." She realized there was no good way to tell him he would be her first.

"I'm willing to teach you." It seems he had been right, and confirmation of this fact made it more difficult for him to resist her.

"It's just you should know..."

He placed his finger on her lips. "Shhh. It's all right. When the time comes, I will be careful." Giving her a couple of kisses, he said, "I think perhaps you should leave. If I stay here alone with you, I'm not sure I can be held responsible for my behavior." He had slipped his hand under the skirt of her robes and was caressing her thigh.

"I don't mind." She leaned into him, her body screaming at her to satisfy the desires he had awoken.

"Hermione, I would hate to take advantage of you," he whispered between kisses.

"You aren't taking advantage of me. I want this, I want you." She crawled onto his lap.

The ache in his groin was unbearable. She was so close, only a few layers of clothes separating them. With the greatest of self-restraint, he replied, "Soon, my dear. Now, you need to go. You are driving me positively wild." He stood and placed her on her feet. After giving her one last kiss, he walked out of the room.

He could have taken her then. He wanted to take her then, but the reward would be even greater if he waited. He wanted there to be no regrets when they were finally together. By waiting, he was showing her he respected her, that he wasn't a hormonal teenager. In truth, he felt very much like one, possibly worse. He had experience that no teenager had that made his urges stronger.

Hermione took several minutes to compose herself. She knew that if she joined him immediately, she would be likely to act on the same impulses that had just overwhelmed her. He was right, they should wait, but it would be difficult. When she joined him at breakfast, he was halfway done. He rose and pulled her chair out for her. "Forgive me for starting without you. I wasn't sure if you would be coming down."

"No, it's all right." She sat quietly, twisting her napkin in her lap. She looked into his eyes. "What do we do now?"

"What do you want to do?"

"What kind of answer is that?"

"A truthful one. You are the one that has your future to consider. Mine is uncertain. It may not be the wisest of decisions for you to get involved with me. My feelings for you are not based in logic. Nor do I have your best interests in mind. For that reason, it is best for you to be the one to decide." This was all part of the plan.

She stared at him for quite some time. She knew that she could testify on his behalf, and encourage the other to do so, in order for him to gain his pardon. "What if you were pardoned? Then what?"

He smiled weakly at her. "Right now, all I have is the estate. And that is only because it is magically protected. Naturally, I would petition the Ministry for the return of my assets. I don't know how successful that would be. For all I know, they will try to take the estate as well. From whatever I have left, I would rebuild my life. I don't know that I could make any promises." Yes, she was playing right into his hand.

"Oh," she replied quietly. Reaching across the table, she took hold of his hand. "I would think the Ministry would take into account the help you are providing now. I'll gladly testify on your behalf."

"That means a great deal to me. Thank you. But you should be careful about being associated with me. My tarnished reputation could hurt you," he said regretfully.

"We all make mistakes. Given the environment in which you were raised, your behavior is partially explainable. I forgive you."

"You are ever the optimist. One other thing for you to consider, if you were to help me, it would be best if we did not have a relationship that could be exploited. If anyone were to learn..."

"We could keep it secret. I'm very good at keeping secrets."

He smiled warmly at her. "Let's not rush into anything. Consider what you are offering me. I will be here for you." He could tell she wanted to speak. "Please, say no more right now. Think about it and we can speak later." She was nearly his. He had presented her with all his thoughts, and she was already planning how to overcome them. This was even better than he had anticipated.

Hermione was amazed that she was actually able to concentrate on anything. Lucius had been far more restrained than she thought possible. He had pointed out which of the books that she had been using contained inaccurate information, and they had sat on the sofa and gone through the passages she had referenced. Surprisingly, most of what was in the book was correct, and there was little that she had to alter.

As she leaned over to ask about a particular passage, she found herself nuzzling against him. She kissed his chest and trailed her kisses toward his mouth.

Unable to resist her temptations, he leaned toward her and kissed her. As he deepened the kiss, he lowered her to the couch. Without releasing her mouth, he used his hand to push the fabric from her breast to expose her nipple. She gasped as he gently twisted her nipple.

He had released the kiss and was about to tease her nipple with his tongue, when he felt an alarm. He looked up and turned his head toward the door quite suddenly. "We have a visitor."

"A visitor?" Who would be visiting here? She pulled her wand out of her sleeve and readjusted her robes.

He smiled at her, placed his hand on hers, and lowered her wand. "Hermione, whoever it is cannot get past the front gate. I suggest you retrieve my wand, and we can see who it is. I have a strong suspicion it will be one of your friends." He was not sure if he was glad to have the visitor or not. He had encouraged her to wait, but it was apparent that she desired him.

"Oh, I hope not," she replied sadly.

"Would you rather it be one of my old acquaintances?"

"Well, no. It's just that I had hoped to find some more time with you, but if it's someone I know..."

He kissed her gently on the lips. When he tried to pull away, she held him tight. Gently, he forced space between the two of them. "We don't want to keep our visitor waiting. Perhaps it is someone that can be convinced to leave," he said hopefully.

"Okay," she nodded. There was something about his kisses that took her breath away. "I'll, er, go get your wand."

"Of course, my dear. I'll be waiting by the door for you." He watched her leave the room. He was so close, and now one of her friends was coming to interfere. Had he been free, he never would have gone down to the gate. Whoever it was would have waited there until they left or froze.

Gupper popped into the library. "Master, a Mister Weasley is at the gate, insisting to see Miss Granger."

"Thank you." Weasley, he assumed it was the youngest. He knew that Arthur and the others were far too busy. "Fetch cloaks. Miss Granger and I will walk down to the gate." He really didn't want to walk down there, but there were secrets about the estate he wished to keep for the time being. Besides, he wasn't about to favor the Weasley youth with any semblance of being a wanted guest.

Ron was pacing outside the gate. He had already tried *alohamora* and found it useless. The other hexes he had tried had all been equally ineffective. He just knew that Malfoy was doing something horrible to Hermione. She had to be a prisoner; that was the only reason she would have for staying this long. He knew it had been a mistake to give Malfoy his wand.

He saw two shapes coming down the drive from the manor. They looked like Hermione and Malfoy. He began going over the ways to determine if someone was under the Imperius Curse. As they got closer, he was about to speak, when he saw what she was wearing. It was a very fine blue velvet cloak, lined with ermine. Of course, he noticed that Malfoy was dressed in his finery as well. "Hermione! Are you all right?" he asked.

"Of course I am, Ron. What are you doing here?"

"I came to check on you."

"I told everyone in my letter that everything was well. I've been getting a lot of research done, which I would like to mention, you have pulled me away from." She did not try to hide the irritation in her voice.

"Let me in. I came to lend a hand."

She doubted it, but knew that he would not go away, and the sooner they let him, the sooner she could probably get him to leave. Pulling Malfoy's wand out of her pocket, she handed it to him.

"Are you mad? Giving him his wand?"

Lucius did not hide his displeasure at being insulted, though he did hold his tongue.

"He's the only one that can let you in. Now, I've mentioned it before, but he's been the perfect gentleman." It was not really a lie. He had not done anything she did not want.

Lucius took his time undoing the charms on the gate. He could see that Weasley was cold and did not mind prolonging the suffering. He knew that he and Hermione were perfectly warm in the cloaks they were wearing. Once the gate was unlocked, he backed away as Weasley shoved his way past that gate. As he locked the gate, he supposed that he could not completely blame the young man for his lack of manners. With six siblings, there was no way he could be expected to have any.

Ron moved right up next to Hermione and began whispering, "What are you wearing?"

"I've been here for three days. You honestly didn't expect me to wear the same clothes did you?"

"But did you have to wear the cloak? I mean, what's wrong with yours?"

"You may not have noticed, but it's quite cold out. This one is better than mine at keeping out the chill. Are you really that suspicious?"

Ron glanced over his shoulder and saw Malfoy following them a little too close for comfort. He did not like the innocent little smile Malfoy gave him. He waved his wand at Malfoy. "Walk in front of us so we can keep an eye on you."

Lucius gave him a small nod. "As you wish."

"Ron, really, that's not necessary. He's not going to do anything."

"Yeah, well, I don't know that."

Hermione rolled her eyes and walked more quickly toward the manor, trying to put some distance between her and Ron.

Ron had to jog past Malfoy in order to catch up to her. When he realized what he had done, he said, "Hey! I told you to stay in front of us."

"Mr. Weasley, I am not running," Lucius replied imperiously.

Malfoy's reluctance to speed up forced Ron to choose between keeping up with Hermione and keeping an eye on Malfoy. He decided to slow down and allow Malfoy to pass him.

When they entered the manor, house-elves were waiting to take their cloaks. "Would Master like hot beverages brought to the library?" Gupper asked.

"Yes, thank you," Lucius replied as he draped his cloak in the arms of one of the elves. Rather than waiting for Weasley to do anything, he headed for the library.

"Hey!" Ron called out.

"Oh leave him. He hasn't got his wand. He's just going to the library."

The rest of the afternoon was spent in uncomfortable silence. Lucius was calmly reading a book. Ron kept glaring suspiciously at him and proved to be of little help to Hermione's search.

While Lucius was maintaining a pleasant and calm exterior, he wanted nothing more than for Weasley to go away. He shifted uncomfortably in his chair as he thought of what he would do if the young man were not there.

He welcomed the diversion of Gupper's arrival. "Master, will Mr. Weasley be remaining for dinner?"

Lucius looked across the room for the answer.

Ron looked to Hermione. "Are you come back to Headquarters?"

"Ron, I still have a lot of work to do here. I had planned to stay until Christmas."

"Well, then, I'll be staying, too," he said definitively.

Lucius forced himself not to scowl. "As you wish. Gupper, we will take dinner in the dining room and prepare a room for Mr. Weasley."

Dinner was a somber affair. They sat at one end of the monstrous dining room table, Lucius at the head of the table, Hermione on his right and Weasley on his left. Weasley kept glaring at him, but Lucius kept ignoring him. He took his time eating his dinner, exhibiting perfect manners, while Weasley demonstrated uncouth manners. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see that Hermione found the young man's behavior repulsive. While his expression did not change, he was grinning on the inside.

After using his napkin to ensure the corners of his mouth were clean, he rose and announced, "As wonderful as dinner has been, I think it is time for me to turn in."

Hermione rose to follow.

"Where are you going?" asked Ron.

"I'm going to lock him into his room." Actually, she was hoping to steal a kiss from him.

"I'm coming along."

"Ron, I can take care of myself," she replied defensively.

"Miss Granger, if it will reassure Mr. Weasley, I see no harm in letting him help set the wards on my room." Let Weasley have his childish victory. Lucius could tell that Hermione was fed up with the young man's behavior.

When they arrived at his rooms, Weasley insisted on searching them, even though Hermione stated that they had been searched and that Lucius was not up to anything dastardly.

Ron was satisfied the rooms were safe and that Malfoy did not have access to any magic. Once the door was locked, he turned to Hermione. "Where is your room?"

As they walked back towards the library, she pointed at her room. "That one."

"And where is my room?"

"I don't know. Gupper!" she called out.

"Yes, Miss? How may Gupper be of service? Would you like something to drink?"

"No, thank you. Where is Mr. Weasley's room?"

"Mr. Weasley has been given a room in the guest wing. Gupper can take you there."

"You mean my room isn't here?" Ron protested.

Gupper looked nervous. "No, sir. This is the family quarters."

"Then why is her room here?" Ron demanded.

"Ron, stop yelling at him," Hermione ordered.

"Master told Gupper which room to give Miss Granger. He did not choose the room for Mr. Weasley. Gupper is not wanting to give a guest a family room." Gupper twisted the hem of his tea towel.

"Ron, leave him alone. My room is here so that I could keep an eye on Malfoy. If I was in a different wing, it would take longer for me to react if he did something."

"If her room is here, then so is mine. I want that one." He pointed at the room next to Hermione's.

Gupper fell the floor and began beating his head against the stone. "Gupper...can't..."

Hermione grabbed him to stop the house-elf from hurting himself further. "Why not?" she asked gently.

"That room was young Master's. Mistress forbade the house-elves from changing the room or entering the room other than to keep it clean. Gupper can't give Mr. Weasley that room," explained the hysterical elf.

That was all the encouragement Ron needed to want that room. He hurried towards the door.

Gupper cried out in anguish and tried to squirm away from Hermione. She was forced to drop the elf. Before Ron could open the door, she hit him with a freezing charm. "Ron, no!"

"I can't believe you're taking his side," he said indignantly.

"You are an insensitive oaf. I can't believe you would do something like that." She released the charm. "Gupper, what about that room?" she asked as she pointed across the hall.

"Gupper will ready that room for Mr. Weasley." He kissed the hem of Hermione's skirt. "Thank you, Miss. Thank you for protecting young Master's room." He disappeared to prepare the new room.

Hermione stormed down the hall after releasing Ron, wanting to get away from him.

"Hermione," he pleaded to her retreating back before realizing she wasn't going to stop and that he would have to follow her.

Lucius had been reading by the fireplace when he heard the commotion in the Hall. He had pressed his ear up against the door, hoping to hear the conversation more clearly. That had hardly been necessary, as voices had been raised.

It did not surprise him that Narcissa had ordered Draco's room left as it had been. He knew how much the boy had meant to her. He pushed the guilt from his mind, knowing it would not help him. Instead, he concentrated on the argument outside. He was quite pleased that Hermione was supporting him. That foolish boy was no competition.

When he heard Weasley's final plea, he realized his entertainment was over. The one thing he wished was that he could comfort Hermione. Reassure her that she did not have to put up with Weasley's boorishness.

Hermione worked in the library, refusing to talk to Ron. Oh, he tried to talk to her, but she would not dignify him with a response. He had gone through several phases. First, he had pleaded with her, arguing that he was right. After that had failed, he had gotten angry with her, claiming that she was wrong in siding with Malfoy, and that she was betraying them. Finally, he had shifted to apologizing, trying to convince her that he had been wrong. She knew that he wasn't sincere.

Now, he was sitting across from her, only speaking when she would look up. Once she had learned that, she stopped making eye contact with him. After several hours, she decided to go to bed.

"Hermione, I'm sorry," he called out to her.

She continued to ignore him and hurried up to her room. Once there, she slammed the door and waited for Ron. She was sure that he would follow her, and she was not disappointed.

Ron knocked on her door. "Hermione, I'm sorry. It's just that you've been stuck here with him and I've...we've been worried about you. We just wanted to make sure that everything was all right."

"You don't get it, Ron. He's on our side. In fact, you being here has made my job more difficult. You are rude and distrustful and have driven him away. I need his help for my research. This is his library, and I can't do it without his help."

"Hermione, don't send me away. I want to be here."

"Why?" she asked pointedly.

"Because I'm concerned about you. I care about you."

"No, you don't. You're just jealous. You don't trust Malfoy. Or is it that you think he's going to be more useful than you?"

"Hermione, that's not it."

"No, I think that is it. Goodnight, Ron," she said coldly.

"Hermione! Hermione!" he called through the door before leaving.

It didn't take long before she heard his door slam. She waited a few more minutes before slowly cracking her door. There was a light coming from beneath Ron's door, but she thought it was safe to sneak out of her room.

A/N: Well, for those that were wondering about Ron, you now have your answer. I think he is going to be a thorn in their side, wouldn't you agree? On one hand, Hermione has overly emotional and immature Ron, on the other, she has suave and seductive Lucius. Hmmm... I wonder who's going to win?

As for future chapters, I hope to have a new chapter up every couple of days. Hopefully, I'll finish the story before the posting catches up to where I am.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic.

A/N: First off, I'm going to apologize to those that got confused when I uploaded the wrong chapter. I'm still not sure what happened there, as I am almost positive I did give this chapter a final run through. Anyway, thank you for your patience as I get the synaptic pathways working correctly again.

Lucius was trying to sleep, but it was eluding him. He couldn't stop thinking of her and how close they had come. If only Weasley hadn't shown up. After tossing and turning for quite some time, he began to think that he would need another round of manual stimulation.

He heard a soft knock on his door, and rose from bed to investigate.

The door cracked, and he heard, "Lucius, are you awake?"

He smiled. "Please, come in, Hermione." With a wave of his hand, he lit the lamps by the fireplace. "What brings you here this late?"

"I wanted to apologize for Ron. I'm sure you heard us arguing. He's immature and never really liked Draco. I just wanted you to know that I stopped him from going into Draco's room."

"Thank you. I had no idea that Narcissa had preserved his room." He tried to sound sentimental.

She slowly moved closer to him and wrapped her arms around him. "I wish he hadn't come. He's making everything more difficult." She kissed his neck and stood on tiptoes as she tried to kiss his lips.

"Hermione, we shouldn't," he protested.

"But I want to."

"As do I. But remember, Weasley is here."

"He's in his room."

He found it increasingly difficult to control his urges. He knew that she had to be aware of how he felt; his pajamas provided little concealment. "But he might not stay there. I don't want it to be like this. I want it to be special."

She pulled herself against him. "Lucius, please. I've dreamt about this. I know you want the same thing."

He was painfully aware of how obvious that fact was and found himself kissing her. Once he realized he was leading her towards the bed, he pulled away. "No. We can't do this now."

"But why not?"

He paced, forcing himself to stay away from her. "Do you want to risk him knowing what we are doing?"

"I know a charm that would keep him from hearing us," she said deviously.

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. She was not making this easy. Most of him wanted to throw her onto the bed and fulfill his fantasies. "It's not that simple. I know that you claim you can keep it hidden, but I guarantee that you cannot. You will be different after we are together, and he will be able to tell."

"What do you mean?"

He sighed, trying to decide how best to explain this. "Surely, you have seen one of your dorm-mates after her first encounter. Something like that energizes a person in a way that is difficult to explain but is obvious to outside observers. I know some of them still don't trust me. If something were to upset them, it could adversely affect me."

"Are you saying you want to wait until this is over?"

He could tell that she was very disappointed and pulled her into his arms. "What I want is to pleasure you all night. What is practical is that we wait. It doesn't have to be until this is over, just until we are alone. I want you so badly it hurts." He brushed her hair and stared into her eyes. "Now, you should go before I lose control," he said softly.

She hugged him tightly. "I don't know how long he will stay. I was pretty rough on him. I think I can convince him to leave," she said hopefully.

"Hermione, please go," he whispered hoarsely. After she left, he began to question his sanity. He had a beautiful, young woman throwing herself at him, and he had done nothing. He had insisted she leave. But he did know that Weasley would immediately be aware something had happened. Now he was certain he would have to take care of himself.

Hermione had stopped by Lucius' room, but he had refused to come down to breakfast, hoping she could use his absence to convince Ron to leave. She froze just inside the dining room when she saw Ron sitting at the table, shoveling food into his mouth. She began to wonder how she ever could have been attracted to him. He was the complete opposite of Lucius.

"Mornin' 'Mione," he said around a large bite of food.

"Ugh. Ron, don't talk with your mouth full," she chastised.

He swallowed. "Sorry. Where is *he*?"

"He is refusing to come down. You were incredibly rude yesterday."

"You expect me to apologize to him?" he asked incredulously.

"I would prefer you leave. You aren't really here to help. You're here because you don't trust him. Believe me when I tell you that he has been very helpful. I'm learning a lot from the books, and it will help us in our fight, but I need his help. There are a lot of contradictions, and I need him to help me sort through it. And he won't help while you are here."

"I'm not leaving, and he'll just have to deal with it," Ron insisted.

Hermione sighed. "Ron, this is important research."

"Then if it's so important, he has to help whether I'm here or not, doesn't he? The others may think that he has changed, but I'm not sure. Harry and I have agreed that I should stay here as long as you are here."

She could tell that she wasn't going to win this one. "Fine. I'll talk to him and see if I can get him to come down, but you are going to have to be civil. Do you think you can do that?"

Ron conceded, "As long as he behaves, I can be civil."

Hermione finished her breakfast and headed back upstairs. Ron started to follow her. "Ron, please. Let me do this. You've already caused enough trouble. Wait in the library. I'll be down shortly."

He watched her disappear upstairs before going to the library to wait. No matter what the others had said, he couldn't trust Malfoy. After all, they had all trusted Snape and look at what that greasy git had done.

Hermione slipped into Lucius' room and fell into his arms. "He's refusing to leave. It seems he and Harry have decided you can't be trusted. What are we going to do?"

He comforted her. This was not as he had planned. "We will wait. I don't want to risk your friends' wrath." He leaned down and kissed her. "I want you and I will wait."

She held him tighter. "It's just so hard. I told him that I would convince you to come down to the library."

"Of course I'll come downstairs. And yes, it is difficult, but that does not cause me to change my mind. We knew that we would have to be careful around the others." He released her and gently pushed her away. "Come, we don't want to keep Weasley waiting."

"Kiss me once more?" she asked.

"Tonight. I don't want you flustered when we go downstairs."

She looked disappointed, but could understand his reasoning.

Ron was reasonably well behaved. Hermione was pleased that he and Lucius had reached a status quo of ignoring each other. She and Lucius continued to share discreet glances when Ron wasn't looking. She was finding it harder and harder to concentrate on the books knowing that he was nearby.

Every time she had to consult with Lucius, she noticed that Ron kept a very close eye on them. She was amazed at the amount of self-control Lucius exhibited. Whenever he sat next to her, all she wanted was to crawl onto his lap.

One thing she did miss were meals in the conservatory. They took all their meals at the main dining room table. Lucius generally drove conversation, keeping it innocuous. She began to think that he purposefully chose subjects that Ron knew very little about. She could tell that Ron was getting frustrated, but she kept giving him warning looks and he remained polite.

Lucius was getting very frustrated. Weasley had been at the manor for three days now, and showed no sign of wanting to leave. Hermione had come to his room last night, but he had sent her away, not trusting himself to be with her. After she had left, it had taken several stiff drinks to allow him to fall asleep. He hoped to avoid that this evening as he had woken up with quite a hangover and learned that his stock of potions was quite low.

His time was running short, and he was considering inviting Hermione to his room. She had gone through most of the books that were useful. It would be difficult to justify her returning after Christmas. Besides, he was positive that Weasley would insist on accompanying them.

A large part of his plan had entailed consummating their relationship before the Christmas holidays were over. He had planned on making their lovemaking unforgettable. Once she knew what it was like with him, she would surely return for more. He couldn't risk her finding satisfaction with another when school returned to session.

Returning to his desk, he penned another letter. Weasley had already announced they would be leaving Christmas Eve, tomorrow. The romantic dinner where he had planned to give her the gift was gone.

He needed a new plan since the one to have Hermione by Christmas seemed to have failed. As he felt the quill tip snap, he focused back on the desk. Without his wand to correct the ink spill, he was forced to crumple the parchment and start over.

It had taken Lucius most of the day to find the opportunity to give the note to Gupper. Weasley was loath to let him go anywhere unaccompanied. He was beginning to suspect the young man had seen the looks he and Hermione were sharing.

When he announced he was ready to turn in, Weasley insisted he be the one to lock Lucius in his room. They ascended the stairs in silence. Lucius was about to close the door when Weasley shoved his hand against it. "Hold on."

"Mr. Weasley, you have searched this room and found nothing. I have hardly been out of your sight since your arrival. I assure you, there is still nothing dangerous in this room."

"Then you won't mind if I search it again."

"If you insist," Lucius replied imperiously. He looked bored as he stood by the fireplace and watched Weasley conduct a rather ineffective search. When Weasley appeared to be finished, he asked, "Are you satisfied?"

"Yeah, you don't have anything. Just know that I am keeping an eye on you," Ron said suspiciously.

"I am afraid it will be rather boring for you. The only interest I have now is in defeating the Dark Lord."

"You won't mind if I don't believe that, eh?"

Lucius refused to get into an argument. He wanted to be left alone. Once he was alone, he hoped the next part of his plan would work. He did not like acting with haste, but he had been forced to in this situation. Gupper would give Weasley and Hermione drinks. Weasley's would have a sleeping potion that would leave him with a quite a hangover in the morning. That should dull his senses enough that he wouldn't notice Hermione acting strange.

He entered the bath to prepare himself for the evening and get the lotions he would need. Since this would be her first time, he knew there would be pain if he did nothing to help her. He examined a nearly empty bottle. There was enough, barely. After arranging various massage oils on the counter, he returned to the bedroom to prepare for her arrival.

He froze when he saw someone in his room. "What the devil are you doing here?"

The dark shape emerged from the shadows. "I could ask you the same thing."

A/N: Well, sorry this chapter is a tad shorter than the others. I really couldn't make it any longer without ruining the suspense. :)

Chapter 6

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic.

Chapter 6

Lucius was torn between wanting to evict and capture his intruder. Unfortunately, he was unarmed, and his intruder was not.

The man moved closer. "Imagine my surprise when I arrived and saw lights on. Imagine my greater surprise to find you."

Lucius tried to keep the fear out of his voice. "What are you doing trespassing on my property?*Or better yet, how are you trespassing?*

"Oh, I'm not trespassing. Dear Narcissa gave me access to the manor," he replied smugly.

Lucius knew that Narcissa had been fiercely loyal to him. Surely, the matter of his incarceration would not have caused her to change her mind. "And why would she do that?"

"I find I'm tired of answering your questions until you have answered some of mine."

Lucius stared into those black eyes, Occluding his mind. "Ask away, Severus." The sooner this was over the better. He knew it wouldn't be long until Hermione found her note.

"Let's start with my initial question: what are you doing here? If memory serves, you are supposed to be in Azkaban. If you had escaped, it surely would have been reported in the news." Severus walked around Lucius, examining him from all sides. "The only possible answer is that you are cooperating with the Ministry."

Lucius could hear a commotion in the hall. That must be Weasley succumbing to the effects of the Sleeping Draught. "I will gladly answer your questions. Perhaps you could come back shortly before dawn?"

Severus raised an eyebrow. "Expecting company? Who are you entertaining?"

"It's of no consequence. I will explain everything to you, but not at this moment."

Severus took a seat that gave him a clear view of the door. "I think I would like to meet your guest. Perhaps she would be interested in a threesome?"

Lucius found that thought utterly revolting. He knew that he would have to explain something to Severus to get him to go away. "Fine. I am expecting Hermione Granger, and she should be here shortly."

Severus was unable to hide the shock. "Hermione Granger? So you are working for the Ministry."

Lucius feared that Severus would run straight to the Dark Lord and inform him one of his Death Eaters had taken up with the enemy. "It's complicated and I don't have time to explain now. Come back shortly before dawn."

"Perhaps I'll stay and watch," he replied with a salacious grin on his face.

This was almost as revolting an idea as Severus joining them. "Come back before dawn. I'll be here." He was straining to hear the sound of her door. "Now, go before you are discovered." He watched Severus reluctantly rise from the chair. "You won't inform the Dark Lord until I have given you my explanation, will you?"

"You know I am never one to behave rashly. I would never waste our Master's time with half a story. I'll see you in a few hours."

Lucius watched Severus disappear without a sound. He was wondering how that was possible since Disapparating always produced a loud crack. He didn't have long to wonder since he heard a soft knock at his door.

Hermione was having a hard time concentrating. Ron had been gone much longer than required for him to lock Lucius in his room. Hermione hoped the two of them had not gotten into an argument. If she could convince Ron that Lucius was being helpful and had reformed, the two of them would have a better chance at convincing Harry than her alone.

Finally, she heard him stomping down the hall. "Everything all right?" she asked when she saw the scowl on Ron's face.

"Fine. He's locked in. No way he's getting out tonight."

"Ron, he hasn't tried to get out since we arrived. You have to admit he's been very cooperative. You haven't seen him cause any trouble, have you?"

"Well, no," Ron admitted reluctantly.

Gupper popped into the room carrying a tray. "Pardon, miss. Gupper thought you and Mr. Weasley might like some hot chocolate."

"Yes, thank you," Hermione said as she took the mug.

Ron took the remaining mug and waited until the elf was gone. "I just don't see how you can trust him. He's a Death Eater."

"He was a Death Eater, Ron. If he still is a Death Eater, he's had ample opportunity to do something dastardly. He's not interested in that anymore. He's given us way too much information to still be on their side."

"Fine, he's our pet Death Eater," he replied petulantly.

She just scowled at him. This was probably the best she was going to get out of him this evening. Besides, going through the books was more important than getting involved in another meaningless argument with him.

After half an hour, and a second mug of hot chocolate, Ron yawned. "'Mi-one, I'm heading up to bed. I'm tired."

"Fine," she replied without looking up. When she heard him bump into the doorframe, she looked up and saw him weaving out of the room. She shook her head at how brainless he could be sometimes.

She left shortly after he did. For once in her life, she found herself having difficulties concentrating on books. Her mind kept drifting to the man upstairs, and how she felt

when he touched her, a man that she couldn't have right now.

The first thing she did was check under her pillow. Lucius had been leaving her little notes every night, sweet gestures of affection. The type of thing that made her feel special. Pulling the piece of parchment out from under her pillow, she flopped on the bed to see what he had written tonight.

My dearest Hermione,

I imagine that these last few days have been torture for you. I know they have been so for me. I had hoped that we might be able to have one last romantic dinner before we left, but alas, it is not to be. Once we return, it will be difficult to spend time together.

I know I have warned against you seeing me, but I find I must be with you one last time. I long to hold you, to kiss you, to caress you...

If you feel the same way, I will be waiting for you. You will forgive me for giving Mr. Weasley a sleeping potion that will make him feel as though he has been out drinking all night, won't you? I wish that had not been necessary, but it's the only way I know to keep him from being suspicious tomorrow morning.

I'll be awaiting your answer.

Lucius

She clutched the letter to her breast. This is what she had been hoping for. Hopping up from the bed, she went to the mirror and tried to tame her hair into some semblance of organization. Even though she knew she wasn't likely to be wearing them long, she applied a charm to remove the wrinkles from her robes.

Even though she knew that Ron should be out cold, she still moved quietly down the hall and rapped on Lucius' door. She didn't wait for him to open the door, but slipped in and threw herself into his arms and kissed him passionately.

He found he couldn't keep his hands off her. This reaction was more than he had expected, not that he was disappointed. He could feel her trembling. "This is what you want, isn't it?" Even though she had already told him it was, he wanted to make sure.

She nodded. "It is. I've been thinking about this for quite some time."

"There's no need to be nervous," he reassured her.

"I know, it's just that I've heard..." Girls talked in the lavatory, and over the years, she had heard some rather unpleasant accounts of the first time.

He silenced her with a kiss and guided her towards the bed. "Forget what you've heard. I will take care of you. You do trust me, don't you?" he asked in a calm, reassuring voice.

"Yes." She started unbuttoning his shirt.

Returning the favor, he slowly began removing her clothes. The first things he removed were her shoes and stockings. Gently kissing her toes, he could hear her softly moaning.

When he had her nearly undressed, she whispered, "Take off your shirt. I want to feel your skin."

He threw his shirt across the room. "It's not too cold for you, is it?" He watched her shake her head as he removed the last of her clothing. After admiring her body for a few seconds - he had forgotten how breathtaking a young body was - he rolled off the bed.

"Where are you going?" she asked nervously, afraid that she had done something to drive him away.

"I'll be right back. I have to retrieve a few things from the bath."

She suddenly felt very self-conscious, lying naked on his bed. "What sort of things?"

"Nothing harmful. You said you trust me," he called from the other room.

"I do." *It's just that I've never done this.*

When he emerged from the bath, he was carrying several small bottles. He paused when he saw that she had pulled a pillow over her body. "Now, my dear, you have nothing to be ashamed of." After setting the bottles on the night table, he pulled the pillow away from her and started kissing her bare skin. "I assure you, you are perfect." He wondered if she might be less nervous if he was naked as well. Considering this was her first time, probably not. He chose to remove his trousers, but left his pants on. Before returning to the bed, he picked up one of the bottles. "I think you will enjoy this massage oil."

"What does it do?" she asked nervously.

He hoped that this foreplay would help her relax. "It is pleasantly warm and will tingle," he replied as poured a small amount of the oil onto his hand before rubbing it on her body. He started by placing his hands on her stomach, slowly working his way up to her breasts.

He was right about how it would feel. She closed her eyes and arched her back to better feel his touch. "Oh, Lucius."

The sound of his name was music. He could feel the throbbing in his groin. After teasing her nipples to hardness with his fingers, he leaned down and suckled on the hardened nipple. She continued to writhe under his touch. He let his hand drift down her stomach and between her legs. She was hot and wet. His body cried out to take her. Massaging her nub, he felt the wetness increase.

She moaned, writhed and dug her fingers into his arms. "Oh, Lucius!" She could feel her body reacting in a way she had never experienced.

He hadn't planned on bringing her to orgasm this way, but he decided not to stop. He could feel her grip tighten even further as shudders wracked her body. When they stopped, she was panting heavily. "How do you feel?"

"That was... I can't describe it."

"Just wait, my dear." After reapplying the oil, he began massaging her body again, wanting her prepared. Once her body was glistening with oil, he shifted his attention to between her legs. Slipping one finger into her sheath, he could feel how incredibly tight she was. He quivered in anticipation of being inside her.

When he slipped his second finger inside and started to stretch her, she whimpered. "Am I hurting you?"

"It's a little uncomfortable."

He could hear the nervousness in her voice. "Don't worry." He pulled away and picked up one of the other bottles. After generously coating his fingers, he slipped them back into her. "Better?"

"Yes," she replied.

He spent several minutes preparing her. When he thought she was ready, he removed his pants. He saw the look of panic on her face. "Hermione, don't be afraid."

"I'm not," she lied.

He leaned forward and kissed her, brushing his member against her. "Touch me," he whispered.

"What?"

He took her hand and placed it on his swollen manhood. "Touch me. Get to know me."

She was excited to be touching him, though incredibly nervous. She could feel his hand, guiding hers, showing her how to touch him.

When he felt he couldn't contain himself anymore, he asked, "Are you ready?"

"Yes," she replied nervously.

"I'll be gentle." Slowly, he pressed himself against her, feeling the wet, tightness engulf him. Carefully, he pushed against the barrier to break it. While she wouldn't feel it now, she would be sore in the morning. As she stretched to accommodate him, he began to thrust more quickly. As tight as she was, he knew that he wouldn't last long. He tried to be gentle, but as he neared release, he began to lose control. As his release came, he could hear her crying out. He shuddered as he was overcome by his orgasm. Looking into her eyes, he was pleased to see that she was not crying. "How are you?"

She pulled him close for a kiss. "Marvelous." She hadn't thought it was possible to feel this good.

Carefully, he pulled away from her and wrapped his arms around her. To ward off the chill, he pulled the blanket over them. Picking up the third bottle, he held it out for her. "I need you to drink this." He realized this was not the most romantic part of the evening, but it was necessary.

"What is it?"

"A contraceptive potion. To prevent...anything unexpected from happening."

She took the bottle. "Did you have this planned?"

"Whatever do you mean?" he asked innocently.

"You just happened to have all these potions..."

He reassured her, "Now, Hermione, how would I have planned this? I didn't have any access to my manor prior to our arrival. Besides, we hardly spent any time together before arriving here. How was I to know how positively irresistible you would be?"

"I know. I'm sorry. It just seemed too convenient." She snuggled against his chest and he wrapped her arm around her.

He wasn't sure what to say to her. He was sure that he had planned something to say, but he was unable to recall it. He held her and enjoyed the feel of her smooth skin beneath his hands.

"This changes everything," she said after several minutes.

He had thought she was drifting off to sleep, he knew that he was. He should ask her to leave. As much as he wanted to spend the entire night with her, having her in his bed when Severus returned would be bad. "It does. Do you regret it?"

She rolled over to face him. "No. I...really enjoyed it."

He smiled at her. "I'm glad. This is why I wanted to wait. I wanted to do it right."

She brushed a stray lock of hair away from his face. "Thank you. For taking care of me."

"I will always take care of you if you will permit me."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"You are special. I have come to care for you quite deeply." He examined her eyes, trying to determine how far he should continue.

"What are you saying?" she asked.

"You make me feel like I have never felt before. I know that with the war raging, it's ridiculous to make any plans for the future." He tried to sound embarrassed.

She ran her hands through the fine hair on his chest. "Oh, I don't think that it is. I wouldn't mind making plans."

"Do you mean that? You want to make plans with me?" He had not expected a declaration so soon.

She draped her leg over his body and snuggled against him. "I do. I know the others don't trust you, but I do. And I know that you care for me." She snuggled against him for a few more minutes. "Do you love me?"

"I do indeed." He wasn't sure if he meant it or not, but he knew it was what she wanted to hear. After a few minutes, he kissed her softly several times to ensure she was awake. "Hermione, you should return to your room. If you are here in the morning, it will negate the trouble I went through."

"I just love how it feels when you hold me. I know I won't get to feel it again for a while." She called for her wand and pointed it at the clock. "There. I've sent an alarm. I'll be up before dawn." She snuggled back against him.

She felt so good nestled against him that he wasn't going to argue.

When the alarm went off, he gently nuzzled her awake. "Hermione, it's time for you to leave."

She nuzzled against him. "Five more minutes," she groaned.

"Darling, it's nearly sunrise. You must go in case Weasley is up early."

"I'd forgotten about him," she replied as she yawned and stretched.

He admired her body and found himself wondering if they could have a quickie before she had to go, but he dismissed that thought. Even so, he found himself caressing her soft skin. "We can't afford to forget about him. Remember, just be yourself. If you try to act like nothing happened, it will look suspicious."

"I know." She leaned over and kissed him before getting up from bed. "I love you."

This was the last thing he had expected her to say, even after her question last night. "As do I. I only wish we had more time together."

After she was dressed, she sat next to him on the bed. "So do I. It's going to be hard being around you but not being able to be with you."

He smoothed her hair. "You're strong. I know you can do it. Now, it really is time for you to be going." Once she was gone, he rose from bed and wrapped his robe around his body.

"So, you really did it?" Snape asked from behind him.

"How do you do that?" Once again, he hadn't heard Snape arrive, and this bothered him. He had no idea how long Snape had been in the room.

"Inconsequential." Snape surveyed the room, saw the decanter on the desk, and helped himself. "I'm amazed you really did it. Now, I believe you had a tale to tell me?" He took a seat by the fireplace.

"First, tell me about my son."

"You are in no position to demand anything, Lucius. I have the upper hand. If I am convinced by what I hear, you get to live. If not..." he shrugged. "I turn you over to the Dark Lord."

Lucius continued to Occlude his mind. "It became obvious to me that I was not going to be rescued from prison. Given the fact that the others were sprung shortly after his return, I found this odd. I knew that I couldn't do anything to support the Dark Lord's rise to power from behind bars, so I used any means necessary to get out of that prison. Since the Dark Lord is not in control of Azkaban, I was forced to make a deal with Ministry forces.

"In return for providing them information, I was placed under house arrest. Now, before you say anything, the information I have given them is more than a year old and was nothing that they hadn't figured out on their own."

"And having Granger, is that one of your perks?"

Lucius sneered. "That is a little side bet. In the off chance the Dark Lord is defeated, I intend to use her to regain my place in society."

"You don't believe our Master will be victorious?" Severus asked cautiously.

Lucius leaned forward in his chair. "Come now, Severus. I know you had an ulterior motive when you took that job at Hogwarts. You played both sides for a very long time. I'm not going back to Azkaban. She is my insurance, just as Dumbledore was yours. Though I must say, I was quite surprised you did the old man in. I thought for sure you would hide under his wing until the end."

"We aren't here to discuss me. Why should I not tell our Master that you are working for the other side?"

Lucius had hoped to draw Severus away from that topic. "Because I am in a unique position to learn what the Order is doing, a position that you used to hold. Of course, I can only report once, but rest assured, when the time is right, I will. I will provide our Master with the opportunity to defeat them once and for all." He hoped that Severus would believe this.

"And what about your plaything?"

Lucius waved his hand dismissively. "She is just that. I know she is shunned since she's a Mudblood. If the Dark Lord sees fit to let me keep her, I won't complain."

"But you said you would use her to regain your place in society..." Severus prompted.

"Yes. Look at it this way: she is close to Harry Potter, who will undoubtedly be a hero. If they are successful, they will all be lauded as heroes. I will use that to regain my position. No one would believe that a hero of the Order would get involved with a Death Eater. Everyone would be forced to accept the fact that I have reformed." He smirked at Severus. "You see, it's a win-win situation for me." He leaned forward, "Now, old friend, what's your way out?" He could feel Severus trying to break past his block and forced himself to break eye contact.

"Afraid of what I might see?" Severus asked snidely.

"Not at all. You know I don't approve of people going into my mind. I believe I asked you a question. It's not like you to not have a way out."

The two men stared in silence for more than a minute before Severus finally spoke. "It so happens that you have something I want."

A/N: Here you go my darlings, another chapter. I have answered a few questions, but I think I'm generating more than I'm answering. LOL I'm sure the anti-Ron fans must be happy about this turn of events.

I should have the next chapter up before the weekend is out.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic.

Chapter 7

Lucius chuckled softly. "You may not have heard me correctly, but I have nothing. I am under house arrest, only here because I was needed for the research mission."

Severus leaned forward. "Oh, but you do have something I want. You have access to the Order."

"True, but you will have no way to communicate with me. As you can imagine, they keep me at their headquarters, and I will be leaving this afternoon, so this is the last you will see of me."

"There's no chance of you returning?"

Lucius laughed. "Very doubtful. You see, for the most part, they don't have a lot of trust in me. What is it you want?"

"I have information that I have to get to the Order."

Lucius did a good job hiding his surprise. "Ah, feeding them false information. Of course, you do realize they have vilified you and would not trust any of the information you deliver."

"Let's not play games anymore. I know that you have abandoned the Dark Lord."

"We thought the same thing about you, you know," Lucius replied calmly, not wanting to give away too much information.

"We are more alike than you think. Even though he is dead, I remain loyal to Dumbledore."

"Interesting that you claim to remain loyal to a man you killed." Lucius wondered where this was going. He had no idea whether or not Severus was telling the truth. He knew that Severus was a survivor and may just be doing the same thing he was doing, playing both sides to remain alive.

Severus grimaced. "We have your wife to thank for that." He considered his words carefully. He knew the real reason Narcissa had wasted away and wasn't sure Lucius was ready to hear the truth. "After your imprisonment, to say the Dark Lord was upset would be a vast understatement. He had ordered you *not* to go on the mission to retrieve the prophecy. You were far too valuable to risk needlessly. Instead, you thought you would gain the glory of delivering the prophecy, and you ended up captured. Since he couldn't reach you, he took out his anger on Draco. Not even a week had passed before he called Draco to him and forced the boy to take the Mark. He then gave Draco an impossible task. The Dark Lord's plan was not just to kill Draco, but to disgrace him, and the Malfoy name, in the process.

"Narcissa was naturally distraught when Draco told her what he had been tasked to do. She came begging to me to watch out for him. I was a fool and allowed her to extract an Unbreakable Vow from me. I paid for my error. She made me vow to carry out the task if Draco was going to fail.

"Had I anticipated that, I would not have agreed to the Vow. I knew that nothing would save Draco, unless by some stroke of luck he was able to carry out his task. Sadly, he did not trust me and would not confide in me. I believe the Dark Lord gave him instructions to carry out the task himself, and he was afraid to go against his orders, no matter the consequences. It is possible I could have protected him.

"Because of that foolish Vow, I was forced to kill Dumbledore. Of course, the old man knew it was coming. I had informed him of the Vow, not that it mattered much. He was already gravely wounded from destroying one of the Dark Lord's Horcruxes and would not have lasted much longer. The fact that Draco was not the one to kill Dumbledore, and that the Dark Lord lost his spy at Hogwarts, angered our master greatly. You know what happens when he gets angry." Severus paused and tried to gauge Lucius' reaction to the news. Amazingly, Lucius had a neutral expression on his face.

Severus continued, "Fortunately, killing Dumbledore has removed all doubt from everyone's minds as to where my loyalties lay. I have been using my time to uncover the location of the remaining Horcruxes. I have most located and one in my possession. I have been placing clues in the hope that someone from the Order will find them. When the time is right, they will all be destroyed and the Dark Lord will once again be mortal. I need you to deliver word to them when the time is right. You said they don't all trust you, but you at least have Granger, and some of the others, on your side or you wouldn't be here."

Lucius was in shock over what he had heard. "Narcissa made an Unbreakable Vow?"

Severus was not surprised his friend had focused on this one fact. "Yes. The guilt she felt after Draco was executed..."

Lucius closed his eyes to ward off the tears. It had not been grief, but guilt, that had killed his wife. But it had really been his fault. If he had done as the Dark Lord had asked and remained behind, Draco might still be alive.

Severus could see that he was losing Lucius. "Lucius, do not blame yourself. You have seen what type of monster the Dark Lord is. Do you really want to live in a world that he rules?"

Lucius opened his eyes, but focused on nothing. "No."

"Then when the time comes, let them know what I have done." Severus glanced out the window and saw that the sun had risen. "I must go." He handed Lucius a necklace with a simple medallion. "This has a Protean Charm and will let you know when and where."

Lucius barely noticed Severus leaving. What he had learnt about Draco's death weighed heavily on his mind. He knew that he couldn't let it bother him. Not now. He could dwell on it later, but if he let it control him, it would affect his plan to have Hermione. He fastened the necklace and tucked it beneath his shirt.

It was a very quiet morning. Ron didn't really say anything, as he was feeling the effects of the sleeping potion. Hermione was afraid to make eye contact with Lucius for fear she would give something away. After the morning's revelations, Lucius didn't feel much like talking.

Hermione insisted on a few more hours of research before they left. Lucius didn't mind. He knew this might be the last time he was at his home.

While in the library, Hermione would sneak glances at Lucius. She became very concerned that he did not seem to be returning her attention. In fact, he didn't seem to be doing anything other than staring at the book in his hands. She noticed that he wasn't turning the pages. She began to suspect he was having second thoughts about their night together. If only she could get rid of Ron, she could find out what was bothering Lucius.

Now that she was worried she had done something wrong to upset him, she found it harder to concentrate.

Ron saw that she was looking distracted. "Hermione? Is something bothering you?"

"What? Oh, no. Just thinking. I've learned a lot of information the last few days, and I'm trying to figure out how the latest bit of information fits in with that." She noticed that Lucius was finally looking at her. Obviously, the sound of her voice had broken him free of the trance. He smiled weakly at her, and she had no doubt that something was bothering him.

Ron seemed to believe what she had told him and returned his attention to his book.

When Ron excused himself from the room, Hermione immediately turned her attention to Lucius. "What's wrong?"

He tried to force a cheerful smile on his face. After all, he should be happy, his goal was within sight. "Nothing that you need to concern yourself with. I'm just lamenting the fact that we will be leaving today, and there is a chance this may be the last time I see my home." He thought this sounded like a plausible lie.

She was relieved that it was nothing she had done. "Oh, well. I'm sure that you will have enough support that you will be pardoned. After all you've done for us, there's no

way they can send you back to Azkaban."

"I really do appreciate your optimism, and I hope that you will not be offended if I don't share it?"

"No, not at all. But I hope you won't mind if I do remain optimistic."

"Not at all." He found that he had finally found a sincere smile. Her youthful innocence could be quite contagious.

Shortly after dinner, Ron insisted it was time to leave. He also insisted in following Lucius.

"What's in the bag?" he asked.

Lucius did his best to remain calm. "I thought that I would bring some clothes. Much of what I have been given is wearing out."

Ron carefully searched the bag. He seemed disappointed that he couldn't find anything. He couldn't think of a valid reason to deny Malfoy clothes. "All right. Let's go."

Mrs. Weasley was the one to answer the door. "Hermione, Ron, so glad to see you made it before the storm rolls in. We're supposed to have some horrible weather tonight. Have you eaten? I can whip something up if you're hungry."

"I'm starved. That would be great, Mum," replied Ron.

Out of the corner of her eye, Hermione watched Malfoy carry his bag upstairs. "No, I'm fine. We ate before we left. I have some good information I look forward to sharing with everyone tomorrow, but for now, I think I'd like to get some rest."

Molly tried not to sound disappointed that Hermione was refusing food. "Of course, dear. The others are in the drawing room."

"Thank you, Mrs. Weasley." She wasn't sure she wanted to be bombarded with questions right now, but knowing it would be rude to go to bed without saying anything to them, she decided to stop by the drawing room and let them know she was back.

When she stood in the door, Ginny saw her first. "Welcome back, Hermione."

Harry and Remus looked up from their game of chess. She was actually surprised to see Harry since he was away so often searching for Horcruxes.

"Hermione!" Harry exclaimed. "We were worried about you. It must have been horrible being stuck with Malfoy."

"It wasn't that bad. He was a perfect gentleman. If you don't believe me, ask Ron."

Harry snorted. "Oh really? I find that hard to believe." As soon as he had found out Hermione was alone with Malfoy, he had insisted that Ron go to ensure her safety. Of course, he and Ron had argued about why she had been allowed to go alone in the first place.

"Believe what you will. I'm going to bed as I've had a lot of long days going through the books. I'll let everyone know what I found tomorrow. I've got some stuff that I think you'll find very useful, Harry. I even brought back a couple of books." As she headed across the hall, she could hear Ginny excuse herself for bed as well. She had expected this.

Ginny bounded into their shared bedroom. "I can't believe you spent five whole days with him."

"I didn't really notice it. I was buried in books most of the time." 'Other than those wonderfully intimate meals *Hush*, she said in an attempt to silence the voice. She had hoped that it would leave her alone now that she had done what it wanted.

"He didn't do anything to you, did he? I mean, I know how he feels about those that aren't purebloods or who are blood traitors."

"I told you, he was the perfect gentleman. He helped me choose which books would be useful, but otherwise left me to my research." She really didn't want to talk about it. That wasn't quite true, she really did want to talk about it, but she knew it wasn't possible. Ginny wouldn't understand, at least not right now.

"He was pleasant?" Ginny could hardly believe what she was hearing.

"Reasonably so. We had a few pleasant chats over meals. Would you believe he didn't say anything disparaging? I think being in prison did something to him, changed him." She decided this was as good an opportunity as any to try to improve his reputation.

"Lucius Malfoy change? Not bloody likely. This is the same man that gave me that diary," Ginny replied sarcastically.

"I don't think he is, Ginny. I know that no one here has really talked to him, but perhaps you should try. He might surprise you."

She looked at Hermione in disbelief. "If he talked to me, that would be enough to surprise me."

By now Hermione was dressed for bed and crawling under the covers. "All I'm saying is we should give him the benefit of the doubt that he is sincere. I'll talk about it in the morning." She yawned, hoping Ginny would leave her alone.

Ginny jumped on the end of Hermione's bed. "Oh, no you don't. I want you to tell me about the manor. Is it really as beautiful as they say?"

"Honestly, Ginny. I really didn't see much of it, just the library, dining room and my bedroom. Well, his bedroom too..."

"What were you doing in his bedroom?" Ginny asked suspiciously.

"Well, I had to check it to make sure he didn't have anything dangerous, didn't I? I couldn't have him getting loose at night, could I?" In reality, the first night was the only night she had magically locked his door, but he hadn't tried to leave on any of the other nights.

"Oh, right. Well, from what you did see?"

Hermione could tell that Ginny wasn't going to leave her be. "It's very extravagant, kind of like a fancy hotel. And it's very old, but it's been well maintained. That's really all I can tell you about it. I spent most of my time in the library, and all the walls there were covered in books, so there wasn't much to look at."

Ginny seemed disappointed. "Right, well, goodnight."

"Goodnight, Ginny." She tried to go to sleep, but lay awake for quite some time wondering when she could be alone with Lucius again. She still had the feeling that something other than leaving his house was bothering him, but they had not had long to talk.

As she finally drifted off to sleep, memories of the previous night kept invading her mind. This was much better than one of Fred and George's fantasies. She moaned softly as she imagined him touching her.

Given the fact there were Death Eater attacks and other signs of a large impending battle, Christmas was surprisingly normal. Hermione woke to the standard pile of presents at the foot of her bed. Ginny had knitted her a scarf, and Mrs. Weasley had given her standard jumper, this one in a warm brown. Harry gave her a new quill. Not surprisingly, Ron had given her a very unimaginative gift of a box of chocolate. She was slightly disappointed that she hadn't received a gift from Lucius, but then rationalized that there was no way for him to have purchased anything nor was there a way for him to deliver one if he had.

The rest of the day passed like many other Christmases. After breakfast, they met in the drawing room and talked about their gifts. For one day, everyone was trying to be normal.

As the day wore on, she pulled out her notes to discuss her findings with the Order. She ended up making several copies of her notes for the others to study. They had praised her for the information she had found. She had been sure to give Lucius credit for the assistance he had provided. She saw that the older members of the Order seemed more accepting that Lucius had provided his assistance freely. Her schoolmates were still very skeptical.

Hermione noticed that Lucius didn't join them until it was nearly time for dinner. He only briefly met her eyes as he entered the room.

As usual, Mrs. Weasley had outdone herself on Christmas dinner. No one left the table hungry. After dinner, she hurried them upstairs so that she could listen to her Christmas broadcast. Ron and Harry settled in to a game of chess. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley sat together on the couch. Fred and George found a quiet spot in the corner and began whispering. Bill and Fleur were sitting as far from the Wireless as they could get. Hermione suspected Fleur would rather not be there, but knew how important family was to Bill. Charlie had stopped by for dinner, but had left early to go back to work. The dragonkeepers had only been able to get a few hours apiece off.

"Hey, Hermione, take a look at this," Ginny said as she shoved the latest issue of *Witch Weekly* at Hermione.

Hermione forced herself to pay attention and forget Lucius, the man she would rather be spending the evening with.

Lucius stood outside the drawing room, hiding in the shadows, watching the others enjoy themselves. He thought he had gotten used to being alone after his year of confinement to Azkaban, but after having Hermione as a constant companion for more than a week, he found that was not true.

As he watched them, he compared the setting to how his family had celebrated the holidays. While this celebration was more subdued, he found it more meaningful, more personal. There were so many things that he was determined do differently this time. He found he was succumbing to grief and forced himself to turn away. This was not why he had come downstairs; there was something important he had to do.

It was close to midnight before they all went to bed. Everyone had been surprised that it had been a quiet evening. There had been the general sentiment that the Death Eaters would use Christmas to start a rash of attacks.

Ron had tried to talk to Hermione, but rather than it being anything pleasant, he had just tried to get her tell him that Malfoy had done something wrong. She actually left in a huff at his childish behavior. Even after spending three days at the manor, he insisted that Malfoy had to be up to something devious.

As she slipped into bed, her hand brushed against something. Reaching further under her pillow, she could tell that it was some sort of package. Not wanting Ginny to know about the package, she waited until Ginny was asleep before sneaking into the lavatory. The words 'Happy Christmas' were written on the card. Flipping the card over, she saw those were the only words, but she recognized Lucius' handwriting.

Quietly, she untied the ribbon and opened the box. Wrapped in tissue paper was a small book that looked very old, though well preserved. Carefully, she opened the book and examined the pages. The pages were filled with ancient runes. Some of it was magic, but most of it looked to be some sort of history. This gift was far too extravagant for her to accept.

Knowing that Lucius liked to read in the drawing room, she pulled on her dressing gown and slipped out of her room, the book still clutched in her hand, hoping that he would be there. She could tell the fire was still burning in the fireplace and at least one of the lamps was lit. Lucius was indeed sitting in the chair reading. "Did you leave a gift under my pillow?" she asked.

He looked up from his book. "Ah, Hermione. I had not expected to see you this evening. I thought everyone had gone to bed. Though, I am not one to complain. As for the gift, it seemed the best way to deliver it. I had hoped to give it to you in person, before we left, but Mr. Weasley's arrival changed that."

She tried to hand the book back. "I can't accept this. It's far too much. This book must be hundreds of years old."

He put his hand over hers, forcing her to hold the book. "It is and it has done nothing but decorate shelves for most of its life. I would much prefer it to be in the hands of someone who might actually read it. Besides, if the Ministry decides to confiscate my property, who knows where it will end up? I feel better knowing that at least one of my books will be appreciated properly."

She could feel the heat rising on her cheeks where he touched her. "Well, thank you." She tried not to act embarrassed, but this was the most thoughtful gift anyone had given her. "I feel bad that I don't have anything to give you in return."

"Gifts are not given with expectation of receiving one in return. Your happiness is enough for me." He was pleased that she liked the gift.

She pulled out her wand and locked the door. Once the room was secure, she gave him a passionate kiss. "Thank you again for such a wonderful gift."

"You're quite welcome. While I'm almost positive everyone is asleep, I don't think you should stay long."

"I want to be with you again," she replied as she nuzzled against him.

"I know, my dear. So do I. But if we were caught, I would find myself back in Azkaban rather quickly. And you don't want that, do you?"

"No," she replied sheepishly. She had only been thinking of her desires, not the effect it might have on his freedom. She gave him one last kiss and then unlocked the door.

He watched her leave and was pleased with her response to the gift. He was presenting her exactly what she thought she wanted in a man. Now, all he had to do was figure out a way to be with her before she returned to Hogwarts.

Hermione was still giddy about the book. She had perused it briefly upon returning to her room, but didn't want to answer any questions about where she got it. Since it was not about Dark Magic, there would have been no justification for her bringing it from the manor.

When she went down to the kitchen for breakfast, she tried not to blush when she saw Lucius. He had his hair pulled back, but a few stray locks had worked their way loose, and she found this incredibly attractive. He casually brushed up against her as she was putting the eggs on her plate, causing her to drop the spoon.

She found the only seats available at the table faced the stove. After taking her seat, she forced herself to look down at her plate. She wasn't sure she could handle seeing him. She was sneaking a glance at him cleaning the dishes and accidentally knocked her glass over.

Ron jumped up before the juice spilled into his lap. "Watch out, Hermione!"

She pulled out her wand and cleaned up the mess. "Sorry."

"Honestly, you're worse than Tonks this morning," he rebuked.

"I said I'm sorry." She quickly finished her breakfast and was in a hurry to leave, when she tripped over a chair leg and fell against Lucius.

"Be careful, Miss Granger. You don't want to hurt yourself," he replied smoothly and released her once he was sure she was steady on her feet. He took her plate and glass from her hands. "Allow me."

She nearly ran out of the room, not wanting the others to see how badly she was blushing.

"What did you do to her?" Ron asked tersely, sure that he had done something to cause her to rush out of the room.

"Nothing, Mr. Weasley. I have no explanation for her reaction." *Actually, I do have an explanation, but not one that I will give you.*

Ron watched Malfoy suspiciously while he ate the rest of his breakfast and tried to determine why Hermione was acting so odd.

Finally, Harry nudged him. "Come one, let's go."

A part of Lucius liked the fact that the two of them didn't trust him, but he knew he had to find a way to earn their trust. Unfortunately, he wasn't sure how to do that. If he acted too nice, they would think he was up to something. If he was not nice enough, they would think he was insincere. He sighed. Thankfully, Hermione was on his side.

Hermione found that she kept having problems with her dexterity when Lucius was around. She couldn't help but feel nervous around him, fearful that her friends would discover how she really felt about him.

Ginny noticed that Hermione was acting odd and decided to pull her off to the side. "Hermione, what's wrong?"

"Nothing, Ginny."

"Then what's with the attack of the clumsies? Ron's right, you are worse than Tonks." She saw the look on Hermione's face. "Oh, it's Ron, isn't it?"

"Ginny!" She couldn't believe that Ginny would talk about her brother like that.

"Don't worry about it. The first time is a little awkward, but it gets better."

"He's your brother," Hermione replied in a harsh whisper.

"So? That doesn't matter to me. You two are good for each other."

Hermione doubted that. She knew that she could be a good influence on Ron, but the more time they had spent together, the more she had realized they would be nothing more than friends. "Oh, I don't know."

Ginny placed a reassuring hand on Hermione. "Don't judge by your first time. Really, it does get better. I know it was pretty awkward for me and Dean the first time."

Hermione was shocked. "You and Dean?"

"Yeah, I thought you knew? Anyway, it really does get better. You just need to give it time."

Hermione's mind was processing this new turn of events. It could be used to her advantage. "You won't tell him about this, will you?"

"Of course not. I think the last thing Ron wants is his little sister talking to him about sex. I don't think he's even brought it up with Fred and George, not that I can blame him considering how poorly they keep secrets."

"Thanks, Ginny. We'll see how it goes. You know how he can be."

Ginny laughed. "Yeah, I sure do. I think it's just grand that you two are getting back together." She gave Hermione a hug before leaving.

Hermione almost laughed out loud at this turn of events. Ginny had come up with the perfect assumption, one that made her more at ease. Ginny was probably the only one perceptive enough to notice anything different.

A/N: Yes, the plot thickens. I'm really trying to post updates every couple of days, but I'm trying to work on new chapters of various fics in between, so sometimes updates come a little slower than I would like.

I know, the anti-Ron fan club is rooting for me to do something awful to him. I can't say anything about that. :)

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic.

Various members of the Order were in and out of Grimmauld Place between Christmas and New Year's, including Hermione. She was spending a great deal of time at the library in Diagon Alley researching theories she had developed at Malfoy's. Every night, she would find a note under her pillow. They were simple notes, wishing her a good night's rest and pleasant dreams. That made the one on the thirtieth quite surprising. It was a rather lengthy poem. Not an overly romantic poem, but an original composition that he had clearly spent a great deal of time writing.

"What are you reading?" Ginny asked.

Hermione folded the note and tucked it away. "Nothing," she replied innocently.

"Did Ron write you a note?" Ginny asked as she plopped on the bed.

"That's none of your business," she replied as she slapped Ginny's hand away.

"Oh, come on. If my brother's being romantic, I want to see it," Ginny insisted.

"No! It's personal. I don't ask to see your love letters."

Ginny got up in a huff and buried her head in her pillow. That was when Hermione remembered that Ginny was in love with Harry, who was refusing to return that affection right now. She tucked the letter into her pocket and sat next to Ginny. "Ginny, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. It's just that something like that is very personal. I got so wrapped up in my feelings that I forgot about yours."

Ginny turned her head and looked at Hermione. "I know. I just wish that he would give in to his feelings."

Hermione wrapped her arm around Ginny. "He will. He just needs time. He does love you, but he's just scared to admit it."

"I know. I just wanted to share in your happiness."

"You can share in my happiness, but you won't mind if I keep the details to myself, will you?"

Ginny giggled. "No, I guess not. I probably don't want to know the details about my brother anyway. You know, if you want someone to talk to, Tonks is available. She gave me some rather good advice."

"I'll keep that in mind. Goodnight, Ginny," she said as she crawled back into her bed. She would have to be more careful, and she would have to hide the notes she had been saving. While Lucius didn't sign them, Ginny would know it wasn't Ron's handwriting.

"G'night, Hermione," replied Ginny.

Hermione lay in bed, waiting until the house grew quiet. Once she was sure the Ginny had finally drifted off to sleep, she slipped down the hall to the drawing room. Surprisingly, it was deserted. Noticing that it wasn't really that late, she took a book off the shelf and curled up in a chair, Lucius' chair.

Lucius entered the library and saw someone sitting in his chair. He approached quietly, hoping it was Hermione. He whispered playfully, "I believe you have taken my chair."

"Lucius, you startled me." Her face flushed, and her heart was pounding, either from being startled or his proximity.

"My apologies; that was not my intention. I'm unaccustomed to finding anyone here at this hour." He reached down and brushed her cheek.

"Yes, well, I, er..." She suddenly found it very difficult to form a coherent sentence. "Thank you for the notes."

He sat in the chair opposite hers. "Since I can't be with you, it's the least I can do."

"It's just..." For one of the rare times in Hermione's life, she was having a hard time finding words.

He saw that she was blushing. "Forgive me for embarrassing you. I'll stop."

"No," she said forcefully before moderating her tone, "don't do that. I...enjoy them." She crossed the distance between them and straddled him. "They are from you and that makes them special." Leaning forward, she gave him a passionate kiss.

Lucius had not expected her to be so forward, but he was not going to complain. He had seen so little of her over the last few days and had feared she would leave before he could get her alone. "Well then, I'm glad you enjoy them. Anything I can do to brighten your day." He let his right hand drift onto her bosom.

"I've missed you," she whispered.

He gently lowered her to the hearthrug. "And I you." He seriously contemplated taking her right there. Just before he kissed her, he looked toward the door and got to his feet. "Someone's coming," he announced while offering her his hand. Once she was standing, he smoothed his clothes and walked toward the door. "Arthur," he said cordially as he passed Mr. Weasley.

"Lucius. Up late?"

"I normally read after everyone has gone to bed. I found Miss Granger in my usual chair and decided to forgo my nightly ritual. Good night." As he climbed the stairs, he had a very satisfied and smug grin on his face. Everything was happening according to plan.

Once safely in his room, he could no longer suppress his laugh. Last summer, he had carefully crafted a plan to woo Hermione. He had faithfully carried out his plan, which was now reaping dividends. Even better, she was not anywhere near as bad as Severus had made her seem. It wasn't an unpleasant experience and it made him feel young again.

"Are you all right, Hermione?" Arthur asked as he peered into the drawing room.

"Fine, Mr. Weasley. I was just buried in the book when he came in and startled me. I just couldn't sleep and thought I'd read a bit."

"All right. Don't tell Molly, but I thought I'd nip down to the kitchen for a bite. See you in the morning."

Deciding to wait until Mr. Weasley went back upstairs, she stared at the book, reliving the kiss *How did it happen?* "You asked for it." *I did not!* "I'm afraid you did. You sat on his lap." She had been about to argue with the voice, but it was right. *I must be insane.* "No, you aren't. Go up and see him." *But what if we're caught?* "He's the only one on the top floor. No one will know. You know it's what you want."

After she heard Mr. Weasley go back upstairs, she waited ten minutes before slipping upstairs. By now, she knew which steps creaked so she could avoid them. Her heart was pounding in her chest by the time she reached the top floor landing. Before she could change her mind, she twisted the doorknob and slipped into his room.

Lucius was shirtless and turned to face the door. "Hermione?"

After admiring him for a few seconds, she threw herself into his arms. "I had to be with you again."

"I fear this room is not as well appointed as the one at the manor."

"I don't care. All that matters is that you are here." She rubbed against him.

"Well, aren't you the little nymphomaniac?" he asked playfully.

"I can't help it. It's how you make me feel."

He slipped the nightgown over her head and lowered her to the bed. "I only wish I could make it more comfortable for you here." Once again, he was trying to make her feel as though she was the most important person in the world.

She began unfastening his trousers. "I hadn't noticed."

As he brought her closer to climax, she began to moan and cry out. He stopped.

"No, no, don't stop. I'm so close," she panted.

"Darling, you're getting a little vocal, and the others might hear you."

"Sorry, sorry. Please don't stop." She pulled at his hips, trying to draw him further inside.

He captured her mouth in his and resumed thrusting. This way, her moans would be muffled. He felt his climax coming and knew hers was also approaching by the way she wrapped her legs around him and dug her fingers into his back. He finished just ahead of her, but did not leave her disappointed.

In between soft kisses, he whispered, "We really shouldn't have done that."

"We had to do it. I needed you again before I left." She returned his kisses, enjoying the comfort of his presence.

"What if they suspect something? Last time, you had most of the day to recover before you had to face anyone."

She smiled slyly at him and ran her fingers through his silky hair. "I have a solution to that. Ginny is the only one I spend a lot of time around. The others are all too busy with Order business. She thinks that I have gotten back together with Ron."

He pulled away. "Weasley? How revolting."

She sat up and wrapped her hands around his arm to prevent him from leaving the bed. "Lucius, it's not true. I love you, not him."

"But you let the others believe you do." He refused to look at her.

"No. Just Ginny. The others don't suspect anything."

"And how long do you expect this to last? Surely, once you go back to school, she will realize you care nothing for her brother."

She sighed and leaned against him. "I know. I'll have a big row with him and be done with it." She climbed onto his lap. "I can make it work. I just want to be with you. It's been horrible seeing you every day and not being able to do anything."

"Yes, it has," he agreed. "But do you know how hard it is for me to know that people still believe you and Weasley are together?"

She leaned against him. "It's a necessary evil. It's very convenient for her to think that. And it's a better lie than any I could think of. She suspected something. What else could I have told her?"

"Shh. Let's not think about that." Having her on his lap was arousing him again. He grabbed her hips and guided her over his erection. As she slid onto him, he had a horrifying thought. "Hermione, I don't have a potion..."

She stopped him with a kiss as she started rocking on his lap. "I took care of it in the hopes we would find time together."

He smiled at her in relief. "Good girl." He helped guide her in this new position.

Hermione opened her door slowly, hardly able to believe what had happened. She hadn't wanted to leave, but he had been right. The others just wouldn't understand. Would they ever understand? She would have to convince them that Lucius had changed and was trustworthy. She would have to do it carefully so they didn't grow suspicious.

"Hermione?" Ginny asked groggily. "Is that you?"

"Yes, Ginny."

"What you doing up?"

"Just wanted to get a snack. Go back to bed."

"For two hours?" asked Ginny, mid-yawn.

Hermione had not anticipated having to answer any questions. "I did some reading, too."

Ginny lit the lamp and saw Hermione's expression before she turned away. "Hermione?" she prodded.

Hermione kept her back to Ginny and tried to punch her pillow into submission. "I told you, I did some reading and got a snack."

Ginny rushed around Hermione's bed. "Oh, no you didn't. You were with Ron, weren't you?"

"No..." She realized that this was the type of lie she needed Ginny to believe. "I'm not going to talk to you about that."

"What if Mum and Dad had heard?" Ginny asked, amazed that Hermione had found the courage.

"Of course we were careful. I'm really quite tired now and would like to get some sleep."

"After all that, I'm not surprised. See you in the morning," Ginny said as she crawled into her bed.

Hermione was so exhausted it didn't take her long to fall asleep.

The time to return to school was approaching all too quickly. There was a rush to collect as much information as possible before their return. When she wasn't researching in Diagon Alley, she was accompanying Harry on his Horcrux quest. They had just found another one yesterday. There were now only three left.

She took a look at the pile of dirty laundry and decided she should do something about it now rather than waiting until the last minute.

On her way downstairs, she passed Mrs. Weasley. "Ah, doing your laundry? That's good, dear. Now, if only I could get those boys to do the same."

Hermione laughed softly. She knew it was a battle to get Ron and Harry ready to go back to Hogwarts. Surprisingly, the kitchen was empty. It was normally the social center for the house, especially in winter.

She crossed the room and pushed open the door to laundry with her backside. When arms wrapped around her, it startled her and she dropped her basket.

"I didn't mean to frighten you," Lucius whispered in her ear.

She leaned back against him. "You didn't frighten me, just surprised me."

He spun her around and pressed her against the wall before kissing her deeply. "That's good. I would hate to think I frighten you."

Since he was shirtless, her eyes were drawn to the Dark Mark on his forearm. She traced it with her finger. "Will it go away?"

He resisted the urge to pull his arm away from her. "It did before. I have no reason to believe it won't this time." The Mark was the last thing he wanted to discuss with her.

She looked into his eyes for several seconds before gently kissing the Mark. She trailed her kisses up his arm, until he leaned toward her and cupped her cheek in his hand. "We should be more careful. The others are awake." He moved away from her, hoping the distance would ease the tensions.

"I know. It's just so hard." She pulled out her wand and charmed the washer to finish the clothes Lucius had been washing when she arrived.

"Thank you," he replied.

"What? Oh, it's nothing." She sat on the opposite side of the room, not trusting herself to get too close. When she finally met his gaze, she said, "I'll miss you."

Before he could answer, Ginny opened the door. "Oh, good, I thought I'd have to do it myself. Mum's refusing to do our laundry this year." She saw that the washer was working magically. "What's this?"

Hermione knew that Ginny didn't like Lucius and relished watching him perform household chores. "I didn't want to wait since I wanted to get my packing done early. I have to make sure everything will fit into my trunk."

Ginny pondered this statement for a few seconds. "I'm in no hurry. He can wash them for me."

"As you wish," he replied with a nod of his head.

"And for Merlin's sake, put a shirt on," she chided before leaving.

Hermione gave Lucius a victorious grin. "See, she doesn't suspect anything." With a flick of her wand, the clothes flew out of the washer, dried and folded themselves. Another flick and her clothes flew into the washer. She saw him picking up his shirt and summoned it to her. "I prefer you shirtless," she said coyly.

He crossed the room to retrieve his shirt, which she held behind her back. "Hermione, hand me my shirt."

"No," she replied defiantly.

He pulled her against him and grasped his shirt. "As much as I love playing with you, I should probably leave before someone else brings laundry down."

She loosened her grip on his shirt enough that it started slipping through her fingers. Before relinquishing the shirt, she tightened her grip again. "Tonight?"

"If at all possible," he replied before kissing her.

After he broke the kiss, she found herself having to lean against the workbench. He paused and gave her a soft kiss before leaving. She wanted nothing more than to follow him upstairs.

Hermione wasn't looking forward to going back to school. There would be no more notes under her pillow at night, no more stolen glances. And she hadn't even had the chance to say a proper goodbye. Ginny had been watching her far too closely for her to sneak out and see him.

As she neatly packed the last of her belongings, she saw an envelope placed on top of her books. Picking it up, she saw her name written in the same neat hand that had penned her nightly notes. It was a rather thick letter from the feel of the envelope, and she knew she didn't have time to read it now. Instead, she tucked it into a book. No one would think twice about her reading on the train. She felt a small stab of guilt for not thinking of writing a letter for him.

She could hear Mrs. Weasley upstairs, yelling for the boys to hurry up and get their belongings together. She still had a few minutes and pulled out quill and parchment. Tapping her quill against her forehead, she wondered how she should start the letter. Just writing 'Lucius' seemed too impersonal, but 'Darling Lucius' or 'Dearest Lucius' seemed too syrupy. She decided to come back to that later; time was running out.

I feel dreadful for not thinking about this sooner, but I only have a few minutes. I find a part of me doesn't want to go back to school, but wants to remain here. But the greater part of me knows that Harry needs me, and the school will become a focal point. It is with a heavy heart that I leave.

I will miss our chats, though we have not had one since we left your manor. It's so refreshing to have an intelligent, thought-provoking conversation. This must all sound foolish to you. I will miss you so much it's hard to express. I think I will miss your notes the most. I looked forward to going to bed every night to see what you had left under my pillow. It's silly and romantic, isn't it?

I look forward to reading your letter and only wish there was a way I could correspond with you once I leave. But, we both know that's not possible. Even if you weren't here, it would look suspicious.

Perhaps we can find a reason to return to your manor during Easter break? I've had a dreadful time sleeping the last few nights. I keep thinking of you and being with you.

I have to go. I hear them coming downstairs.

She thought a few seconds trying to decide how to close the letter.

Affectionately yours,

Hermione

After drying the ink with a quick wave of her wand, she folded the letter and tucked it under her pillow, sure he would find it there. Shoving the last few things into her trunk, she joined the mayhem in the hall that included Mrs. Black's portrait.

Once they were settled on the train, she pulled out her book. She saw that Ron had been about to talk to her, but he changed his mind. After she was left alone, she opened the book to the pages where she had placed her letter.

My dearest Hermione,

How it pains me to know that I will no longer see your beautiful face everyday. These last few weeks have been paradise for me. You have no idea what you mean to me. I hope that one day I will be able to show you. Even worse than not being able to see you is the fact that I will have no contact with you. I know that you are capable of taking care of yourself, and I tell myself not to worry, but I find I cannot help it. You are heading for the center of the storm, and I can do nothing to protect you.

No, that's not true. I hope what you learned in my library will prove of value and help protect you and the others. Still, I wish I could be there to help, but it would only place you in more danger. For now, word of my change of heart has remained secret; at least I hope that is the case.

I'm sure you have noticed that this was a rather thick letter. I recall you telling me how much you liked my nightly notes, and I had plenty of time on my hands. Truly, I have come to have great deal of respect for Mrs. Weasley, but she declared that most of the chores were hers and flatly refused my offers to help with meals. Not that I can say I blame her; I have found cooking oddly therapeutic. Isn't that strange?

Terribly sorry for the interruption. You will find the other sheets of this letter are dated. I know it will not be the same as finding a note under your pillow every night, but this is the best I could do. In addition, you will find other notes packed in your trunk. I trust you will open them on the appointed date. If I had my wand, I would have sealed them to prevent you from peeking, but I trust you not to read ahead.

Take care of yourself. I'm not sure when we will see each other again, but if you find you need anything else from my library, it would be my pleasure to escort you.

I should go now before I become too sentimental. You are my guiding star, Hermione.

Your humble servant,

Lucius

She read through the letter again, still not entirely believing the strange turn of events her life had taken these last couple of weeks. Checking the other pages that had been in the envelope, she saw that they were dated at one week intervals. Despite the urge to rip into them right away, she resisted. It would disappoint Lucius to know that she had read them all right away.

She tucked them back into the book and returned it to her trunk. After all, she did have duties to perform as Head Girl.

Once back at school, lessons progressed much as they had before the holidays. Even though they weren't sure N.E.W.T. exams would be held, McGonagall had determined they would progress as usual, with as few changes as possible.

One of those changes had been the resurrection of Dumbledore's Army. They had all agreed to keep the name. Using Hermione's coins, they were able to remain alert and ready to defend the castle. After talking with Harry and Malfoy, Hermione had decided to concentrate her research on discovering any hidden magic in the castle. This was one search that Harry had been happy to help out with.

Ron seemed to calm down some from how he had acted over the holidays, but she couldn't help but think how incredibly immature he could be. He had tried to help in the search, but he didn't have Hermione's knowledge of the library, or Harry's seemingly instinctive feel for magic.

After a careful examination of the Marauder's Map, and investigating all the secret passages, they found nothing. "Clearly, wherever this magic is kept, it's something that they didn't know about," Hermione said. "I mean, the Map would only show parts of the castle they knew about, right?"

"So how do we find these other secret passages?" Ron asked.

She pulled a book out of her bag. "It's not going to be easy. I've found some information on locating secret passages. There's a spell, it's not an easy one, and it's going to take time since it's only good for a small area at a time, but it's the best I could find."

"Hermione, there are miles of hallway here. We could never search it all," Ron lamented.

"We shouldn't have to search it all," said Harry. "The Map shows us a representation of the castle. We can use the layout that Hermione found in *Hogwarts: A History* and concentrate our search on areas we are likely to find something. All we have to do is look for areas that don't appear to have a door. You and Ron can take on that search, and I'll continue my search of the Room of Requirement."

"Not that again. We've spent hours in there, and it's all junk," whined Hermione. Her idea was much more likely to yield results and would go faster with the three of them searching.

"We haven't gone through it all. As big as that room is, there has to be something important there. It can't all just be junk the caretakers have thrown in there over the years."

"I think I'd rather search the halls," said Ron. "Some of the stuff in that room weirds me out. What's the spell?"

The three of them leaned around the book. After practicing the spell, Hermione got Harry to agree to at least help with the search between classes. Once they felt comfortable with the spell, they began comparing the two maps. It looked like the dungeons were the best place to start.

They had spent most of the weekend searching the castle. They had turned up a secret chamber in the dungeon, but the only things in the room were old specimen jars. She had only half her mind on the search, though. She knew that waiting in her room was her next note. She had tucked it under her pillow that morning. It wasn't quite the same as when Lucius placed one under her pillow, but it would have to do.

After a soak in the prefect's bathroom, she was ready for bed and to see what the new note said. Pulling the curtains around her bed, she slid the note out from under her pillow. Her hands were shaking as she unfolded it.

My dearest Hermione,

It has now been a week since we parted, assuming you aren't reading all the letters at once. I think you may have been tempted to read them all, but I trust you have waited.

I know it must be strange for you to be back at school, I and I can understand how difficult it is for you to keep our relationship secret. I must do the same. I fear that any inroads I have made with the others here would be destroyed if they knew how I felt about you.

I hope that your feelings for me have not faded. I know that mine have not. I fall asleep each night dreaming of you and hope that you do the same.

I know that it is difficult not having contact with one you care about. I assure you, I feel it, too. My only hope is that these letters will help lessen the separation. I know that you did not have the free time to undertake a project of this nature, and you should not feel guilty for not having written me letters. You had no idea I would do this, and that is the way I wished it.

I only wish I could be there with you, or rather, you here with me. After hours of phenomenal sex, I would tuck you in and kiss you sweetly to wish you pleasant dreams. Instead, you will have to accept my wishes from a distance.

You are always in my heart.

Your humble servant,

Lucius

She pressed the letter to her chest. Once the final three Horcruxes and the Dark Lord were destroyed, she could begin planning her future. She knew that the man that wrote her letters like this had to be a part of that future.

She resolved to cover more ground in her search for secret chambers tomorrow. She would get up early in to begin her search.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Chapter 9

Lucius stared at the letter she had written, as he did most days. He had not expected anything like that from her. It was a very short letter, but he could tell that she truly did have feelings for him.

Realizing he was once again being sentimental, he shoved the letter back into the desk drawer. He hated showing emotional weakness. She was nothing more than his way to regain his place in society. Now that she was gone, he no longer had to live that act. He could continue working on earning the trust of the adults.

When he entered the drawing room, he saw Lupin sitting by the fire. "Lupin," he said politely.

"Malfoy," Remus replied in an equally polite voice.

The two of them had gotten along reasonably well since Lucius' arrival. He had gained the impression that Lupin was more forgiving than some of the others. Naturally, this worked to his advantage. "If I might disturb you, I wonder if you play chess?"

"I'm passable," Remus replied as he closed his book. "And you?"

"I used to be fairly decent. Would you fancy a match?"

Remus rose and moved toward the table. "Sure." He noticed that Lucius had already palmed two of the pawns. He chose the right hand and saw he would play the light pieces.

The first half of the match was played in relative silence as they two men gauged each other's playing styles. "So, you've really renounced You-Know-Who?" Remus finally asked.

"I have. I made a mistake many years ago. It cost me dearly to learn the error of my ways." He took Lupin's rook with his knight.

Lupin furrowed his brow as he studied the board. "Hermione mentioned how helpful you were. She seems to believe you have repented." He moved a pawn, placing Malfoy's queen in danger.

Malfoy frowned. His queen had been in a very commanding position, and now he was forced to move her to a more restrictive place on the board. "She is a very bright young woman. It was a pleasure working with someone as mature as she is."

Remus sat back, forgetting about the game. "The others don't seem to trust you."

"They have every right not to. I have done many despicable things." He had learned this was the best way to gain trust, be almost overly honest.

"You aren't bitter about this? I mean, are you happy with the current situation?"

"You've never been to Azkaban, have you? I have a hard time imagining anything worse than that. In my time in prison, I have learned that I don't want to go back. I will be an upstanding citizen so that I *never* have to experience that again. If it involves cleaning toilets, so be it. I have a warm bed, hot bath, and hot meals. More than I had during my incarceration."

Remus mulled the reply for several seconds. "That's an interesting outlook you've adopted. What are your plans for the future?"

"Do you know your plans for the future?" retorted Lucius.

"We aren't talking about me," replied Remus defensively.

"True. But I somehow doubt you know what you are going to do when this is all over. It is much the same for me. If our side prevails, I hope that the aid I have given will convince those in power that I have atoned for my sins and earned my freedom. If the Dark Lord wins... I somehow doubt I will survive. There isn't anything to drink around here, is there?" In the month since he had left his manor, he hadn't had a drink, and he was in a mood where he could really use one. The chess game had been partially successful in diverting his thoughts from Hermione, but Lupin had just brought them to the forefront again.

"There might be something. That's the sort of thing Molly doesn't approve of, but I have to believe someone has snuck something in. Probably in the dining room. No one goes in there."

After a few minutes exploration of the dining room, Remus turned up a rather dusty bottle of Scotch. "Well, looks like it's been around a while, but it should be good."

Lucius took a look at the label. He didn't recognize it and assumed it was probably something inferior, but at this point, he didn't care.

Half a bottle of Scotch later, Lucius said, "You know, this isn't half bad once you've had several glasses."

"I've never been much of a Scotch man myself, so I'll take your word on it." Remus' words were starting to slur. "What possessed you to join up with Vol hic Vol ol' what's his name, in the first place?"

Lucius downed what was left in his glass and poured himself another serving. "Didn't have a choice. As the heir, it was expected." He leaned forward and whispered, "Do you realize I have had very few choices in my life?"

Remus looked at him in disbelief. "No!"

Lucius leaned back and sipped at his drink. "It's true. My job, my friends, my wife: all chosen for me. Including becoming a Death Eater. I was taught what to think and not to question it. Changing sides marks the first real choice I've made in my life."

"Surely, you could have said no to being a Death Eater?"

"I would have lost everything. My father would have disinherited me."

"What happened to him?" asked Remus.

"Old bastard finally died five years ago." Lucius raised his glass in a toast. "One of the happiest days of my life." His father had been a tyrant. He tried not to think of the old man. Lucius' mother had been his father's second wife. He strongly suspected his father had poisoned his first wife when it became clear she would not give him a son. Because his father had been nearly ninety when he was born, the two of them were never close. All his life, he had been drilled about his responsibilities and duties and what it meant to be a Malfoy. *Here's to you, father. I'm going to marry a Mudblood*, he mentally toasted before throwing back his drink. He chuckled at the thought of the reaction his father would have had to that news.

"What's so funny?" asked Remus as he refilled both glasses.

"Just thinking of how ignorant my father was. I like the idea he was wrong."

Remus proposed a toast, "To ignorant purebloods, may the light find them as it has you."

"Here, here," replied Lucius. "Now, while I can still make it upstairs, I think I should go to bed." He tried to stand and found the alcohol was affecting him more than he had thought, and he fell back in his seat.

Remus laughed. "Are you sure 'bout that?"

"Apparently not. Perhaps I shall stay down here?" He tried to stand again, more slowly this time, and shuffled across the room, reaching out for the doorframe, not sure he could tell which was the real frame and which the double. He turned when he heard Remus fall to the floor.

"I think perhaps I'll crawl. Standing seems to be too much work." He crawled past Lucius and half-crawled, half-walked up the stairs since his room was only one floor up.

Lucius looked at the stairs, debating whether he thought he could make it. Deciding he wasn't up to climbing three flights, he elected to stay in the room across the hall. Falling into what had been Hermione's bed, he swore it still had traces of her scent, and he was soon asleep.

The search was going slowly. Ron had been correct; there were miles of corridors and searching them all was going to take a long time. They recruited Luna and Neville, though Neville was not able to master the spell.

When Hermione wasn't searching the castle for hidden chambers, she was helping Harry in his research to find the last two Horcruxes. The diary, ring, locket, and cup had already been destroyed. She was going through the clues they had been gathering, and she had maps and books strewn across one of the tables in the common room. Everything indicated they had enough information on the Ravenclaw artifact. Apparently, it was a silver dagger with a raven hilt. The raven's eye was a sapphire.

That still left the mystery of the sixth Horcrux. As yet, they had no firm information on what it might be. Logic dictated it would be something of Gryffindor's, but the only two Gryffindor artifacts had been safe at Hogwarts for decades. She and Harry both doubted it was the snake.

"Figure it out, yet?" Harry asked as he plopped into the seat across from her.

She stretched and yawned before replying, "Nearly." While it was late, it wasn't so late that she should be so tired. Sliding a note across the table, she said, "I don't think this is relative to the Ravenclaw Horcrux. I'll look at it later for locating the last one."

"Will you be ready by tomorrow?" he asked impatiently, only giving the note a cursory glance.

She shot him an irritated glance. "If you quit pestering me."

He realized what he was doing and mumbled an apology before moving to his favorite chair by the fire.

It was Friday night and she really wanted to solve this riddle so she could head upstairs. Tonight was the night she could open her next note.

Realizing her mind was drifting, she forced thoughts of Lucius out of her mind and concentrated on the clues for finding the Ravenclaw dagger.

After an hour, she announced, "This is the best I can do. I think that once we get there, we should be able to follow the rest of the clues."

"This is great, Hermione." He took the parchment from her hand and read through it. "I think I can do this on my own."

She gave him an exasperated look. "Harry, it has required two people to recover all the other Horcruxes. Why do you think this one will be different?"

"You and Ron have done enough. Staying back would let you continue the search for the magic in the castle."

"Ron and Luna have control of that. You need me on this one. Besides, you have to take me."

"No, I don't. You gave me the parchment." He waved it at her.

She smiled triumphantly. "Where are you going?"

He frowned when he realized she had tricked him. "This isn't funny, Hermione."

"No, it's not. I'll meet you early at breakfast, and we can leave after we eat. Good night, Harry," she said glibly before heading upstairs.

Harry wanted to follow her, but she made it to the stairs before he could catch her.

Once safely in her bed, she pulled out the note. She was still amazed by how much she looked forward to Fridays so she could read the next one. With trembling hands, she opened the note.

My dearest Hermione,

Do not despair at our forced separation. And do not despair if you find your mind occupied with other affairs. I do not begrudge you this. I know that you are working hard to preserve our way of life. What you and the others are doing is incredibly important, and it should be your primary focus. I am not egotistical enough to think that you will think about me constantly. Well, not anymore, anyway.

I, on the other hand, have little else to do besides think of you. Rest assured, that when we finally get some time alone, it will be incredibly memorable. I have thought of a thousand places I would like to kiss you.

I will start with your fingertips and move up your arm. That little spot on your neck will receive some special attention before I tease your nipples to hardness and lave first one and then the other. I can almost hear your moans of pleasure. I felt horrid asking you to keep quiet during our last night together, but it was really for the best. Next time, we will have to ensure that no one can hear us, and you can be as vocal as you please.

She could feel the throbbing and wetness between her legs as she imagined his hands and lips on her body. For a moment, she thought he was touching her, but realized that she had absentmindedly begun fondling her breast.

Once your nipples are hard, I will trail my kisses down your stomach. I look forward to tasting you. I will use my tongue to bring you to orgasm so I can taste your juices. Forgive me, there is so much more I would like to do, but I fear it would be cruel to continue as neither of us can act on our desires. As it is, I find I am quite aroused and sorely in need of some time alone with you. Rest assured, it will truly be a memorable and pleasurable experience.

Yours faithfully,

Lucius

Once again, she was mimicking the actions in the letter. She was trying to find that spot where he had touched that had sent her over the edge. *wonder if I can slip away this weekend?* she wondered. But she knew that headquarters was a busy place, and she wasn't likely to be able to sneak in and out of the house.

Given all the research she had been doing on Horcruxes, she could easily find an excuse to have to return to the manor. All she had to do was ensure that Ron and Harry were otherwise occupied so she didn't have to suffer one of them as her chaperone. Easter holidays were a little less than a month away; she could wait that long.

It didn't take long for her to drift off to sleep and dream of Lucius.

After breakfast, Harry and Hermione left Hogwarts. The early morning air was frigid, and they could hear the grass crunching beneath their feet. Once they were outside the gates, Harry asked, "Are you going to tell me where we are going now?"

She pulled out a map and pointed at a location south of where they were. "Here. That will be our starting point. Hopefully, the landmarks haven't changed too much. And before you think of stunning me, I have information that's not on the page I gave you."

He tried to look like that thought had not been crossing his mind and drew his wand. "Ready?"

"Ready," she replied, also drawing her wand.

They arrived on a deserted moor, and Harry looked around cautiously. He didn't like being in such an exposed location. "Which way?"

Hermione looked to the horizon and found the rising sun. After consulting the map and comparing landmarks, she pointed to the west. "That way."

He couldn't really see anything that made that area any more special than any other part of the moor. "Are you sure?"

"That small rise should be the ruins of a castle. That's where we'll find the dagger." Putting the map back in her pocket, she headed in the direction she had indicated. She pulled her cloak tight to ward against the chill.

It took them about half an hour to cover the distance. "Hermione, there's nothing here," Harry said, clearly dismayed.

"Shhh," she said as she pulled her wand out.

Harry watched as she closed her eyes and began moving her wand in a complex pattern. He thought he could hear her muttering something, but he couldn't recognize the words. Sensing movement, he aimed his wand, looking for danger. Instead, he could see the shimmering outlines of the ruins of a castle appearing on the plateau.

"Hermione," he whispered as the ruins solidified. When she didn't answer, he looked over and saw that she had collapsed to her knees. He quickly moved to her side. "Are you all right?"

She grabbed hold of him and pulled herself to her feet. "I'll be fine. That was a difficult spell."

He led her into the ruins. "Let's see if we can find a way into the dungeons. That's where it's hidden, right?"

She nodded. "That's what my research indicated." As they walked into the ruins, she tried not to let Harry see how exhausted she was.

It took Harry fifteen minutes to find stairs to the dungeons. "Hermione! Over here!" he called.

By the time she arrived, he was at the bottom of the stairs. Rather than use her wand for light, she created a ball of fire she could hold in her hand, leaving her wand available for defense.

"I keep forgetting about that," Harry said when he saw her fire provided enough light to see. They followed the corridor for more than a hundred yards before it ended in a tee. "Which way now?"

They looked down both corridors. Hermione pulled out her parchment and read through her notes. "I'm not sure. Which way do you think?" She knew he was more adept at detecting magic.

He walked a few paces down each corridor. "This way," he said, choosing the left corridor. After fifty feet he held his arm out to stop her. Facing the blank wall, he began feeling along the surface. "There's a concealed entrance here." He cast the spell that revealed secret chambers. They could see the outline of a door, but it quickly faded.

"What now?" she asked. The few chambers they had found at Hogwarts had not disappeared so quickly.

He used his wand to create a cut on the palm of his hand and smeared the blood where the doorknob had been. The bricks shifted to allow them entrance. Blood spells seemed to be Voldemort's favorite.

"Is it safe to enter?" she asked.

Harry moved cautiously into the room. "It appears so."

Examining the room, Hermione thought it was empty. She cast seeking spells and turned up nothing. "Harry, I think this might be a dead end."

"It has to be here. I can feel the magic. Just...keep looking."

She sighed and continued walking around the room. As she was walking she thought she heard something odd. "Hang on," she said and stamped on the floor. Underneath one stone, it sounded hollow. "Harry, I think I've found it."

He rushed over to her side and stomped on the stone. "Yeah. I think this is it. Stand back," he ordered and then levitated the stone out of the way.

Hermione coughed at a combination of dust and stale air. Creating a second fireball, she dropped it into the opening. All they could see were stairs and an empty corridor. "Shall we?" she asked.

"I think you should wait here," he said.

"Not on your life. We're staying together." As they descended into the darkness, she pulled her cloak tight. There was a cool malice in the air. She stood close to Harry for the sense of security.

Lucius heard the door slam and the ensuing mayhem caused by Mrs. Black's portrait becoming uncovered. Normally, he would have ignored the ruckus, but he heard Potter shouting for help and slipped closer to the stairs in an attempt to hear what they were saying after he thought he heard 'Hermione' mentioned.

He could feel the medallion burning against his skin. When he pulled it out, he saw the words: "Granger, come quickly." It felt as though a hand was squeezing his chest, and he could barely breathe. He leaned against the wall for support and closed his eyes to fight off the dizziness. Potter was hysterical because the Death Eaters had Hermione. He flipped the medallion over, but that was all that was on it. There was no location. He had no idea where to go to find her.

Suddenly, he gripped his forearm as he felt the burning on his arm. The Dark Lord was summoning the faithful, and giving him a beacon to use to find Hermione. Noticing that the commotion had quieted, he realized the Order members must be in the kitchen, strategizing a recovery plan. He knew they would need his help and he rushed downstairs.

A/N: Once again, many thanks to those that have reviewed. This story has so far turned out nothing like the one I had anticipated, not that it's a bad thing, just unexpected when the author doesn't know where the story is going. I really hate it when the muses keep secrets from me.

This chapter has my favorite scene, the one with Lucius, Remus and the Scotch. As I saw this story taking a turn toward darkness, I wanted to be able to have a little light-hearted scene, and I think this one fit the bill perfectly.

And finally, a shameless plug. This story has been nominated in the Feb 2006 [Multifaceted Awards](#) for Best Dramatic Fic and Best Het (Adult Rating) Fic. I encourage everyone to check out the other wonderful stories nominated. Voting commences 22 Feb.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Chapter 10

The first thing she noticed was pain. Her head, her back...actually, everything hurt. Experimentally, she tried to move, but found her muscles weren't responding. Hermione began to wonder if she really was awake or if this was a dream. She desperately hoped that it was a nightmare. At least she could wake from that. If it were real... Well, she didn't want to think about that right now.

Think. Now there was something she could do. She tried to remember what had happened, for clearly something had happened that caused her to end up unconscious. She was exploring ruins with Harry, looking for something. *Horcrux*, prompted a voice. Yes, that was it. They had been searching for a Horcrux. The Ravenclaw dagger. Had they found it?

Her thoughts were interrupted by sounds. The sounds were muted, indistinct, but they were there. If she was hearing things, this was not likely a nightmare; it must be reality. She was not sure she was ready to face this as a reality. It was much better to believe it was a dream.

She tried to focus back on her memories. Castle. Dungeon. Light. Dagger. It all flashed in an undecipherable blur and she felt nauseous. *Concentrate on one thing. The dagger*, she instructed herself. She could see the dagger, see Harry reaching for it. She remembered casting a flurry of spells so that he could grasp it. It had seemed as though the dagger was fighting their attempts to grasp it.

In time, her spells had prevailed and Harry had taken the dagger. Casting the spells had weakened her even more than she already was from making the ruins visible. Something about that place seemed to have drained her energy. Once they had the dagger, they left the ruins and moved to a small copse near the moor. She remembered instructing Harry in what he needed to do to destroy the soul within the dagger. Where she had gotten that knowledge? She could not remember. *Did it work? Did we destroy the bit of soul?* She couldn't remember.

The sounds were coming closer. She thought she could hear a door open and the shuffle of footsteps. Desperately, she tried to move. She didn't think she was bound, but she still could not move. After a few moments, the buzzing sound began to resolve itself into voices, and the voices were arguing. Arguing over her. Once again, she hoped it was a dream, but other memories intruded on her ability to focus on the noise.

There was a commotion. Harry had not yet finished the spell, and others had found them. From the surprise of those others, they had not been expecting to find anyone. She remembered seeing rocks in the copse. They had chosen a Druid holy place, and the Death Eaters had adopted that place. Harry had yelled for her to run and she had tried to flee, but she was too weak and they had caught her. The last thing she remembered was Harry's scream before he disappeared. She assumed that he had wisely chosen to go for help.

But that still didn't explain where she was now. Obviously, the Death Eaters had her. She could hear them debating what to do with her. She expected they would kill her for being Muggle-born. Unfortunately, that's not what they were debating. She thought she heard three or four different voices, and they seemed to be arguing over who could have her first. She was repulsed by the thought that they didn't seem to care whether she was conscious or not.

The argument was ended by an authoritative voice. "Enough. She is a gift to the Dark Lord. Don't you imbeciles recognize her? She is one of Potter's confidants and is valuable to us alive and whole." Beneath the sneering hatred, she thought she heard something else, but she couldn't place it. A small part of her mind registered that the others were filing out of the room. She dared not open her eyes in case one had remained behind.

As she had feared, someone had remained behind. She could feel warm breath on her cheek, and she tried not to react, hoping her feigned unconsciousness would make him go away.

"I know you are awake," whispered an undistinguishable voice.

She opened her eyes to see who it was, but the speaker was wearing a mask. There was nothing she could use to identify him as his voice was also masked. She felt a piece of paper getting tucked into her pocket.

"Your rescuers should be here soon. You will need this." Without saying anything more, the man walked away.

Rescuers? What could he possibly mean? How could anyone know where I am? He would know where you are.' She was dismayed to find the voice was back. *He is as much a prisoner as I am. Besides, any attempt for him to rescue me would destroy his protection. 'Do not underestimate love.' This is not a fantasy. Lucius will not be my knight in shining armor and ride to my rescue. It's just not possible.* She was pleased that seemed to quiet the voice. False hope was the last thing she needed. She needed to concentrate on finding a way out, not fantasizing about something silly and girlish.

Lucius ran downstairs and paused outside the door to the kitchen. He clenched his fist and fought against the panic that was threatening to overtake him. *Think, fool. If you rush in there with too much information it will raise far too many questions. You must be calm.* He took a few moments and several deep breaths to compose himself, which was exceedingly difficult. There was no time to waste if the Dark Lord had summoned the faithful.

When he felt he had regained control, he knocked on the door.

The door swung open and Harry snarled, "What do you want?"

"I heard the commotion upstairs and thought you might like to know the Dark Lord has just summoned his inner circle."

"And?"

"Clearly, something has upset you. I can only assume the two are related. Generally, he only summons his followers for something important."

"Do you have a point, Malfoy?" Harry asked impatiently.

Lucius forced himself to remain calm. "I know where they are meeting. I can help you find that place."

"Harry, let him in," said Remus.

Grudgingly, Harry moved aside. Lucius saw that Tonks was the only other one present. "I assume that you have summoned the others?"

"We don't have to discuss our plans with you," Harry snapped.

"Mr. Potter, I merely wish to offer my assistance. In this case, I believe it will be invaluable since it appears you will need to infiltrate a Death Eater stronghold." He tried to maintain a neutral tone of voice, not wanting to let his anger or frustration show.

"Oh, yes. You really want to help us rescue a 'filthy little Mudblood,' don't you?" Harry spat.

Lucius could see Lupin cringe at Harry's behavior, but no one moved to restrain the emotional youth.

"Is it Miss Granger that has been captured? That's most unfortunate." He hoped the others would be convinced that he had no prior knowledge of her capture. He noticed that Arthur and Molly Weasley had now arrived and were standing on the periphery.

"Like you care."

"I do care, Mr. Potter. Miss Granger is a rather pleasant person and a valuable asset to the Order. I believe it is time we set our differences aside; this argument is accomplishing nothing. As I said, he has summoned his inner circle, and I imagine they will do some rather unpleasant things to her."

"You would know all about that," Harry retorted.

Lucius didn't try to control the pain that flashed across his expression. "Indeed I would, but that is unimportant. I have a fairly good idea of where she is being held. When the others arrive, I will need you to conduct an attack to create a diversion."

"A diversion for what?" Moody asked cautiously, magical eye swirling in its socket to assess the situation, as he clomped down the stairs.

"A diversion for me to rescue Miss Granger," Lucius announced simply.

"NO! I will not let you join back up with the Death Eaters," Harry insisted.

"Harry!" Remus cautioned.

Harry spun on Remus. "What? You mean you are actually considering this? He would love to get back with his old cronies."

Tonks was closest to Harry and placed her hand on his shoulder, trying to calm him. "Harry, please," she said quietly.

Lucius replied through gritted teeth, "Mr. Potter, I assure you, I have no interest in rejoining the Death Eaters. But the truth remains that you need me to rescue her."

"We don't need you for anything."

"Harry, listen to him," urged Remus.

Ignoring Harry's outburst, Lucius continued, "The Dark Lord generally uses protective wards that may only be crossed by someone with the Dark Mark. I am the only one here that possesses that Mark. While the rest of you are attacking outside that boundary, I can cross it, rescue her, and leave before anyone is the wiser."

"And why should we trust you?" Harry asked.

Remus placed his hand on Harry's shoulder, hoping to calm the young man. "He is correct about the protective ward. Remember what happened last summer?"

"Yes, I do. Snape betrayed us, proved he was evil, and killed Dumbledore."

"What do you lose by trusting me? I do not possess enough knowledge about the actions of the Order to provide anything useful to the Dark Lord. I cannot reveal the location of your headquarters. I would return to him with nothing to offer and he would surely kill me, thankful to finally be able to exact the revenge he took out on my son. You have Miss Granger's life to gain. Without my intervention, how were you planning on rescuing her?" He had known that Potter would be the hardest to convince, but he had no idea the young man would be so obstinate when his friend's life was in danger.

Harry opened his mouth to argue, but found he had nothing to say.

Moody was considering the information they had been presented with. He wasn't sure he trusted Malfoy, but he could see there was little choice. "Time is of the essence if the Death Eaters are gathering. What do you need?"

Lucius considered his words carefully. "I will need my wand. With it, I can transfigure a Death Eater cloak and mask. That should allow me to move unnoticed. I will also need it for defense in the event my presence does not go unnoticed. All I ask is a small head start to allow me to infiltrate the compound. Then you can begin your attack. I should need no more than five minutes to locate Miss Granger and execute our escape." He looked at the map on the table and pointed. "This is where the faithful have been summoned."

Moody considered Malfoy's plan, focusing both eyes on him, before responding. "All right. Wait upstairs. I'll bring your wand up in a few minutes." Other members of the Order had been filtering in during the discussion.

Lucius wanted to leave straight away, but he was at their mercy. He knew they would want to have a rudimentary plan of attack to reduce the chances of any of them being injured or captured.

Lucius arrived where he had been summoned. Before proceeding, he once again checked his mask and cloak, ensuring his identity would remain secret. As he had expected, he had no problem getting in the building. He did not see any of the others and assumed they were with the Dark Lord. Knowing that the Order would be arriving soon, he found a secluded place to wait.

He didn't have to wait long before he heard Death Eaters yelling that they were under attack and streaming out of the room. He noticed one of the dark shapes merge with the shadows. *That must be Snape.*

Once he was reasonably sure the area was deserted, he headed towards the shadow. "Where is she?" he whispered.

Snape pointed to a door on the left side of the hallway. "There," he replied and slipped away.

Cautiously, Lucius moved towards the designated room. As he reached for the doorknob, he momentarily considered the possibility this could be an elaborate trap. He had trusted that Severus was still on the Order's side. If he had misplaced that trust, he realized he did not have a believable set of lies in place to explain his presence. Opening that door could seal his death, and he was sure it would be long and painful.

He had come this far and had no choice; he was committed. After one last glance down the hallway to ensure he was alone, he opened the door and quickly slipped inside, wand at the ready to deal with any adversary he might encounter.

A quick scan of the room revealed nothing suspicious. He saw Hermione lying on a table, apparently unconscious. Crossing the room, he tried to pick her up and was met with a flurry of arms and legs trying to strike him. He pulled off his mask. "Hermione, it's me. I've come to rescue you."

"Lucius?" she whispered uncertainly.

"Yes. Now, I need you to be quiet so we can leave. Pretend to be unconscious." He put his mask back in place and scooped her into his arms. After cracking the door to ensure the hall was empty, he moved as quickly as he could towards the exit.

Once outside, he could hear the sounds of magical battle, but ignored them, concentrating on finding a safe place to Disapparate. Thankfully, the Order forces had all attacked from the other side, and this side of the house was deserted.

When they arrived back at Grimmauld Place, he realized he didn't know how to unlock the door. He tried to ask Hermione, but she really was unconscious this time. Taking a chance, he rang the bell. After several of the longest seconds of his life, the door opened, he hurried inside, carried Hermione upstairs to the drawing room and placed her on the couch.

Molly followed after and carefully examined Hermione. "Dear, Merlin. What happened to her?"

Lucius shook his head. "I don't know. She was conscious, though weak, when I found her." He was only peripherally aware of the others joining them.

"Molly?" Moody asked.

She shook her head. "I don't know. I think we should get her to St. Mungo's."

Once again, Lucius could feel the tightness in his chest when he heard the desperation in Molly's voice.

"I'll take her," offered Arthur.

Lucius felt a pang of jealousy. *He* should be the one taking her to the hospital. *He* should be the one sitting by her side, waiting for news from the healers. Instead, he was being shoved aside and ignored. Without his help, they never would have rescued her. He watched Arthur carry her downstairs. He jumped when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

Remus said, "Thank you for your help. Without you, I'm not sure we could have got her back."

Lucius schooled his features, hoping Lupin had seen nothing. "It was the least I could do. After all, I have pledged myself to helping the Order." Deciding he didn't trust himself to be around the others right now, he headed upstairs to his room.

Four days. Hermione had been at St. Mungo's for four days, and he had heard nothing. The first day, he had remained cautiously optimistic. Surely, they were only keeping her for observation, to ensure that she was well. By the end of the second day, he grew more restless. If she were still at St. Mungo's, she must have been the victim of some sort of curse.

The third day, he began to wonder how serious it was. He knew there were many Dark curses that the Healers were not likely to be aware of. He was trying to determine how to casually ask after her. He thought that Lupin would be his best bet, but the werewolf was not around since it was full moon. This left him with quite the quandary. He could wait another day or two for Lupin to return and be his advocate, or he had to devise some way to learn the information from someone else.

Deciding he needed something to do, he took his laundry downstairs. It should help take his mind off Hermione for at least a little while. While he was working, he heard voices coming down the stairs. It sounded like Potter and Weasley. He stopped work and moved closer to the door, hoping to overhear something about Hermione.

"She didn't look good did she?" Harry asked.

"No, not at all. From what Mum has said, they still don't know what's wrong with her," Ron replied.

Lucius could feel his heart pounding. He knew that the longer it took to find a cure to a serious curse, the less likely the victim would fully recover. He had to see her. Perhaps he could determine which curse had been used against her? He was about to leave the laundry room and offer his help to one of the adults when he heard someone barreling down the stairs.

"Ron, I always knew you could be a prat, but I never thought you would be that big a bastard!" Ginny shouted.

Lucius heard the sound of someone being slapped and wondered what this new turn of events was. He moved back a little from the door to ensure that he wasn't spotted.

"Of all the selfish, irresponsible things to do. I thought you learned better from Mum and Dad."

"Ginny, what on earth are you on about?" Ron asked, completely bewildered.

"Oh, don't play innocent with me. You know what I'm talking about. How could you get Hermione pregnant?"

"Pregnant?" yelled Ron and Harry in unison.

Lucius felt his knees buckle, and he slowly collapsed to the floor. *Pregnant? No, she couldn't be. We were careful. The potion. The potion she got must have been ineffective.* Now he knew there was no force that was going to stop him from helping her.

A/N: I know, I'm evil. I'm going to blame my plot bunnies. They are an evil lot. I promise not to make you wait too long for the next installation.

And last but not least, thanks to Mimy for helping me with plot ideas and beta reading this story for me.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Weasley was surely denying his involvement to his parents. He wondered how long it would take for someone to begin to suspect him? Peering through the crack of the door to ensure the room was empty, he rose unsteadily to his feet.

Heading upstairs in search of a sympathetic ear, he heard hushed voices coming from the drawing room. Entering the room, he saw Molly and Arthur speaking quietly with each other. When they saw him, their conversation stopped.

"Forgive me for interrupting. I heard some rather disturbing information, and if it is true, I would like to offer my assistance." He noticed that neither of the Weasleys was offering him information. "I heard that the Healers are having little success in treating Miss Granger. At first glance, she didn't appear badly injured, but I know there are many curses where the effects only make themselves apparent after time. I offer my knowledge and experience with Dark curses in finding a cure." He hoped that sounded sufficiently neutral. Hopefully, he would not have to explain any more to be allowed to assist.

Molly and Arthur looked at each other. After what seemed like an eternity, she shrugged.

Arthur returned his attention to Lucius. "We'll take your offer under advisement."

Lucius fought down the emotional outburst that was brewing. "Arthur, if I might remind you, there are many Dark curses that become worse over time. The longer it takes to cure someone, the less likely they will fully recover. Until I know which one she is the victim of, I cannot be sure if that might be the case." Inwardly, he was pleased when he saw Molly clutch at Arthur's arm. He had hoped he could take advantage of her maternal instinct.

Molly leaned her head close to Arthur's, and the two of them whispered back and forth several times.

Arthur said, "Let me see what I can arrange. If it is possible, you will have to conduct your visit in the middle of the night, and you will travel Disillusioned. I will find you later tonight if it's feasible."

Lucius realized he was being dismissed. Normally, this would have bothered him, but he needed to be in everyone's good graces, or he would lose access to Hermione. Having lost all interest in his laundry, he returned to his room. Once there, he mused that he could use a stiff drink. The rational part of his mind knew that he had to remain sober in order to help her. Unfortunately, his room was too small for pacing, and he moved restlessly between the bed and the desk in an attempt to subdue the frustration he was feeling.

Hours passed and Lucius could not sleep. He kept checking his clock, but time seemed to be almost standing still. He leapt out of bed when he heard a knock at his door. After taking several deep breaths to calm himself, he opened the door. "Yes?"

"Lucius, we have made the arrangements. Come with me," said Arthur.

When Lucius arrived downstairs, he saw Molly and Moody waiting for him. Moody was about to cast the Disillusionment Charm when Potter and young Weasley hurried downstairs.

"We're coming, too," said Harry.

"Harry, we've got this under control. This late at night, the fewer visitors, the better," Arthur said.

Lucius had not anticipated having to deal with the two young men.

"Another couple of eyes and wands can't hurt. This could be a dangerous situation. If there are spies at St. Mungo's, and they learn that Malfoy is there, things could get ugly. They can come," said Moody.

Lucius clenched his jaw. He wasn't sure he could endure the suspicions those two held for him. He waited patiently while Moody cast the Disillusionment Charm. He couldn't suppress the shudder as the cold wave washed through his body.

When they arrived at St. Mungo's, he followed Arthur and Molly to the private room in the Spell Damage wing where Hermione was staying. He assumed she had been given the private room because of his visit.

Before entering her room, he forced his features into the most neutral expression he could. He also steeled himself to see something horrible, knowing he must not react emotionally.

The door opened and he followed Arthur into the room. He was only peripherally aware that Molly had remained near the door. Moody, Potter, and Weasley followed him into the room, and he felt the Disillusionment Charm being lifted. Moody left the room, presumably to stand guard outside.

At first, he didn't notice anything wrong with her. Upon more careful examination, he noticed she looked drawn. Spells raced through his mind as he tried to determine which would have that effect on her.

He moved closer to her, to better see her in the dim light of the room. As he closed the distance from the door to the bed, he noticed the slight swell of her abdomen. He could not suppress the sharp intake of breath and felt fear forming a knot in his gut. *No. Anything but that.*

Holding his hand over her stomach, he could feel the malice within. He closed his eyes as he fought for emotional control. He knew his shoulders were slumping in defeat, but he didn't care. Never before had he considered how horrible this particular curse was.

"Do you know what it is?" asked Arthur softly.

"I do." He paused in order to regain control. "The curse is *Subductum Animus*, and it is incredibly nasty." He noticed they were all watching him in rapt silence, eager to hear what he had to say. "This is incredibly powerful Dark Magic, ancient and obscure. It was used during the last war." *Dear spirits, forgive me for having cast this curse in my youth.* "What it does is horrible, unimaginable." *At least it is now.* "What happens is that a powerful Dark wizard casts this spell on a pregnant woman. The malice, anger, cruelty, all the evil emotions of the caster, are melded to the soul of the child. In addition to those emotions, a drive, a will to survive, is also transferred." *Why? Why did it have to be her?*

After he took several seconds to consider his words, and regain his composure, he continued. "That child becomes something akin to a leech. The infusion of Dark Magic serves to accelerate the pregnancy. The child's entire life is accelerated. At this point, it would not be correct to refer to the child as human. There is no humanity left in a child born of this curse."

"Then we kill the child now," said Harry.

Lucius spun on Harry and growled, "Then you condemn her to death. Do you think Dark Magic makes the answer so simple? You cannot simply terminate the pregnancy." He had always believed that Potter was brighter than this. He had thought that someone with so much experience combating Dark Magic would realize how complex it was.

"How long?" asked Molly.

Lucius softened his features. "I'm not sure how far along she was before the curse, but judging from her current state, I would say no more than two to three weeks." He desperately hoped they would take his word and not ask for further elaboration on how he had determined his estimate. "She will need vast amounts of nutrients to keep her alive."

"Do you know the counter curse?" asked Arthur.

Lucius shook his head. "That was never something we concerned ourselves with. I believe I may have read something about it, but I can't be sure. If I did, it would surely be in my library."

"What happens if the child is born?" asked Molly in a voice so quiet as to be barely audible.

Lucius had a pained look when he faced her to answer her question. "None of the women survived. The trauma of the experience..." He found he could not finish as he imagined Hermione as one of those women, screaming in agony, begging for death as the devil child within fought to be free. He could not condemn her to that fate.

Molly had collapsed into Arthur's arms and was crying.

Harry rushed to Malfoy and grabbed him by the lapels. "You know this curse. You've used this curse. Cure her, you bastard."

Lucius desperately wanted to grab Potter and shout at him, *Don't you think I would if I could?* Instead, he replied in a restrained voice, "If I knew the counter curse, I would. But I do not. I am willing to return to my home and research the cure."

No one said anything for several long seconds. Finally, Arthur broke the silence. "Gentlemen, if you please?" He indicated that Harry and Ron should join him outside.

Lucius found himself alone with Molly. She was solemnly petting Hermione's hair, trying to comfort the unconscious young woman. At this moment, he wanted nothing more than to take Hermione's hand in his, whisper in her ear that everything would be all right, that he would take care of her, and kiss her softly on the lips. Instead, he was forced to stand back and watch another bestow affection on his intended.

"Do you think you can cure her?"

It took Lucius a few seconds to realize he had been addressed. "What? Oh, I do hope so. I think it likely given the vast amount of information I have at my disposal. I only hope that I can find it in time." He was reaching for Hermione when he heard the door open, and he spun to face the men.

Arthur addressed him. "Alastor and Ron will escort you to your manor. Ron will remain until Remus relieves him, unless you find the answer before then."

Lucius nodded. It was as much as he could have hoped for, though he was not looking forward to spending time with Weasley.

"All right then. Come on," prodded Moody. His magical eye was spinning in its socket, searching for potential danger.

Lucius moved close enough so that the Disillusionment Charm could be cast. The three of them slipped out of St. Mungo's, apparently no one the wiser.

The frigid downpour that greeted them in Wiltshire dismayed Lucius. He had no interest in walking the nearly half mile up his drive in the rain, but he somehow doubted Moody would let him Apparate to the manor. In any case, he was not willing to grant Weasley the comfort of a short trip to the manor. Before he started walking, he felt Moody remove the charm. "Ron, I leave him in your care. We have other places we can research since we have the name of the curse."

The two men walked to the manor in silence. House-elves greeted them in the foyer. "Tea, if you please, Gupper," Lucius said. He saw Ron start walking to the library and cleared his throat.

"What?" asked a very irritated Ron.

"Mr. Weasley, I will ask that you either remove your muddy shoes, or clean them before dirtying my house."

Ron pulled out his wand and quickly cleaned first his shoes, and then Malfoy's. "Hurry up," he ordered.

Lucius gritted his teeth at being ordered around by a Weasley, but knew that Hermione's needs came above all else.

Lucius searched through the rest of the night and into the morning. He poured himself another cup of coffee in an attempt to remain alert. In frustration, he slid yet another book across the table. The curse was in one of the books; it was just a matter of determining which one.

Ron jumped awake when he heard the noise. "Look, I think maybe you should get some rest."

Lucius knew that to argue would draw the wrong sort of attention. So far, Weasley did not seem to suspect it was his fault Hermione was in her current predicament. He had to keep it that way; especially since he was unarmed. If he had his way, he would have continued working. His comfort was inconsequential when compared to her safety. He allowed himself to be escorted to his room, and found he could not wait until Remus arrived. The older man was sure to be more reasonable and levelheaded.

Once again, sleep eluded him. Instead, he mentally catalogued the tomes in his library, trying to determine which would be most likely to have the answer he was looking for.

Every time he started to drift to sleep, the screams of the women he had tormented haunted him. *Subductum Animus* had been a popular method for dealing with Mudbloods and blood-traitors for the more powerful Death Eaters. Unfortunately, he had fallen into that category. Of course, at the time, he had not seen anything wrong with maliciously using magic. Now, he truly understood the horrors he had unleashed.

After two hours, he gave up on sleep and was quite surprised to find that Weasley had neglected to lock his door. He took advantage of this oversight and slipped down to the library.

After a couple of hours, Ron rushed into the library, wand at the ready. "What are you doing down here?"

Lucius wanted to retort with a snide remark, but could tell that Weasley was in no mood for sarcasm. "I was awake, and rather than wasting time in my room, I chose to more efficiently use my time."

Ron looked around the room, as though expecting Death Eaters to jump out from behind the curtains. "Right. You got anything to eat around here?"

Lucius could hardly control his outrage. One of Weasley's closest friends, and someone the others claimed was his girlfriend, was lying in the hospital, victim of a fatal curse, and he was thinking about food? Lucius called for one of the house-elves and instructed it to see to Weasley's needs. He then buried himself back in his work.

He was disturbed some time later when Gupper stood before him and nervously said, "Master? You is having a visitor. A Mr. Lupin is at that gate."

Lucius could have cursed himself for being so careless. He was so intent on his research, he had not noticed that someone had arrived. "Escort him up." He was relieved that he would soon be rid of Weasley. The last thing he needed was the boy getting suspicious.

It wasn't long before Remus said, "Good afternoon, Ron."

Ron was startled that Remus had arrived so quickly. He knew it was not a short walk up to the manor. "How did you...?"

"Gupper brought him up," supplied Lucius, eager to have this discussion over with and Weasley out of his hair.

"You mean we wouldn't have had to walk up in the pouring rain yesterday?"

"It must have slipped my mind," Lucius replied dryly. "If you will forgive me, my research requires a great deal of concentration."

"Ron, I've got it. You should get back." Remus waited until he saw Ron leave and took a seat at the table. "I don't know who looks worse, you or me."

"The others may not have informed you, but time is of the essence for this cure." A part of him wanted to thank Remus for quickly sending Weasley away, but he thought that might give the impression he was trying to hide something from Weasley.

"They did tell me, and they told me the name of the curse. How can I help?"

Lucius looked up from his books and found that Remus was sincere in his offer. He pointed at the neatly stacked books. "I have not yet gone through any of those." Hopefully, Remus would prove more adept at research that Weasley had. That boy had the attention span of a glumbumble.

Remus grabbed the top book and began searching through it.

After five days, neither of them had found anything. Lucius was going through the last of the books from his Dark library. He knew he had seen the curse, and he couldn't imagine it would have been in a book he didn't own. Tossing the last book across the table, he saw that Remus had fallen asleep on the couch.

He had no idea what to do now. Nothing. His library had turned up nothing. He let his head sink to the table, and he fought the desire to cry. Everything had been for nothing. He was going to lose her.

Feeling something warm, he jerked upright and could feel the burn of the medallion against his chest. Pulling it out of his shirt, he saw one word: ~~pocket~~*Pocket? What the bloody hell does that mean?* He knew that Severus was sending him a message, but he couldn't fathom what it could mean. Rising from his chair, he began to pace, hoping the movement would help him think more clearly.

After several seconds, he realized what the message meant. He rushed over to the couch and shook Lupin. "Remus, wake up."

Remus grabbed at the couch in confusion, trying to determine where he was. "What? Oh, Lucius. Did you find something?"

"I need to see Miss Granger again," he said urgently.

Remus yawned. "What for?"

Lucius wasn't sure how much he dared admit. "I've had an idea, but I have to examine her. Please, Remus. It could be our only chance."

Remus had begun to suspect that, however unlikely, Hermione and Lucius had formed some sort of friendship. He wasn't completely surprised. He knew how much Hermione loved books and knowledge, and Remus had learned that Lucius was quite the academic. "All right. We'll go tonight."

"Thank you," Lucius replied.

"Now, perhaps you can get some rest? You really look like you could use it."

Lucius knew that wasn't likely, but he wasn't going to argue. Instead, he went to his room, sat in front of the fireplace and stared.

Hermione was magically paralyzed. She had been trying to move, and had not been successful. She knew the Death Eaters had her and that You-Know-Who was coming. None of her non-verbal spells had worked without her wand. She had tried to summon her wand, but they were obviously keeping it elsewhere.

"Now, now, don't struggle," she heard a softly malevolent voice say.

It wasn't long before she could see Voldemort's otherworldly face as he leered at her.

"Imagine my surprise when I heard my followers had captured one of Potter's closest friends." He reached out to touch her, and she tried to pull away, repulsed by his touch.

"Don't be afraid. I'm not going to hurt you...yet." He ran his hand down her body and paused over her stomach. "What's this?" He pulled out his wand.

She had no idea what he was talking about, but his tone of voice frightened her.

He could see the fear in her eyes and seemed to draw strength from it. "An added bonus. You are with child."

He is lying; he has to be lying. We were careful. *She was determined to deny that his words had truth.*

"I wonder? Could this be Potter's offspring? How marvelous it would be to use his child against him."

What is he talking about? There is no way he will wait for this child to grow up.

"Oh, I will wait," he replied to her unspoken question. He moved closer and his voice was almost a hiss. "But the wait will not be as long as you think." He pointed his wand at her stomach. "Subductum Animus."

She could feel something, something evil, flowing into her body and taking root in her stomach. At that moment, she realized he had not been lying. There was nothing she could do. She tried to scream out, but found her voice was not working. He was doing something horrible to her child, and there was nothing she could do. She could feel the tears streaming down her cheek.

Hermione thrashed, trying to get away from You-Know-Who, prevent him from harming her baby. A part of her mind realized that she was no longer his prisoner, and that Lucius had saved her, but it didn't matter. She had to get away. As her rational mind began to exert control, she calmed, realizing she was safe.

She wondered if Lucius would be pleased to learn he was going to be a father? It would have been better if it had happened after they were married, but surely he would still be happy. Reaching down, she rubbed her swollen stomach. Their child was growing big and strong. She was sure it would be a son, a strong son who would take after his father. There was a flutter from her stomach, and she was pleased to feel the baby kick.

That pleasure turned to fear as the kicking became more violent. She almost thought she could feel hatred coming from her stomach, and she started squirming, trying to get away from the evil.

A/N: This update came so slow because I was out of town for most of the last week. I just ran out of time to get an update posted before I left. I should be able to update every few days now. I hope you enjoy the dark twist the story has taken. The next couple of chapter will be equally dark. This is the point the evil plot bunnies took over and decided I could not have a fluffy story.

Many thanks to Mimy, Giton and nota for providing a sounding board for the ideas the evil plot bunnies threw at me. Or don't thank them for encouraging the little buggers. LOL

And continuing on the shameless plug crusade, voting for the [Multifaceted Awards](#) is now open. :) So, go check out the nominees and vote for your favorites.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Chapter 12

Shortly after midnight, Lucius found himself standing outside Hermione's door.

"I'll keep watch out here," Remus offered, flashing Lucius a friendly smile. He checked both ways down the hall and removed the Disillusionment Charm.

Lucius slipped into the room and saw Hermione thrashing on the bed. He hurried to her side and restrained her. It took him crawling into bed and holding her. After many long seconds, she calmed. "Shhh. Hermione. Be calm. I'm here. I'm going to help you." He fought back his tears as he tried to stop her trembling, infuse her with his strength. She was mumbling, but he couldn't make out the words. What truly mattered was that his presence seemed to calm her.

As he held her, he let his hand drift down to her stomach. Not only could he feel the malevolence of the life growing within her, but he could tell that it had grown significantly. He began to believe that his original estimate was off. Now, he thought he only had a matter of days.

Not knowing if he would see her again, he held her tightly. "Hermione, I am so sorry. This should have been our child to love and raise together. True, the time was not right, but that would not have changed how I feel about you. I love you." He pulled away from her and gave her a kiss on the lips.

While he wanted to stay with her, he knew that he had to find the answer. Moving to the bedside table, he opened the drawers, hoping to find the clothes she had been wearing. They were neatly folded in the bottom drawer, and he pulled them out and looked through her pockets. He wasn't sure what he was searching for, but hoped he would recognize it when he saw it. Finally, he felt a scrap of paper. Pulling the paper out, he nervously unfolded it. On it, in Severus' cramped hand, he saw the words: *Malédiction de la Mort*. Curses of death, he mentally translated. The French sounded familiar. He knew he had seen it somewhere.

He stuffed the paper in his pocket, and once again turned his attention to Hermione. He wasn't sure when he would see her again. "Hermione, *will* be back soon and *I will* make you better." After kissing her one last time, he turned to the door, determined to find the *Malédiction de la Mort*.

Lucius cracked the door to make sure the hallway was empty before slipping out.

"Did you get what you needed?" Remus asked.

Lucius nodded. "Yes." He waited for the Disillusionment Charm to be cast. They could talk more once they were safely away from prying eyes. As they walked out of the hospital, he was trying to remember where he had seen the *Malédiction de la Mort*. He was familiar with the title and thought the book was bound in red leather with silver lettering. He could not recall having seen it in his Dark library.

Once they were outside the building, Lucius reached out and grasped Remus' arm. "If you will permit me?" he asked.

Remus looked around to ensure they were alone and took hold of Lucius' arm. He soon found himself standing in the foyer of Malfoy's manor. "That's a handy trick," Lupin said as he removed the charm.

"It would be rather inconvenient for family members to have to walk from the gates." Lucius hurried to the library. Perhaps the book had been filed in the main library since it was written in French.

"What are we looking for?" Remus asked.

Lucius thought Remus was being quite restrained. It was clear that Remus had deduced that Lucius cared quite deeply for Hermione, but he had said nothing, choosing instead to focus on the more important mission of finding the cure.

"A book called *Malédiction de la Mort*. I believe it will be in the main library. I don't recall seeing it in the Dark library. If I recall correctly, it is bound in red leather with silver letters."

"*Malédiction de la Mort*," Remus repeated, committing the name to his memory. He placed his hand on Lucius' shoulder for reassurance. "We'll find it."

The two men shared a momentary glance that let Lucius know that Remus understood how important this was.

After a day and a half with no sign of the book, Lucius was coming unglued. He knew he had seen the book, a long time ago. It had to be somewhere, and he had to find it soon.

"Lucius, I think you should take a break. We've been at this for days, and our minds will be clearer after some rest."

"There is no time for rest. She is running out of time," he said desperately.

"You care a great deal about her, don't you?"

Lucius realized he was getting emotional and moderated his tone. "She is a valuable asset to the Order. One of the brightest people I have met. Her assistance has been invaluable in working to defeat the Dark Lord."

"Lucius," Remus said in a disbelieving tone of voice. "It's your child, isn't it?"

"That's preposterous. She's young enough to be my daughter. You should question Weasley. The two of them are quite close." It pained him to say this, but he did not need that sort of attention.

"Ron insists it isn't his, and I have no reason to believe he's lying. Neither he nor Harry can recall her hanging around with anyone at school. You are the only one she has been alone with. And you are working yourself to death trying to find the cure."

"Only because I know she will not survive the birth," he replied evasively.

The two men stared at each other for several seconds. "I will keep my theory to myself."

"It is possible it is the offspring of one of the Death Eaters. She was their prisoner for nearly an hour."

"Of course. That's what the others believe. I won't dissuade that belief."

Lucius could hardly believe what he was hearing. Remus was actually showing him trust, offering to be his confidant.

Remus once again broke the silence. "Look, we're exhausted. Let's take a break, get something to eat. I don't think either of us has eaten properly in days. Maybe that will help you remember where you might have seen the book?"

Lucius had the impression that he was about to be blackmailed if he didn't agree and acquiesced.

While Lucius was nibbling on a piece of toast, he had an epiphany. He slammed his hand against the table. "Of course. I should have remembered. It's in my father's study." He took off down the hall at a trot.

Remus followed, hoping to learn what Lucius was talking about.

Lucius was panting, both from the run and from the excitement. "I should have remembered. I closed this room up after the old bastard died. I'd completely forgotten about his small collection of books." He looked around the room, trying to remember where they were hidden. "I'll need your wand."

"You could let me know what spell to cast where."

"It wouldn't work. This spell is attuned to Malfoys. Please. We must hurry," he pleaded.

Remus paused a moment before handing over his wand.

Lucius quickly cast the spell that would reveal the hidden compartment. Rifling through the books, he desperately sought the red one he needed. He was beginning to fear that the book was gone, that somehow the old man had gotten rid of it. Finally, from underneath the other junk, he saw a flash of red. Throwing the other stuff to the floor, he grasped the book and pulled it out of the compartment.

It was the book he was looking for. Turning around, he placed the book on the desk and began searching through the pages. Now that he was skimming through it, he knew this was the book. He only hoped there would be a cure, and if he was truly fortunate, a way to save his child's soul.

He stopped when he found the chapter he was searching for. Peripherally, he was aware of Remus moving closer, but ignored the other man. The first pages of the chapter were a verbose discussion of the history of the spell and how it worked. He didn't care about that. He wanted to know about a cure.

He stabbed the book with his index finger. "Here. Here's the chapter."

Remus looked at the page. "Sorry, I don't read French."

Lucius skimmed through the chapter. "Yes. It does have a counter curse. We can save her."

"Good. Let's get this back to Headquarters and inform the others. They will want to take a look at it before we see Hermione."

"Of course." He watched Remus send a Patronus message.

When Lucius and Remus entered Grimmauld Place, Lucius found himself physically assaulted.

"You bastard! I'll kill you!" growled Harry.

Lucius raised his arms, trying to fend off the attack as Remus tried to place himself between Lucius and the boys.

"What is the meaning of this?" shouted Molly as she came to investigate the commotion.

Ron pointed an accusatory finger at Lucius. "He raped Hermione."

"Ron!" shouted a shocked Molly.

"I did no such thing," said Lucius defensively.

"Then how did she get pregnant?" Harry asked.

"In the usual way, I would assume. I do not pretend to know what sort of social life she leads." He hoped that his deception would be believed. This was exactly the sort of reaction he had expected. Surprisingly, it did not seem that they had shared their theory that the child was his.

"Hermione would never do that! She's not careless or irresponsible. You had to have raped her and altered her memory. I'm sure you've done that in the past," accused Ron.

Lucius knew he couldn't deny who he had been. "That was then. I am no longer the same man. I have repented my sins and chosen an honorable path."

"An honorable path that involves taking advantage of people," spat Harry.

"Gentlemen, please. We don't have time to argue," interrupted Remus. "Lucius found the book with the counter curse. You will remember that we are trying to save Hermione." He ushered those present down to the kitchen.

Lucius was careful to keep the table between himself and Ron and Harry. He placed the book on the table and opened it to the applicable chapter. "This chapter explains the curse and how to counter it. I can translate for you," he offered.

"No thanks," growled Harry. He looked at the book. "Who here knows French?"

Tonks stepped forward. "I do." She sat at the table and began slowly reading.

No one said anything, and Lucius began pacing impatiently. Obviously, if she knew French, she was not fluent.

"This... This is horrible," she whispered.

Lucius bit his tongue. "Yes, it is. If you could translate the counter course, Tonks?" he prompted.

"Yeah, right." She began reading the translation of the section on the cure.

Lucius stood over her shoulder and interjected when she mistranslated.

"Malfoy!" warned Harry.

"Do you want the proper translation or not? I thought you cared about Miss Granger's safety?"

"I do. And that's why I don't want you involved."

Lucius scowled at Harry. The boy understood nothing. Lucius had already lost his family once. He wasn't about to experience that again.

"Harry, Lucius, please. Go on, Tonks," Remus prompted.

When she finished, Harry said, "All right. Write that down, and we'll go help Hermione."

"And *who* is going to cast the spell?" Lucius asked.

"I'll do it. I have loads of experience countering Dark spells," Harry said.

"You can't cast this spell," Lucius insisted.

"And why not? The book says it has to be someone that loves her. Well, I love her. End of discussion."

"And you think that's all it will take? You have no understanding of this spell. I do. And yes, it is because I have cast the curse in the past. I will not deny who I was, but that is not who I am. You need me to cast the counter curse."

"That's not going to happen. I don't think you know anything about love. I do. Tonks, we'll be upstairs." He spun on his heel and rushed up the stairs, Ron following close behind.

"Almost done," she replied.

Lucius fought the urge to kick furniture and instead sat across from Tonks. "If you have any questions about the translation, I can assist."

"I think I've got it now," she replied.

Once the others were gone, Lucius slid the book across the table and began to read through it again. He had made Tonks read the translation back to him, and she seemed to have remembered all the changes he had suggested when she had read that passage aloud.

Remus sat at the table and passed Lucius a cup of tea. "Harry and Ron really do love her, you know."

"I just have the feeling that won't be enough," Lucius replied as he reread the entire chapter. He paled when he saw something they had previously missed in their rush to translate the cure. "Remus, we have to stop them. Platonic love is not enough."

"Are you sure?" Remus asked.

"Yes. We have to leave now." He rose and hurried up the stairs.

"Lucius, hold on," Remus said. "We don't want anyone to see you."

Lucius arrived at the hospital and didn't wait for Remus. He hurried his way through the crowds in the lobby and ran up the stairs, not willing to wait for the lift or risk revealing himself. Bursting through the door to Hermione's room, he shouted, "Stop!" Numerous wands were pointed at him because he was still invisible.

Remus rushed into the room, breathless. "Lucius?"

"Here," he replied, waiting for the spell to be removed.

"What are you doing here?" Harry asked.

"I have come to stop you before you do permanent damage."

"You just want to see her die!" accused Harry.

"No, Potter. I want her to live, that's why I'm here. There was more information about the curse in the book. The counter-curse can only be cast by someone who loves her."

"We know that," Harry replied condescendingly.

"Platonic love is not enough. It must be romantic love."

"Then Ron will do it. He loves her."

"That is not enough. The love must be reciprocated, and she does not love Weasley."

"Oh really? And how would you know that?" Ron asked defensively.

Lucius knew that what he was about to say would probably cause him to lose her. "Because she loves me," he said quietly.

There was stunned silence from all present. Remus finally spoke, "Harry, let him cast the spell."

Harry turned on Remus. "You knew? You knew and you didn't tell us? How can you believe him? Isn't it obvious that he tricked her, put her under some sort of spell?"

Lucius was losing patience. This was taking far too long. "And how did I do that? I haven't had my wand; I have been closely supervised. I ~~did~~*nothing* to her. We simply learned that we are fated for each other." Hermione's life hung in the balance, and all they could see were their prejudices and petty jealousies.

"So you did get her pregnant, didn't you?" Harry asked.

He had been dreading this question, but knew there was no longer any point in lying. "Not intentionally, but yes, I believe so."

Harry and Ron both lunged at Lucius. Remus, Arthur, Tonks, and the Healer worked to restrain the two.

"You bastard. How could you? That's disgusting. You're old enough to be her father," Ron shouted.

"We are both adults, and what we do with our personal lives is our business." Their argument was interrupted by Hermione moaning. Lucius shoved past the others, moved to her side, and picked up her hand. "Darling, I'm here. I'll make it all better." He kissed her softly on the lips before placing his hand over her heavily swollen stomach. "As you can see, we are running out of time. I will need my wand to cast this spell."

Arthur, still in a state of shock, said quietly, "I'll send a message to Alastor."

Remus said, "Harry, Ron, let's wait outside." The young men fought against him, unable to believe he had kept that information from them.

Once they were alone, Molly asked, "Do you really love her?"

"I do. It was not something I had anticipated happening." He looked up and met her eyes. "If she will have me, I intend to ask her to marry me. Of course, that assumes that I will be free. I fear that the fact I was blinded by love may make that more difficult."

"I don't know that it will," Molly replied. "What of the baby?"

He shook his head sadly. "I don't know. The book was not clear. It says the counter curse will neutralize the evil infused to the child's soul, but there was no mention of whether or not the child would be healed." He was beginning to wonder if he was destined to hurt all those that were close to him. She looked so frail; he was surprised she was still alive.

Molly placed her hand on his arm. "I hope so. I always hate seeing the innocent become victims."

"Thank you, Molly," he replied. He really didn't know what else to say, kindness was not something he was used to receiving.

Moody stumped into the room, both eyes firmly fixed on Lucius. "So, you're the father?"

"I believe so." Lucius had the feeling the magical eye was seeing the very fiber of his being. "May I have my wand?" he asked cautiously.

Moody continued to stare at Lucius for several long seconds before handing the wand over.

Lucius faced Hermione. "She will need to be restrained." He watched the Healer conjure restraints, and he positioned himself next to Hermione, placing his wand over her stomach. He placed his left hand on her stomach to draw the attention of the evil spirit within.

As he began the counter curse, he could feel the evil fighting against him. Not only that, but he could feel it gathering strength. Hermione's stomach began to throb as the devil child fought for survival. He forced himself to focus on the spell, and ignore Hermione's cries of pain and Molly's sobbing.

He could feel the child gaining strength and Hermione slipping away from him. He drew on his inner strength, his feelings for Hermione, hoping that his love was enough.

A/N: Many thanks again to Mimmy for providing a sanity check on these last few chapters. And I won't even attempt to apologize for the evil cliffhanger. I'm addicted to them and the screams they elicit from my readers.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

A/N: I'm not much for pre-story notes, but I have used a potentially confusing format. In this chapter, the italicized parts are not Hermione's inner monologue as they have been in past chapters, they are a flashback. They were actually flashback last chapter, too. I apologize for any confusion this might have caused.

Chapter 13

Lucius knew it was a battle of wills; one he seemed to be losing. Now that he was fighting with the evil, he knew why Hermione's pregnancy had progressed so quickly. The Dark Lord had cast the spell on her. "Hermione, help me. Fight it," he whispered. He only hoped she had heard; she was screaming and writhing in pain.

"Kill me. Don't let it live!" she shrieked.

"Fight, Hermione," Lucius urged, not wanting to divert his concentration too much from the spell he was casting on the evil within. He knew that the evil was powerful. It had a presence, a malicious presence, and was bent on its survival. He was sure that it was telling her lies as it sucked her life. "Fight, my love. Come back to me. I am here for you. Don't listen to it." He hoped his words would be enough. The lure of evil was powerful, and a very easy trap to fall into. After all, it had ruled his life for decades.

He could feel a barely perceptible waver in the strength of the evil. Her cries of pain became stronger. It was either because she was gaining control, or the evil was making final preparations for its emergence. He only hoped that the fact the evil had not been ready to be born meant it was not yet at full strength. The closer it was to birth, the harder it would be to defeat. "I can't do it alone, darling. Help me," he pleaded. Her life was only a faint spark now. "Don't leave me alone."

After what seemed like an eternity, he was thrown back when the evil was finally expelled. He saw Molly and the Healer rushing to Hermione's side before succumbing to unconsciousness.

When he woke, he found himself lying on a bed. The next thing he noticed was the screaming. "Hermione." He tried to sit, but found he was restrained.

"Easy, Lucius. You were convulsing earlier," Remus replied. With a wave of his wand, the restraints vanished. He caught Lucius when the other man tried to stand. "I daresay that took quite a lot out of you."

"I have to go to her," Lucius insisted.

Remus had no problems restraining a weakened Lucius. "I'm afraid not. They've kicked us all out. Once you think you can walk, Alastor would like you to go back to Headquarters. It's too dangerous for you to be here."

"I won't leave her," Lucius insisted as he grabbed Remus' lapels. She needed him; he couldn't leave her alone.

"Lucius, you won't do her any good if people associate you with her. I know you want to be with her, and I will make sure she knows that you wanted to stay, but you really must go. It's safer for everyone." Remus offered him something to drink.

Lucius ran his fingers through his hair. "I know. But it's my fault this happened to her. I should be with her. What's this?"

"An Invigoration Draught. It should give you the strength to leave."

Lucius tried to shut out the cries that came from the other room. He wondered why they had not cast a Silencing Charm on the room. "How long was I out?"

"Perhaps twenty minutes."

Lucius had to admit he was feeling better after drinking the potion. "I'm ready to go." He wasn't really, but he knew that being out in public was dangerous.

"Thank you for helping her. The Healers believe she will survive. They could detect no trace of the spell."

"I should thank you for believing in me. Tell me, where are Potter and Weasley?"

"I believe they went up to the Tea Room. You should have the house to yourself."

This was a small blessing on a rather dreadful day. The last thing he needed right now was to face the two of them. He was emotionally drained and was sure he would say things that would only make matters worse.

When they arrived at Grimmauld Place, Lucius headed upstairs to his room. He didn't want to risk running into trouble with the others. Hopefully, none of them would come searching for him up there. On his way up, he stopped in the dining room to see if there was any more of that horrible Scotch. He was in luck; the half-empty bottle was still there.

He sat at his desk, trying to recreate what had happened when he vanquished the evil as he stared at the amber liquid in his glass. He was trying to recall anything about the fight. He knew he had urged Hermione to fight, that he didn't have the strength to defeat the evil by himself. She had been on the verge of giving up. Somehow, she must have found the strength, but he found he still couldn't remember exactly what had happened.

He was restless, but he didn't want to leave the room. It was unlikely anyone would come up here looking for him *What will happen now that they know?* he wondered. At the moment of revelation, everyone had been in shock. Well, everyone except Remus. He finished off the glass of Scotch and poured another.

Now that Hermione was out of danger, he was sure they were debating what to do with him. He knew that Potter would lobby for having him sent back to Azkaban. He thought that Molly might be mildly sympathetic to him, but he wasn't positive. None of it mattered. All that mattered at this moment was that Hermione was all right. He continued drinking to push away thoughts of what he might have lost today.

Hermione cried out in pain. It felt as though she was being torn apart from the inside out. Something horrible and evil was happening. She could remember You-Know-Who standing over her, grinning maliciously.

"Soon you will bear the instrument of Potter's defeat. The child growing within you belongs to me." He rubbed her stomach longingly before wiping a tear from her cheek in an uncharacteristically kind gesture. "Don't cry, Mudblood. You should rejoice. You are performing a valiant service for the Wizarding World. This is all that people like you are good for."

"Kill me," Hermione whispered with all the strength she could muster.

"Hermione, dear, concentrate on my voice. It's Molly and you're safe. Do you know where you are, dear?"

Hermione tried to bat away the hand that was touching her, thinking it was a Death Eater. After You-Know-Who had cast the spell on her, they had once again started the discussion about raping her. "Get away. Don't touch me."

"Hermione, you're in St. Mungo's. Can you hear me?"

She started to focus her eyes on the speaker. "Mrs. Weasley?"

Molly smiled warmly. "Yes, dear. I need you to focus on me. You're in labor." Her tone of voice indicated this was not the first time she had told Hermione this.

Hermione shook her head and gritted her teeth as she experienced a contraction. "You have to kill me. You can't let the child live."

Molly sponged off Hermione's forehead. "No, dear. The curse has been lifted."

Hermione felt the evil settling in her stomach. Once it took root she felt it reaching out, drawing strength from her. She tried to fight it, tried to suppress it, but it was too strong. As it drew her strength, she could feel it growing.

She both loved and hated the evil. It spoke to her, told her it was her child, and that it needed to be protected. When it told her it was scared that others would try to hurt it, she comforted it. She would rub her expanding stomach; tell it everything would be all right, and that it could take what it needed. Not once did she find it odd how quickly her baby was growing. It reassured her that was the way it should be.

She remembered feeling weak when it drew from her, but others were taking care of her. They would give her food, and tell her everything was going to be just fine. She knew that already. It told her the same thing, and she believed it more the others. It told her to eat more, always to eat more. She was aware of the others talking to her, but it told her not to listen, not to respond, merely to eat more. It told her the others really wanted to take it away, but if she protected it, it would save her from the others. She comforted it, and told it she would never let them have her child. It was pleased.

Hermione fought against Molly and the contractions. "NO! It's too early. The baby can't survive." They were trying to trick her, to take her baby. It had warned her they would do this.

"Dear, it is time and it isn't too early. We can't stop it. It's time for the baby. Here, drink this, it will help."

She turned her head away from the cup, fearing what was in it. "No!" she insisted. She wouldn't let them hurt her baby.

It had told her the others would lie. That was what was happening now. They were lying to her, hoping to hurt her baby. She started to panic when she realized she couldn't feel it drawing from her. It had been her constant companion and now it was gone, she had failed as a mother.

One of the others had tried to hurt it. She remembered him coming. He pointed his wand at her stomach like the other had, but this time, the man wanted to hurt her baby, not make her baby better.

It talked to her, told her that the other was trying to kill it, and that it couldn't let that happen. It asked for help. She told it to take what it needed. She knew that the life of her baby must come first. It drank deeply from her, and she could feel it growing powerful, resisting the other. It hurt, but she knew it was good pain. The pain was necessary for it to live.

She remembered the other calling her, telling her to fight. It told her to ignore the voice, that it must survive. She finally recognized the man's voice and listened to him.

"Lucius!" Hermione cried out. She tried to get up, but found she was restrained. "Where is Lucius?"

"Hush, dear," Molly said.

She remembered him banishing the evil. Everything she had remembered was all a memory. It was gone. All that was left was her child. "I want Lucius here. He should be here when his child is born."

Molly did what she could to calm the hysterical woman. "Hermione, dear, that's not possible. We can't risk him being seen. He's already taken far too great a risk."

Hermione cried out at another contraction. She suddenly had newfound respect for Mrs. Weasley. Why women would do this more than once was beyond her.

"Dear, please, drink the potion, it will help with the pain."

"It won't hurt the baby, will it?" she asked nervously. She knew that many Muggle medicines were bad for babies, but she had no idea about potions.

"No."

Hermione drank the potion, wanting the pain to stop. "When can I see him?"

Molly had a pained look on her face. "I don't know."

"He didn't do anything wrong," Hermione said, thinking she knew what the problem was. The others probably assumed he had coerced or tricked her. What if they thought he had got her pregnant with the intention of turning her over to the Death Eaters? She started to panic. "He's a good man, now. He doesn't want anything to do with the Death Eaters anymore. He didn't do this on purpose." Once again, she cried out. Her contractions were getting closer together.

"Shhh. Don't think about that now. You need to concentrate on giving birth." Molly began to coach her, hoping to calm her to make the delivery easier.

Hours passed and no one came. He was becoming more drunk and distraught, and he thought about seeking out Remus, but decided he preferred solitude. That and he had no idea if he would run into Potter or Weasley. He looked up when he heard a knock at his door. "Come in," he said hoarsely.

When the door opened, he first saw Remus. "Hermione?" he asked hopefully.

"She is recovering," Remus said soberly.

Lucius breathed a sigh of relief. When he opened his eyes, he noticed two shapes behind Remus. Tonks and Kingsley, the two Aurors, both wearing their official robes. "What's this?" he asked nervously. They couldn't be taking him back to Azkaban. Not after all he had done for the Order, for Hermione.

"Come with us, Mr. Malfoy," ordered Kingsley.

He shook his head and backed up against the wall. "No. Not back to Azkaban. I haven't done anything wrong," he insisted.

"Lucius, please don't fight them," said Remus.

Lucius felt betrayed. He had thought the two of them were forming a friendship. Remus had kept his secret, and now... "I haven't done anything wrong! I have been helpful. I saved her," he said defensively.

Tonks pulled out her wand and conjured manacles. "It will go easier if you come quietly."

He knew there was no point in struggling and shot a malicious look at Remus as the Aurors led him out of the room. The only emotion he saw in the other's face was anguish. As they led him downstairs, his gaze fell to the floor and the fire left his spirit.

Hermione woke and found that she was very sore. At first, she couldn't remember why. Her mind was quite fuzzy. As she became more aware of her surroundings, she realized she was in a hospital room. The baby. Where was the baby? She tried to remember the birth, but found she couldn't remember much after Mrs. Weasley had given her a potion to drink.

"Hey, Hermione," said Ginny as she took hold of Hermione's hand. "How are you feeling?"

"Ginny?" she was still trying to make sense of everything.

"Yeah. Mum stepped out for a bit. I think Dad wanted her to get some rest. She's been with you the whole time. So, how are you?"

"Very tired and very sore."

"Here, drink this," Ginny offered.

Leery of receiving another potion that would dull her senses, she asked, "What is it?"

"Just some water. I thought you might be thirsty." She propped Hermione up with some pillows.

After drinking half the glass of water, she asked, "Ginny, what about the baby?"

Ginny licked her lips nervously. "With the Healers."

"Ginny?" Hermione probed.

"That's really all I know. Mum didn't let me in the room for the birth."

"Lucius?" When she asked, she could see the distasteful look on Ginny's face.

"They took him back to Headquarters."

"I want to see him, Ginny," Hermione insisted.

"Why? What could you possibly see in him? I mean, I thought you and Ron..."

"It's hard to explain. I just learned who he really is, and I love that man. He's changed; he's not who he was."

"That's what you keep saying, but I don't see it."

"How are you feeling, Hermione dear?" asked Molly as she entered the room and saw that Hermione was awake.

Hermione forced herself to smile. "I think I'm myself again."

"That's good. It was a rather nasty curse, and we were concerned about you. Sometimes you didn't seem sure about where you were." Molly pressed her hand against Hermione's forehead. "Yes, I think you'll be fine."

"Mrs. Weasley, how's the baby?" Hermione asked tentatively.

Molly picked up Hermione's hand. "I think first we need to concentrate on you getting better. I'll get the Healer. Your body was under a lot of stress, and we need to make sure you are all right."

Hermione grasped Molly's hand. "Please? I need to know."

"We just don't know," Molly finally admitted. "The best Healers are on the case, don't you fret."

"I want to see my baby."

"In time, dear. In time. Right now, the Healers need to work."

Hermione bit her lip, trying to stop the tears, but it didn't work. She was afraid she was going to lose her baby without ever holding it. Even though the child had been touched by evil, it was still part of her and part of Lucius. "I want Lucius," she whispered.

"It's too dangerous to bring him. We don't know if there are spies here, and Alastor doesn't want to risk him being discovered," cautioned Molly.

"Then take me home. I want to be with him. I don't want to be here alone." She could no longer control the tears. All she knew was that she felt safe in his arms. He had said he would protect her, and she wanted to feel that protection. "I want Lucius."

Molly tried to comfort her. "You aren't alone. Ginny and I are here for you. I can send her to get Ron and Harry."

"I don't want to see Ron and Harry! They hate him and I'm sure they hate me. I just want Lucius. He loves me."

A/N: I know, yet another cruel chapter. The physical abuse part of the story is over now. I know there are many questions about the baby, about Lucius, they will be answered in time. I just can't reveal them all at once. Keep reading for more answers.

And I know this was a short chapter, but this is where it needed to end. Also, I'd like to thank Mimy again for all her assistance as my beta reader.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Chapter 14

Lucius found himself Apparated to a non-descript room. He assumed it was some sort of receiving area, and he would soon find himself in the processing area.

"Move along," Kingsley said and prodded Lucius in the back.

Lucius was in a daze, feeling the effects of both the alcohol and the despondency of not being allowed to see Hermione. He couldn't believe everything had collapsed so completely. While Potter and Weasley had been against him, they were only two teenagers. For months he had been cultivating friendships or, at the very least, truces with the adults. Thinking back through his actions, he could think of nothing he had done that would prove he was anything other than trustworthy.

"We'll take over," Kingsley said.

Lucius looked up and found that he was not at Azkaban or even the Ministry; he was at St. Mungo's, and Kingsley and Tonks were relieving a pair of Aurors guarding a door. *It's her room. It has to be her room.* Once the other Aurors were gone, Tonks removed the manacles and opened the door for him.

She shrugged. "Sorry for the deception. It was the best way to do this."

Slowly, Lucius entered the room. It was dimly lit, and he could see Molly and Ginny sitting next to the bed. All three women looked up at him.

Hermione smiled weakly. "Lucius, you came."

He couldn't help but notice how weak she sounded. Instead of the vibrant young woman he was used to, she looked frail, was barely able to move, and spoke in a whisper. He smiled at her, relieved that she was alive. "Of course I came. I love you." He noticed Molly pulling Ginny away.

"I'm so sorry. I was careless. I didn't know..."

He stroked her hair. "Shh. You have nothing to apologize for. I should apologize to you."

"It was horrible. He touched me..." She broke down into tears.

He held her tightly to comfort her. "Don't think about it. It's not important right now. I countered the spell."

"What was the spell? No one will tell me."

"It was something horrible. Please don't concern yourself with it now. You need to concentrate on getting well."

"They won't tell me about the baby. Can you find out?"

"Of course. I just wanted to make sure you were okay first." He didn't think it was a good sign that no one had told her about the baby.

"I'm sore and tired, but I'll be fine."

He finally kissed her, thankful that she was well. "That is the best news I have had in a long time." He paused before leaving. "I'm not sure if you've seen Potter or Weasley, but they were less than pleased to learn about us."

"No, but I'm not surprised. They'll get over it."

He kissed her again. "I'll be back soon." He cautiously opened the door.

Remus saw Lucius and asked, "What do you need?"

"Can we talk somewhere?" Lucius asked.

Remus hurried him down the hall to an empty room. "I suppose you want to know about the baby?"

"I do. She says that no one has told her anything."

"There's not much to say. They don't know right now. As you can imagine, it was a very traumatic experience. Many Healers are working on it right now."

"Is it a boy or a girl?" she interrupted.

"Lucius, please. I don't want you to become attached. The Healers are not very optimistic. You know more about that spell than any of us, but even with what I've learned, I know it is not pleasant."

He placed his hand on the other man's shoulder. "Remus, please, I want to see my child. I don't care what the Healers think."

Remus looked into Lucius' eyes for several seconds before replying. "All right. Hold on." Once Lucius was concealed, he led the other man down the hall to a separate ward. He revealed Lucius and stood back.

Nervously, Lucius moved forward. He could see four Healers huddled around a crib. It seemed to take him an eternity to cross the room. He could tell that the Healers were all working hard and conversing quietly with each other. There was tangible electricity in the room from the magic they were using.

When he was in position to see into the crib, he noticed the baby was unnaturally still. "Is the baby alive?" he asked tentatively.

One of the Healers faced him. "For now, yes. You are the father?"

He found he could not take his eyes off his child. Instead of the infant he expected to see, he noticed the child was the size of a toddler. "Yes. What's wrong with the baby? The evil was expelled." He felt horrible that a young life had to start out feeling the effects of pure evil.

"We are doing everything we can for her. This is something we don't have any experience with, and we are trying to determine why she is growing so quickly. She was a large baby at birth and has grown significantly since then. We think we have finally slowed the growth. As for the evil you expelled, there is still a residual. We are trying to purge it, but..."

Her. It was a daughter. He fought for control as he replied, "I understand. Do you know how long it might take?" He knew that if they could not purge the evil, they would be forced to kill her.

"I'm sorry. We don't."

"Thank you," he replied and turned from the room. Remus led him back to Hermione's room, and he buried his emotions. If at all possible, he would protect her from the negative news.

When he entered the room, he was surprised that she was still alone. He had expected that Molly and Ginny would have returned.

"What did you learn?" she asked nervously.

"The Healers are looking after our baby, doing everything they can." Telling her the truth would only upset her, and he needed to make sure she was well. "The events of the last few days were quite traumatic. As the book was not clear about whether the cleansing would restore the child's soul, they are being understandably cautious. Now, how about you? The pregnancy itself was quite traumatic physically. How are you handling it?"

"I have you. I'll be fine." She smiled and reached out to touch him.

He could see through the lie and crawled into bed with her so he could wrap his arms around her. "Hermione, you went from learning you were pregnant to having a baby in about two weeks. That is not normal."

She shifted nervously, clearly not wanting to discuss it. "No, but I have to move on. Is it a boy or a girl?"

He sighed. She was strong, but he knew beneath that strength she was vulnerable. Right now, he wouldn't push her. "They didn't say. I think they want to protect us in case the baby does not survive."

"I hope the baby does survive. I want us to be a family."

He laughed softly. "I thought I was supposed to be the one to propose?"

"Are you proposing to me?" she asked playfully.

"I had intended to wait until you were finished with school and I was pardoned, but yes, I guess I am. Will you be my wife?"

She hugged him tightly. "I will."

"Even though I may not be pardoned, or I may lose everything?"

"I'll make sure you are pardoned. After saving me, how can they doubt which side you are on? And I don't care if you have money or not."

He thought that his life was finally coming together. He knew she would fight for his freedom. "Clearly, I do not deserve you." He looked up when the door opened.

Hermione stifled a scream when she saw Snape slip into the room.

"I don't have long," Severus said.

Hermione cowered into Lucius' chest. "He's come for the baby. Don't let him have the baby."

"I haven't come to hurt your baby, you foolish girl." He pulled a book out of his robes. "You will need this. The time is nearly here. Are you ready?"

"I am," Lucius replied as he took the book.

Severus slipped back out of the room.

"What did he mean? Are you in league with him?" Hermione asked and pushed him away.

"Darling, please, I can explain." He slipped the book into his pocket for safekeeping.

"You've seen him before. He knew about us. The baby!" she shrieked.

"Hermione, please, be calm." He was afraid her screams would draw unwanted attention. "He will not hurt the baby. If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't have known to come rescue you."

"You bastard! Harry and Ron are right. He's a murderer, a Death Eater!" She beat at his chest.

He looked nervously at the door. "Hermione, please don't shout. He is neither of those things."

She did moderate her tone, but the outrage was clear. "Harry saw him. He killed Dumbledore."

Lucius sighed. Every time he had tried to reach out to her, she shoved him away. "It is a very long and complicated tale, and I know I don't have much time. Severus came to me while we were at my manor. He told me that he was searching for the Horcruxes, and how he had been planting clues to allow you to locate them. He also gave me a medallion with the Protean Charm so that he could communicate with me. He had initially planned on using it to tell me when the end was near, when the last Horcrux was found. He used it to inform me that you had been captured. I then used my Dark Mark to find you."

"But he murdered Dumbledore," she insisted. "How could you have trusted him?"

He rose from the side of her bed and began pacing. "Because it wasn't his fault." How could he tell her that it was his fault? That he was responsible for Dumbledore's death. "He had an Unbreakable Vow with...Narcissa. She had made him vow to...kill Dumbledore if...if my son couldn't." He still found it hard to say their names.

"Then he should have died if he was loyal to our side!" she shouted

"He didn't want to do it. As soon as he made the Vow, he told Dumbledore. Dumbledore realized that at this point Severus' life was more important than his and told him he must carry out the Vow. Killing Dumbledore was the last thing Severus wanted to do. Unfortunately, this was all my fault."

"Your fault? How?"

He forced himself to meet her eyes. Even if he didn't tell her, she was bright enough that she would make the connection. Better she hear it from him. "I was ordered not to go to the Ministry. But I allowed my hubris to rule, and I was convinced that it would be easy, that I would get the prophecy and the glory. When I was captured...the Dark Lord took out his vengeance on Draco," he whispered. "Had I carried out my orders, that never would have happened. It is my fault that Dumbledore was murdered."

Remus opened the door and said, "Lucius, it's time to go. You've already been here too long."

"Not now, Remus," he said shortly.

"I'm afraid it has to be now. There other Aurors will be back shortly, and we need to be gone by then."

Lucius looked at Hermione and could see the horrified look on her face. "Hermione," he began.

Tears started streaming down her cheek. "Just go. Get away from me." She turned away and buried her face in her pillow.

He wanted to go comfort her, but Remus took hold of his arm.

"We have to go now. I'm sorry."

Lucius hung his head. He had known that she would not react well to this information, but he had hoped that he could have explained under better circumstances. He didn't even notice when Tonks put the manacles back on.

Harry and Ron slipped into the room. "Hermione?" asked Harry tentatively.

"Go away," came her muffled reply, since her face was still buried in her pillow.

Ron placed his hand on her shoulder. "Mum told us you were upset. We thought you might want to talk."

"I said go away," she sobbed.

Harry sat on the edge of the bed. "We're sorry this had to happen. Did you want to talk about it?"

Molly and Ginny had already come by to pester her, and she had managed to send them away. "Why do you care?"

"We're your friends, Hermione, and we love you," said Ron.

"I think it would help for you to talk about this with someone," added Harry. "We'll listen and not be judgmental."

She looked up and wiped the tears from her face. "I was a fool."

"You weren't a fool. He's a conniving bastard," said Harry.

"I don't know how I could let him use me like this."

"Hermione, it's the way he is. He tricked you into keeping it secret," said Ron.

She sniffed back the tears. "Maybe he did, but I should have known better. I knew how he was. And now, I've ruined my life."

"You haven't ruined your life. You can still help with the battle. In fact, we need your help. We always have. We never would have gotten this far without you," replied Harry.

That statement set off a fresh round of tears. She had thought she had been so clever, but really it had all been Snape. He had been planting clues. "Yes, you would have. You don't need me."

"Yes, we do. You're the brilliant one. Look at how much help you've been in finding the Horcruxes."

"But it wasn't me! Don't you see? It was Snape. He planted the clues, made sure we would find them. You would have found them without me."

"Snape! Who said he's got anything to do with this?" asked Harry angrily.

"Lucius said he's been placing clues. That he's still on our side."

"And you believe this? You know what he did?" Harry was outraged.

She was trying to decide if she should tell them that Snape was here earlier. "I don't know if we'll ever know the whole story, but what Lucius told me made sense." She related the explanation of Dumbledore's demise that Lucius had given her.

Harry was in denial. "Dumbledore would have never sacrificed himself."

"Wouldn't he? You told us that he made you promise to follow his orders no matter what, and he petrified you when he knew someone was coming to the top of the Astronomy Tower. We have gone on without him, and Snape never would have been able to help us unless he was fully trusted by the Death Eaters."

"He's just saying that to save his life, and Malfoy is in on it. We don't have any proof that he did anything to help with finding the Horcruxes, all you have is Malfoy's word."

Hermione chewed on her lower lip as she thought. "I don't know what to think anymore." She collapsed into Ron's arms, and he held her tightly.

Ron said, "We've always been your friends and that hasn't changed."

"Thanks, guys," she replied.

Lucius paced restlessly. He had given up the sanctuary of his room for the open space of the drawing room. He had either convinced or driven Remus to finding out when Hermione might be released. There was still more that he had to explain to her; she had only heard part of the story. He knew that she was still very hormonal. Narcissa had been the same way when she was pregnant with Draco. He had survived that; he would survive this.

When he heard the door open, he rushed to the landing to see who it was. He was dismayed to see it was Weasley and Potter, and they didn't look happy. In an attempt to avoid confrontation, he moved back into the drawing room.

"I'm surprised you aren't gloating in your room," sneered Harry.

"What do I have to gloat about? Hermione was seriously injured, and I have no idea if our child will survive."

"Oh, yeah, I'll bet you're real concerned. What were you using her for? A way to bring us down from the inside to get back in your master's good graces?" asked Ron.

"I *never* wanted to see her hurt. I have no interest in returning to the Dark Lord's service. He may think he will save the wizarding world, but I know he will really destroy it. He cares for nothing but power."

"You seemed to think that power was pretty important. What did you hope to gain with Hermione?" Harry asked.

He couldn't believe they still doubted him. He knew that teenagers could be obstinate, but this was ridiculous. "Why would I rescue her if I wanted to return to the Death Eaters? Why I would I work so hard searching for a cure if I wanted the Dark Lord's plan to succeed? I wouldn't. The truth is, I love her and I want her to live a normal, happy life."

"Then what about Snape? Why would you be working with him?" Harry asked.

So, she had told them about Snape. "I am not working with Snape. That is impossible given my current predicament." He had to proceed cautiously to keep them from losing their tempers. "He came to my manor one night and explained to me where his loyalties lay, and they are not with the Dark Lord."

"Why should we believe you?" Harry demanded.

Lucius threw up his hands in exasperation. "What more can I do to prove my loyalty? I risked my life to rescue Hermione from a Death Eater stronghold. Had they found me, they would have killed me. And do you know how I knew where she was? Severus sent me a message. He made sure the way was clear for me to find her. He left the title of the book that had the counter-curse in her pocket. You owe her life to both of us." It was useless reasoning with those two, and he spun on his heel and walked out of the room.

Before he got through the door, he ran into Remus. "Did you find out when Hermione will be released?"

Remus nodded. "Tomorrow morning."

"Thank you," Lucius replied before heading upstairs.

Lucius found he couldn't sleep. He knew that he had to speak to Hermione, but he also knew that she had talked with Weasley and Potter, and those two had surely poisoned her against him. The look of disgust she had given him when he had left was etched in his mind. In a matter of minutes, she had gone from loving him and agreeing to marry him to hating him.

After tossing and turning for a few hours, he got up and decided to write letters. The first one he wrote was to no one in particular, just a general explanation for anyone that was interested in the event he was sent back to Azkaban. He had no illusions that it would be taken seriously, but it gave him something to do.

The second was to Andromeda, letting her know that she was being named heir if anything happened to him, and the formal declaration in the letter would allow her access to the manor. She would never know that until she received the letter, but at least someone that was family would be allowed to go through the personal effects before the Ministry took control and probably destroyed historical artifacts.

The final letter he spent more than three hours writing. It took several drafts before he was satisfied he had explained everything properly. He hoped he wouldn't need to use the letter, but given her behavior toward him, he found it unlikely she would listen to him. After reviewing the letter, he thought he should write a shorter one; a letter that let her know what his feelings were and asking for the opportunity explain.

Looking out his small window, he could tell that the sun had risen. Deciding he didn't want to miss the opportunity to see her, he went down to the drawing room. After failing at reading a book, he once again took to pacing.

"Lucius, I think you should sit and have some tea," offered Remus.

"What? Tea? How can you think about tea?" He noticed that Remus had brought up a tray that had both tea and pastries.

"Because I know you haven't eaten in quite some time."

Lucius decided it wouldn't hurt to eat something. "Why is it that you still trust me? Surely the boys told you what a horrible man I am?"

"They did, but after spending time with you, I'm not inclined to believe everything they say."

Lucius snorted. "You would be the first. I thought *St. Potter* was always right?"

Remus laughed at the reference. "Hardly. I have learned that teenagers are prone to exaggeration. While Severus and I never got along at school, I came to trust him. I was quite surprised to learn that he had killed Albus. Your explanation is reasonable, at least how I was able to put it together." He checked the clock on the mantle. "We have some time before Hermione is released. Why don't you tell me your version?"

Lucius realized this was in his best interest and gave Remus the full explanation. He was not surprised when the look of shock crossed Remus' face.

When Lucius finished, Remus said, "You think you are responsible?"

"Of course I am. Had I done what I was told, none of this would have happened," Lucius insisted.

"You can't control the actions of others. You had no way to predict the series of events that would come from your failure. For you to take responsibility for this is just insane. Hermione's an intelligent woman, surely she must realize..."

"You interrupted me and you saw her reaction. She despises me."

"She's probably just being emotional. She has to understand that you love her and are on our side."

Lucius was about to respond when he heard the door open and hurried toward the landing. Downstairs, he could hear her voice, and he braced for the tongue-lashing she was likely to give him.

Hermione was glad to finally be leaving the hospital. Over the years, she had spent more than enough time in hospital wards. Unfortunately, she knew that Lucius would be at Grimmauld Place. She couldn't believe that he had been so deceptive, that she had so easily fallen under his spell. Well, she wasn't going to let him ruin her day. She was going to ignore him.

She climbed the stairs from the entry, Harry, Ginny and Ron following behind.

"Hermione," Lucius began.

She cut him off. "I don't have anything to say to you."

"Please. I didn't get to finish."

Ron and Harry took up defensive positions in front of Hermione. Ron said, "She doesn't have anything to say to you."

"This doesn't concern you," Lucius replied sharply.

Ron placed his arm around Hermione's shoulder. "I think that it does. It doesn't concern you anymore."

Lucius clenched his jaw. "You know that I am not the same man I was."

"No. I don't know that. I find that I don't know you at all. You deceived me and I have nothing more to say to you." She turned away, stalked into her room, and slammed the door.

A/N: First off, thanks to Mimmy, Giton and nota for help in beta reading this chapter. The story took a decidedly darker turn and they were wonderful for bouncing ideas.

Second, thanks to everyone that has taken time to review. Your reviews mean an awful lot to me. :) For those that are waiting for Lucius to lash out at Ron and Harry, I share your frustration.

And one final reminder to check out the [Multifaceted Awards](#) before voting closes on 10 March. This is a new link for the site, but the old one has a redirect.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Chapter 15

Lucius stared at the closed door for several seconds before he realized that Potter and Weasley were glaring at him. He finally retreated to the drawing room. Her reaction was about what he had expected.

"Didn't go well, did it?" Remus asked.

"Not really." He took his usual seat by the fireplace and picked up a book.

"So you're just going to give up?"

"No," Lucius replied simply.

Remus pulled up a chair and leaned forward. "What's your plan?"

Lucius closed his book. "Plan? What makes you think I would have a plan? I merely trust that once she has calmed down, she will once again accept her feelings."

Remus leaned back in the chair and smirked. "You can't make me believe that. I saw what you went through to find the cure."

"Believe what you will." Lucius returned to his book. Yes, he had a plan, but he wasn't going to share it with anyone, and especially not Remus. Lucius had already learned the man was not a gifted liar. Besides, Remus was part of the plan. If Hermione suspected there was a plan that would make her even more difficult. No. He would be patient.

Hermione didn't want to be a prisoner in her room, but she didn't want to face Lucius, either. The best thing she could do was to go back to school where she could concentrate on finding Hogwarts' secrets and forget about Lucius.

She couldn't believe she had gotten involved with him in the first place. He was far too old for her, and she had other things to concentrate on. She should have been focusing on finding a way to defeat Voldemort, not wondering when her next romantic liaison would be. She had acted like a foolish schoolgirl, and he had taken advantage of that.

Still feeling exhausted for her recent ordeal, she decided to lie down for nap. Hopefully, he would realize she was not interested and would go sulk in his room. Once she was feeling better, she would convince Mrs. Weasley to let her go back to school.

As she crawled into bed, her hand brushed against something under her pillow. She pulled out a piece of parchment and immediately recognized Lucius' handwriting. Deciding she did not want anything to do with him, she crumpled the letter and threw it across the room.

You want to read that. She had hoped the voice in her head was gone. It had not spoken to her for a long time. 'No, I don't. I don't want anything to do with him.' *Why?* 'You know why. He's a lying bastard.' *Are you sure?* 'Go away. I don't have to justify my life to you.'

That seemed to work and she settled into bed. As she was drifting off to sleep, the voice said *He saved your life because he loves you.* She tried to ignore the voice and get some rest.

After tossing and turning for at least half an hour, she got up and retrieved the letter. As she held it, she noticed her hands were shaking.

Open it. 'It's going to be full of lies.' *I know you saw the look of hurt on his face when you rejected him.* 'Good.' *He loves you. Open it,* the voice prodded gently.

She carefully opened the letter, bracing herself for the lies she would see.

Dearest Hermione,

First, I want you to know how much I love you. I have called you my guiding star, and I do mean that.

Now, I know that what you heard yesterday was terribly difficult to hear. Remember, I am not the same man who made those decisions. That was my old self. I know that you do not trust Severus, and me asking you to do so is very difficult. Without his help, I would not have found the cure. I know that may not mean much to you, but it was all I needed to know I could trust him.

I would greatly appreciate you giving me a chance to finish my explanation. Paper just cannot do it justice.

Please, don't shut me out. I want you in my life, and I want us to be a family. I think that our child will need both of us.

Eternally yours,

Lucius

She held the letter to her chest and started crying. How could she have treated him so coldly? And their child. He had seen their child. After wiping the tears from her cheeks, she hurried across the hall, hoping he was still in the drawing room. She would hear his explanation. All she saw was Remus lying on the couch reading a book.

"Where is he?"

He sat up and closed his book. "Perhaps in his room. Or hopefully, down in the kitchen getting something to eat. He hasn't been eating much since you took ill."

"Is he all right?" She sat next to him.

"He's quite upset. He worked quite hard to find a cure for you."

"Really?" she asked incredulously.

He placed his hand on her knee. "Hermione, I could barely get him to eat or sleep. He was desperate to help you. You should go talk to him."

She was still emotionally confused. She wasn't sure if she wanted to love Lucius or hate him. "But..."

He silenced her protest. "Hear his side of the story. I think you might feel better once you do."

Hermione left the drawing room still confused. Part of her wanted to be with him again, but another part felt betrayed. She noticed the house was very quiet. Turning back to face Remus, she asked, "Where is everyone?"

He replied evasively, "Something came up and they had to go out."

She wanted to ask for more details, but figured she was being sheltered. "Why are you here?"

"I'm on watch in case anyone comes by."

"You're here to watch me and make sure I don't go anywhere, aren't you?"

"That's not my primary reason for being here, but yes. We're all very concerned about you."

She headed down to the kitchen to see if Lucius was there and was disappointed to find it deserted. Since she was in the kitchen, she decided to make up a quick tray of food. After all, Remus said Lucius hadn't eaten much lately.

Lucius was examining the book the Severus had given him. He had forgotten about the book until he was emptying his pockets to take his robes down to laundry. Many of the pages were empty. That generally meant that it would take Dark Magic to read them. Encrypted spells, such as those that were surely in the book, were generally incredibly dangerous. He was looking through the book for clues to the key that would unlock the other pages. Of course, he would need his wand to unlock those pages, assuming he could do it. In the past, he would have had no difficulty casting Dark Magic, but now... He was not the same man. He might not be able to find the hatred and the malice needed to cast the Darkest Magic.

He looked up when he heard a tentative knock on his door. The door cracked.

"Lucius? Are you in there?" asked Hermione.

He put down his book and rose to his feet. "Hermione?" He had not expected her so soon. He had thought it would take much longer for her to come to him.

She pushed the door the rest of the way open and moved toward the desk. "I thought you might..." Realizing she couldn't get past him to the desk, she said nervously, "Lunch?"

He smiled warmly at her and took the tray from her. "Thank you. This is very thoughtful." Noticing that she hadn't moved and was fidgeting her fingers nervously, he asked, "How are you feeling?"

"Better. I, er, read your letter," she replied nervously.

He led her to the bed and asked softly, "Are you willing to listen?"

She nodded and fought back the tears. "I am."

Pulling out his handkerchief, he wiped away her tears. "I know it will be difficult to hear. You know I'm not that same person anymore, right?"

"I do." She tentatively reached out and took hold of his hand.

He knew this would not be easy. "I've already told you that I started the series of events that led to Dumbledore's death. And the reason none of you trust Severus. I spoke with him, and I believe that he wants to see the Dark Lord fall. I say this because of the help he gave me in finding you and a cure."

"What was the curse?"

"Hermione, please," he pleaded and brushed her cheek. At some point, he would have to tell her all about the curse, she was too curious to forget about it, but he didn't want to do it now. Not when she was so emotionally fragile.

"Lucius, what did he do to me, to our child? *need* to know."

He found he couldn't keep the pain from his expression. "It was a spell that melds the evil and malice from the spell caster to the soul of a child." He saw the look of horror cross her face, and he wrapped his arms around her, pulling her to his chest, wishing he could protect her. "That child is imbued with other Dark Magic that will make it grow faster, as you saw. Had I not intervened when I did, you would have died when..." He found he could not continue.

"When what?"

He squeezed her tightly, relieved that she had not succumbed to that fate. "Please don't make me tell you. I have had nightmares about it."

"And our baby? You saw our baby."

He spoke at barely more than a whisper. "There is a very good chance that the evil was not and cannot be purged."

"What are you saying?" she asked nervously.

"I saw our baby. The Healers told me they could still feel...something unnatural. She..."

Hermione interrupted, "She? It's a girl? You told me you didn't know!"

"To protect you, darling. She's growing too fast. While the spell severed the connection the child had to you, and probably to the Dark Lord..."

"What connection to Voldemort?" She was nearly panicking at that thought.

He realized this explanation was not going at all as he had envisioned. All because he had let slip their child was a girl. He took a deep breath. "Please, let me finish the explanation. I know that you have many questions right now, and I hope that I will answer them. This curse forges a connection from the caster to the victim. The victim becomes a servant, actually, slave is a better word, of the caster. I fear that what I did may have severed that connection."

"Why is that something to fear?" It should be a good thing that their child was not a slave.

"Without that connection, there is no loyalty to anyone. The evil will grow with the child, but it will be unbridled evil." This thought terrified him, though he was careful not to let her know. If she knew how he felt, she would likely become completely irrational.

"You're saying our daughter will be evil?" she asked quietly, hardly able to believe what she was hearing.

He held her tightly and kissed the top of her head. "There is a very good chance." He worked hard to maintain his composure. "If that is the case we..."

"No! Don't say it."

"I'm sorry, darling, but it may have to happen."

"Surely, you can find a cure. You found a cure for me," she said hopefully.

"I don't know. I have been back through the book that had your cure, and there is nothing in there about the child, and if it might be possible to restore the child's soul. The infusion of evil, hatred, and all the negative emotions happened so early that it may not be possible."

"What about that book Snape gave you? You said he gave you the information to cure me."

He hated seeing her get her hopes up. "I have looked at that book and it is encrypted. Many of the pages are blank. I am trying to determine how to reveal the blank pages. There are generally clues to revealing them in what can be read in the book. So far, I don't have any ideas."

"Maybe I can help?"

"I would appreciate any assistance you can offer." He gave her a reassuring squeeze, though he wasn't sure she had the knowledge about Dark Magic to be of assistance.

"I want to see her."

"Hermione..."

She was insistent. "Don't tell me not to get attached. I want to see her. I can remember it, her, talking to me. I think I have a right to see my child. Come on, let's go."

"I can't leave the house. If I am seen..." This was a bad idea for many reasons.

"Then I'll Disillusion you. I assume that's what they were using."

"They'll never let you go." He really didn't want her to see their child. It would be better for her.

"Remus is the only one here. I can convince him to let us go." She stood and pulled on his hand. "You're not afraid are you?"

He was because he knew what the Dark Lord would do to him. It was best for her not to see their child, but he knew he didn't want to alienate her. Hopefully, Remus would stand firm and not let them go.

Hermione stopped at her room to get her cloak. By the time she was leaving her room, Remus was standing on the landing.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"We are going to see our child," she stated imperiously.

"Hermione, you need to stay here. And it definitely isn't safe for Lucius to be outside the house."

"He's left before. I'll Disillusion him so that no one will know he's there."

Remus moved to block the steps. "I can't let you leave."

"Remus, please. I haven't seen my daughter. I know something is wrong with her, and I want to see her, no matter what her condition." She was trying to maintain control, but was on the verge of a breakdown.

Remus looked to Lucius, who gave an apologetic shrug. "This is potentially a very dangerous situation. The best Healers are working with her. It really is best that you don't see her."

She bit her lip, trying not to cry. They all said they were protecting her, but they were really making it worse. She had to see for herself that her child was beyond hope. "Please, Remus. Lucius knows more about Dark Magic than any of us. If we can examine her, perhaps we can find a way to help her." She could feel the tears running down her cheeks and didn't care.

Lucius wrapped his arm around her waist. "Remus, it is very important to her. I know that it may not be the most logical thing to do, but it is necessary. We will not be gone long."

After several seconds, Remus stepped aside. "Be careful."

Hermione became more and more agitated the closer they got to the ward. She heard Lucius whisper softly, "Be strong."

When they turned the corner, Lucius grabbed her arm. "Something isn't right."

She drew her wand because she could feel it, too. "What do you think?"

"Something feels wrong. There are no guards."

"Guards? What would they need guards for?" She felt a knot forming in her stomach, and she pulled away from Lucius and ran down the hall for the door.

Lucius ran after her, but realized there was little he could do to protect her from danger without a wand.

She opened the door and saw two Healers lying in heaps on the floor, but her eyes were drawn to the empty crib. "She's gone. Where could she have gone?" When she felt Lucius' hand on her shoulder, she turned around and embraced him, not caring that he was still invisible. "Snape took her. He knew she was here."

"Not likely. The Dark Lord would have also known she was here and would have known when the connection was severed. He would not have needed Severus to tell him she was here."

"But why would he want her? You said he had no control over her." She was desperately trying to understand everything.

"While she may not be under his control, she is still imbued with evil. If he offers her an avenue to channel that evil, she will take it."

She heard one of the Healers moaning and rushed over to her side. "What happened?"

"Death Eaters. Five or six of them. The baby?" the Healer asked weakly.

"Gone. They took her. Hold on, I'll go get help." She started to rush out of the room when Lucius stopped her.

He whispered, "I have to go. I can't be seen here. Aurors and others will come."

She knew he was right, but really didn't want him to leave. "All right. Let Remus know." She still wasn't entirely convinced that Snape didn't have anything to do with this, and she was once again beginning to have small doubts about Lucius, but she knew he would probably end up in Azkaban if he remained. If he returned straight to Grimmauld Place, it would allay those doubts.

Lucius quickly moved out of the hospital. It was possible the Aurors had already been alerted, and he did not want them to discover him. As he walked away from the hospital, looking for a quiet place to Disapparate, he felt someone grab his arm.

"We need to talk."

His mind was racing. No one should have been able to see him, and he realized that he could not see whoever had taken hold of his arm. The next thing he knew, he was being transported elsewhere.

A/N: First off, thanks to Mimmy, nota and Giton for help solidifying the ideas for this fic. You all have been an immense help.

Third, thanks to all who have taken the time to review. I've said it before and I'll say it again, your reviews do much to keep the creative juices flowing.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Chapter 16

Hermione returned to Grimmauld Place, glad to finally be free of the Aurors. They had questioned her, but she had nothing valuable to tell them. Even the Healers had not had much to say. The Death Eaters had stormed into the room and quickly knocked everyone out.

As she entered the drawing room, she said, "Lucius." When she noticed he wasn't there, she asked Remus, "Where is he?"

"He was with you," replied a confused Remus.

"He left early. Something happened at the hospital, and he had to leave without me."

"When was that?"

"About an hour ago." She was growing concerned.

Remus shook his head. "No one has come in since the two of you left." He saw her turn to leave and called, "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to see if he went to his manor." She couldn't believe he had run; he had told her that she could trust him. Instead, he had proven to be a liar. Once again, she had fallen prey to his smooth words.

She stood outside the front gates to Malfoy's manor, waiting for him or one of the house-elves to show up.

Gupper popped in front of her. "Miss Hermione, how can Gupper be helping you?"

"Is Mr. Malfoy here?"

"No, miss. Master has not been here since Tuesday. Should Gupper be expecting Master?"

Hermione furrowed her brow trying to think of somewhere else Lucius could be that was not with the Death Eaters. She could not. "Thank you," she replied sadly and Disapparated before Gupper said anything else.

She found Remus waiting for her when she returned.

"He wasn't there?" he asked gently.

She shook her head and let him lead her to the kitchen. "No. Gupper says he hasn't seen Lucius. I can't believe he's run back to the Death Eaters."

Remus poured her some tea. "It is possible he was kidnapped. He might have been seen before, and whoever saw him might not have fallen for the prisoner act we tried to use."

Being captured was not a possibility she had considered. "If they found him..." He had already told her that if the Death Eaters found him, they weren't likely to let him live. She started crying on Remus' shoulder.

Lucius looked around as soon as he arrived at his destination. As he scanned the shabby room, he felt the Disillusionment Charm being removed. He still could not see whoever had brought him here. "Who are you?" he asked, trying to keep the nervousness out of his voice. Truth be told, he was nervous. He was unarmed and in an unknown location.

Severus threw off an Invisibility Cloak. "The Dark Lord has your daughter."

Somewhat relieved to see it was only Severus, Lucius replied, "You didn't need to abduct me to tell me that. I figured that out already."

"Ah, yes. You and dear Muggle-born Hermione were at the hospital together. How is that going?"

"That is not your concern. Why am I here?" He knew that he couldn't stay long. He wasn't sure how long Hermione would be at St. Mungo's, and he needed to return to Grimmauld Place before she returned.

"You don't want to meet with an old friend? I thought you would welcome some time away from your prison."

"Severus, you obviously had some reason for searching me out. Quit wasting my time and tell me what it is," Lucius replied impatiently.

"Temper, temper. Would you care for something to drink?"

"You live in this...hovel?" Lucius asked disdainfully.

Deciding Lucius was going to ignore his hospitality, he took a seat. "From time to time. It suits my needs. I was quite surprised that the Healers had let your daughter live. If they were smart, they would have killed that abomination. But of course, they are compassionate fools..."

"Get to your point," Lucius growled.

"As I said, the Dark Lord has your daughter, and he knows who she is."

Lucius could feel the blood draining from his face and took a seat on the threadbare sofa. "He knows?" he whispered.

"Yes. There was the small matter of the birth certificate. Rather careless to let them put your name on it. Needless to say, he was quite displeased," Severus replied almost casually.

Lucius tried to sound as though this information was inconsequential. "He has already taken away my family. What can he do to me now?"

"You should know better than to ask that. You are trying to start a family with Granger."

"She is already openly his enemy, and her parents are well protected."

"He will use your child against you. Oh, don't give me that look of disbelief. You know I speak the truth. He believes the two of you will be too sentimental to kill your child."

"Can she be saved?"

"That is precisely the weakness he will exploit!" Severus retorted.

"Can she be saved?" Lucius asked angrily. He was quickly losing patience with Severus.

Severus turned to his bookshelves. "I don't know. The book I gave you may have the answer, though I am surprised that you haven't already found it." Realization dawned. "You haven't cracked the code yet," Severus sneered. "I guess you aren't the powerful Dark Wizard I thought you were."

"Then you should think again. Other events have precluded me from finding the time to study the book. I notice that you don't know what's in it either."

Severus shrugged. "The Dark Lord was interested in it. I thought it might be valuable to you."

"A-ha! So you don't know exactly what is in there, either, do you?" Lucius couldn't help but feel triumphant.

Severus ignored the outburst. "When you broke the connection, it was to save Granger's life. It was assumed the child would be forfeit. Unfortunately, none of the others felt that way. I have only partially read that book, but it seems to have useful information, though I would not hold out hope for a miracle."

Lucius clenched his teeth, realizing that Severus was baiting him. "If this is all you had to tell me, I really should be going."

Hermione heard the knock at the door and rushed downstairs. Throwing open the door, she pointed her wand at Lucius and demanded, "Where have you been?"

Lucius momentarily let the shock of his unwelcome greeting flash across his face before regaining his composure. "I was unavoidably detained. Darling, I don't think we should be lingering in the door. May I come in?"

She moved aside and let him enter the house. "You were supposed to come straight back here. And why are you visible?"

He noticed that Remus was coming down the stairs. Realizing this was a potentially volatile situation, he said, "I think we should discuss this down in the kitchen so as not to set off the portrait."

Lucius was glad that Hermione did not argue. Once in the kitchen, he explained, "As I said, I was unavoidably detained. The Dark Lord knows that I am the father."

"And how would you know that? Did you run back to him?" she accused.

He sighed. Obviously, she had not gotten past this point. "I most certainly did not. I have told you, I have no interest in him." He quickly recapped his visit with Severus. "I shall continue to research the book in my possession."

"Oh, really? And we are supposed to let you keep that book in your position so you can discover some horrible spell? Are you going to use it on me?" she asked sarcastically.

She had been so reasonable before. He definitely didn't care for her mood swings. "Hermione, please believe me. I am on your side. If you don't believe me, send me back to Azkaban, but that will be signing my death warrant."

"What do you mean?" she asked suspiciously.

"The Dark Lord knows that I am free, and that I am working with the Order. You have seen what he does to those that desert him. Imagine what he would do with a traitor?"

"But you would be in the prison. He can't touch you there. The only reason the others escaped was because the dementors helped them."

Lucius chuckled. "Do you honestly expect the prison walls to stop them? The only reason he left me in prison was to punish me. If it takes my death to prove my sincerity to you, so be it."

Remus decided to intervene to keep the peace. "I think we should continue working on the book. In the mean time, I don't think it's safe for you to leave the house anymore."

"Agreed," replied Lucius. If Severus had been able to find him, the others would as well. "There is another danger. As Severus said, the Dark Lord will use our child as a weapon. We have to find a way to stop her."

"How would he use her as a weapon?" she asked.

"As you know, she will mature at a frightening rate. It won't be long before he can use her to wreak havoc. He will also make sure that everyone knows who she is. He is counting on members of the Order being sentimental and not wanting to kill a child, especially your child."

"He's right. I don't want to kill my child."

He reached out to touch her cheek since her anger seemed to have migrated back to the Dark Lord. "Neither do I, but she will have to be stopped. That may, unfortunately, involve her death. She may be very difficult to capture." Stepping closer to her, he wrapped her in a protective embrace.

"Is there anything I can do to help at school?"

Lucius had forgotten that she would be going back to school. He had hoped that they could work on the translation together. "Not at this moment. I have not yet been able to reveal any of the hidden pages. When will you be leaving?"

"Soon. I need to get back to school. We are getting closer to unlocking some of the secrets. We've found a few secret rooms, but nothing important."

Realizing that tempers had calmed, Remus slipped out of the room.

"I should come with you. The castle is large enough that my presence could easily be kept secret. This would allow us to work together to unlock the secrets in the book."

She shook her head. "That wouldn't work. Harry has a map that shows everyone in the castle." She started thinking about the Room of Requirement. Normally, it would have been a good place to hide him, but they had been searching through the detritus of the ages, looking for things that might aid them. "There is one place we might be able to hide you, but not right now."

He reached to cup her cheek in his hand. "Hermione..."

She took his hand and placed a kiss on his palm. "I'll be fine. The castle is one of the safest places I can be. Remus can deliver messages so you can let me know if you find anything important."

With his fingers, he tipped her chin up so he could look into her eyes. "Be careful. Nowhere is as safe as you think it is. A way was found around the protective wards once, it could happen again. Severus has said that the Dark Lord is working toward that."

"I'm a very careful person."

"You've already been hurt once," he said softly before giving her a passionate kiss.

Molly came downstairs and interrupted their kiss. "There you are..." she trailed off as she saw what the two of them were doing.

Lucius took his time pulling away from Hermione, letting her know that they had nothing to be embarrassed about.

After calming down, Molly said, "Remus tells me you want to head back to school. Are you sure you're ready?"

"I am. I need to get back to some sort of normalcy."

"Are you sure, dear? You've been through a lot and no one would fault you if you stayed here a while."

Hermione shook her head. "That's all right. I want to get back to school and the library. There's a lot I can learn there. Things that I can use..." She bit her lip, trying to fight back the tears.

Lucius moved behind her and comforted her with his embrace. "There is the possibility that information in the library can help us find a way to save our child. I would go and assist her in the search, but I have been informed we could not keep my presence secret."

Molly frowned in disapproval. She had already told Hermione that she didn't really approve of the relationship, but there seemed to be nothing that Molly could do to forestall it. "Well, then, let's see if you are ready to go back. Come, dear."

Hermione looked back at Lucius.

"Go ahead, darling," he said in a reassuring voice.

Lucius retired to his room, quite pleased with himself. He was reasonably sure that Hermione once again trusted him. Other than the fact that the Dark Lord had corrupted his child, his life was looking up. Picking up the book from the desk, he continued reading through it and taking notes, hoping to unlock the secret.

Of the hundred or so pages in the book, only about twenty of them were visible. So far, he had been unable to discern what the key was. Even if he did have an idea, he would have to go to the others and convince them to give him his wand. He was sure they would insist they be the ones to cast the spells on the book, but he knew that none of them had the necessary experience with the Dark Arts.

After an hour of making no progress, he slammed the book shut and rubbed his temples in an attempt to stave off the headache he could feel forming. He had hoped that Hermione would have come by to visit him. It was foolishly optimistic. Surely Molly was doing everything she could to convince Hermione to move on.

Deciding that he couldn't let her leave without seeing her again, he rose from the desk to go down to her room. As he opened the door, he jumped back upon seeing her hand poised to knock. "Hermione, what a pleasant surprise."

She threw herself at him and wrapped her arms around him. "Did you think I would leave without coming to see you?"

"That thought had crossed my mind. I know that Mrs. Weasley can be quite insistent."

"Well, so can I. I told her that I wouldn't leave without coming to see you."

He gazed into her warm brown eyes. "I'm glad that you did. How long do we have?"

"Not long. We don't want to wait too late for me to return to the castle." She stood up on tiptoes and kissed him.

"Are you sure you're ready?" he asked when he broke the kiss.

"I'll be fine. I need to get back to work, and I can't do that here. I'll find the answer."

He brushed her hair. "Defeating the Dark Lord must remain our primary task. Don't forget your work to find the Horcrux. I will continue to work on decoding the book and will communicate with you through Remus. He has agreed to post letters to you for me. I only wish I could join you at Hogwarts."

"And how much work would we get done if that happened?" she asked playfully. "I really have to go."

He kissed her again. "If you insist."

"I do. Lucius, please."

"Very well," he replied and released her. "Do be careful. I would hate for anything to happen to you."

"I could say the same for you. After all, Voldemort's bound to be looking for you now." She glanced over her shoulder before disappearing downstairs.

Lucius immersed himself in studying the book. After nearly a week, he had only revealed four pages. None of them seemed to have anything enlightening. Most of the spells discussed were ones that he already knew.

He heard a sound and jumped awake, realizing he had fallen asleep at his desk again. Since it was now dark, he waved his hand to light his lamp. When the lamp didn't light, he began to panic. Realizing there was nothing he could do in his room, he decided to investigate the noise as the portrait in the front hall was now screaming.

Cautiously, he moved downstairs, knowing surprise was the only advantage he had. He was relieved to see Tonks righting the umbrella stand. After helping her close the curtains, they moved upstairs. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I was coming to see Remus. I didn't mean to wake the whole house," she replied apologetically.

Since he realized it wasn't Death Eaters after him, he saw this as an opportunity to explore his difficulty with magic. "Let me see your wand," he said abruptly.

"Why?" she asked suspiciously.

"When I heard you come in, I tried to light the lamp in my room but found I couldn't. I want to use your wand to determine the extent of my...affliction."

Tonks debated a few seconds before handing over her wand.

Lucius tried summoning books and even the basic *Lumos* spell to no avail.

Remus poked his head in the room, looking as though he was mostly asleep. "What's going on here?"

"Remus, I need my wand," Lucius demanded with a hint of desperation.

"What?" asked Remus groggily.

"My wand. I need to check something. I seem to have lost my ability to use magic."

The last statement seemed to break through Remus' sleepy haze. "Lost your magic?"

Lucius was trying hard not to lose patience. "Yes. And I need my wand to see if this is true. I tried Tonks' wand and was unable to perform even the simplest spell."

"Right. I'll be right back," Remus replied.

"What does that mean? If you've lost your magic, I mean," Tonks asked.

Lucius had been trying to form theories on what it might mean, what might have caused it, and so far, had come up with nothing. "I'm not sure." He paced anxiously, awaiting Remus' return.

"Here you go," Remus said, offering the wand to Lucius.

Lucius wanted to snatch the wand out of the other man's hand but forced himself to calmly take it. Pointing it away from the others, he tried a series of small spells, all ending in failure. He took several deep breaths to ward off the panic attack he could feel threatening to overtake him.

Remus was now wide-awake. "We need to rationalize this."

"Rationalize? How you can you rationalize something like this?" Rational was not a word to describe his emotional state.

"If we don't know the cause, we can't find the cure, can we?" Remus asked.

Lucius realized he had a point. His mind was racing, trying to latch on to any possible cause.

"Snape didn't do this, did he?" Remus asked.

"Other than removing the Disillusionment Charm, I don't recall him casting any magic, and I did not eat or drink anything. Besides, I was able to Apparate back here." He started pacing, hoping it would help him think. The first thing he tried to do was pinpoint when this might have started. As he did not routinely use magic, this was proving quite difficult. Three days ago, he had managed to reveal the few pages of the book, but that had been a spoken incantation. Like most books of this variety, a wand did not seem to be required to reveal the hidden pages.

Since he trusted Severus, he ruled out Severus as having anything to do with it. He briefly considered that the book might have been responsible for it, but he realized that Severus had read part of the book and did not seem to be affected. As he continued pacing, he tried to remember what had changed in the last few days. "Hermione!"

"What's that?" asked Remus, who had been in conversation with Tonks.

"Hermione. Can one of you get in touch with her and find out if she is affected? The only thing that has changed is that she went back to Hogwarts."

"You think the two are connected?" Tonks asked skeptically.

He shrugged. "I don't know, but it's all I have to go on right now."

"I'll go check with her in the morning," Tonks offered.

Lucius really wanted the answer now, but he knew that he wasn't in a position to make demands.

A/N: Thanks again to Mimy for providing a sanity check and helping through any little stumbling blocks in the plot department. I hope that you continue to enjoy this story as it continues its dark twists and turns. The plot went places I had not imagined when I first outlined this story.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Chapter 17

Hermione got up early, not wanting to wake either of her dorm mates. She quietly dressed and slipped downstairs. Checking to make sure there was no one in the common room, she pulled out her wand and tried to levitate a piece of paper. When it wouldn't move, she nearly broke down into tears.

Over the last few days, she had found it harder to do magic, but she was blaming it on stress. Stress had caused her to have problems with it in the past, but she had never completely lost her ability before.

She tried reading until it was time for breakfast but found she couldn't really concentrate. For a few minutes, she contemplated going to see Professor McGonagall, but rationalized the Headmistress was far too busy for something as trivial as stress. Unfortunately, it was going to impact her class performance, especially in Charms. She had barely made it through the last lesson.

At breakfast, she nervously pushed her food around her plate. She still hadn't eaten much by the time Harry and Ron joined her.

"Hey, Hermione. Are you all right?" asked Harry.

"I'm fine. I was up early. I'm going to head up to the library and take advantage of my free period." She was scooping up her books when Professor McGonagall walked by.

"Miss Granger, come with me, please," McGonagall said curtly.

"See ya, Hermione," said Ron as she walked away.

"What's wrong, Professor?" she asked nervously, wondering if McGonagall knew about her problem.

"You'll see," McGonagall replied, leading Hermione to a nearby classroom.

Hermione was surprised to see Tonks waiting for them.

"Hiya, Hermione."

"What are you doing here?" Hermione asked.

Tonks was clearly uncomfortable. "I, er, well... Are you having any problem doing magic?" she finally asked.

"What? That's ridiculous. Why would you think that?" While she had been contemplating telling McGonagall, she was caught off guard and stuck with her denial. "I've been a little stressed lately, but it's nothing that hasn't happened before."

"So you are having problems, Miss Granger?" McGonagall asked.

"Well, a little, but nothing major," she replied while looking at the ground.

"Hermione, this is important. Is it a little or a lot?" Tonks asked gently.

"This morning I couldn't do anything," she admitted awkwardly. She looked up in time to see McGonagall frown. "What does it mean?"

"Sit down, Miss Granger," McGonagall said. "Tonks came to me this morning and told me that Mr. Malfoy is experiencing a similar lack of magic. When did your problem start?"

"Lucius has this problem, too?" she asked as she started to mull the possibilities.

"Miss Granger, we need some answers," McGonagall said impatiently.

"Sorry, Professor. I guess it was three or four days ago that I started noticing problems casting more difficult spells, but I've been under a lot of stress, and it's happened before."

"And today you couldn't do anything?" McGonagall asked for confirmation.

"No, Professor. It's gotten worse the last couple of days."

McGonagall took a deep breath and asked, "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I thought it was just stress and didn't want to bother you with it. What is it?" Realizing her loss of magic wasn't stress, she was becoming more concerned, afraid that Voldemort had done something horrible to her to steal her magic.

"We aren't sure. I only learned about it this morning."

"And it's important that it's happening to both of us? I have to get to the library."

"Miss Granger."

Hermione apologized, "Sorry, Professor, it's a reflex. What does Lucius know?"

"Nothing, right now," said Tonks. "He was trying to formulate some theories last night, but he was waiting to hear if it was affecting you, too."

"So what do we do now?" Hermione asked.

"Tonks will take you back to headquarters, though you might miss some of your morning classes, but we can't risk Floo travel. As we suspect this is serious Dark Magic, Malfoy would be the best one to question you. We'll make a decision from there."

"Thank you, Professor."

"Leave your bag here. I'll see it's returned to your room."

When Hermione and Tonks arrived at Grimmauld Place, they found a rather haggard looking Lucius pouring over the few texts on Dark Arts at the house.

He looked up when the two women entered the room. "So, it's affecting you, too?" he asked sadly.

She nodded. "I couldn't do anything this morning. It started a few days ago and has gotten worse."

"Let me see," he said.

She brandished her wand and pointed it at the book on the table. She watched in amazement as it slowly lifted from the table. In her shock, she lost control of the spell and dropped the book. "That didn't work this morning," she insisted.

Lucius was not the least bit upset, instead he looked pleased at this development. "Remus, may I have my wand?" He eagerly took his wand from Remus and likewise levitated the book; though he didn't let it fall, it still wavered in mid-air.

"What does it mean?" asked Hermione.

"I'm not entirely sure. I don't entirely understand all the magic that you have been subjected to. Even though I have used the one spell in the past, I never experienced anything like this. Of course, when the connection to the Dark Lord was broken..."

"It could have shifted to you," she finished. "And you said that none of the others... This is going to require some research. You still have the *Maledictions de la Morte*, don't you?" Her mind was racing from possibility to possibility, barely stopping long enough for her to articulate her thoughts.

"Of course. That's what I've been doing, searching through it for answers, but it has shed no light on a shifting of the connection."

"What about the other book?" she started pacing.

"I've only been able to reveal four pages, but the loss of magic has likely prevented me from revealing more. There is also the possibility that me not having my wand has made this task more difficult."

"He has to come back with me," Hermione insisted.

"Hermione, we need to discuss this with McGonagall and the others," said Tonks.

"We've already proven that we need to be near each other for our magic to work. I can't help with the search at Hogwarts, and he can't figure out that book without magic. There isn't any other option."

"She is correct. We need to be near each other," affirmed Lucius.

"How near?" Remus asked.

Lucius shrugged. "I have no idea. I've never heard of this sort of connection before."

"Hermione, come with me. We'll tell McGonagall what we've learned and make arrangements for him to come to Hogwarts."

"But..." she started to protest.

Lucius interrupted, "It's all right. I know this will have to be carefully orchestrated so that no one knows I'm there. I expect I'll be there late tonight. Besides, I have to pack since I'll be staying for a while."

"Right. Remus, I'll send a message when we are ready. Come on, Hermione," Tonks said.

Once Lucius had packed up his few belongings, he returned to the drawing room and his books. He completely lost track of time until Remus set his wand down on the desk.

"It's time to go. I think you'll probably need this, and it seems silly to keep it here. So, do you have any ideas?"

"Very few. I can't recall ever having heard of this sort of magic. Hopefully, being at Hogwarts will help. There is a rather extensive library, and I'm hoping arrangements can be made for me to use the books."

"I'm sure Minerva will work something out. As time permits, I'll see what research I can get done at the central library. I'm sure that between you and Hermione you'll figure it out. She's quite bright."

"Thank you for your vote of confidence."

"What can I say, I like being optimistic. Shall we?"

Both men held their wands at the ready as they left the house.

Minerva met them at the Hogwarts gates. She gave Lucius a disapproving look. "Come with me, Mr. Malfoy."

Lucius shook hands with Remus. "Thank you very much."

"My pleasure. Good luck."

Once the gates were closed, Lucius could hear Remus Disapparating.

"You will, of course, have to remain concealed while you are here," Minerva said. "We have made arrangements for you to stay in the Room of Requirement. It is a hidden room that will conceal you from the student body. House-elves will deliver your meals."

"What of my research? Will I have access to the library?"

"Very limited access. We will work out the details of after-hours access for you. Of course, you will be allowed to take books out of the library. I assume you brought the book in question with you?"

"I did. Hopefully, being here will allow me to unlock the secrets of the book."

She didn't say anything else as she led him to the seventh floor. Once there, she stopped in front of a tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy. "To get into the room, you will need to walk three times in front of this blank stretch of wall, concentrating on a place for you to remain hidden."

He watched her walk three times in front of the wall and a door appeared. She pushed open the door and revealed a simply furnished room. "As I have said, you will remain here unless someone comes for you." She gave him a sly grin. "Dobby has been assigned to look after you."

He turned to question that assignment, but she had closed the door. He knew that it was not coincidence that Dobby was being assigned to him. Well, if he wanted to prove to Potter and the others that he had changed, this was his best opportunity. He was sure to be spending a great deal of time with Potter and Weasley.

"Dobby," he called softly.

After a few seconds, the elf popped into the room. "You has called Dobby?" the elf asked suspiciously.

Lucius forced himself to smile. He couldn't believe that he was doing this. True, he had a much better relationship with his house-elves now, but he had never actually apologized to them, just modified his behavior. "Yes, there is something I wish to say to you. I treated you quite unfairly when you were in my service." He paused and swallowed. "I wish to apologize for how I treated you."

"Master is apologizing to Dobby?"

"Yes. I will take my meals at the normal times." He hoped this would be the last he had to hear of this.

Dobby eyed Lucius suspiciously and replied, "Dobby will bring breakfast at seven."

"That will be all. Good night." Once Dobby was gone, Lucius took a good look at his surroundings. The furnishings were better than those he had at Grimmauld Place, but still not what he was accustomed to. "If only I were back in my room," he muttered wistfully.

There was a sickening swirling sensation, and when it stopped, he could have sworn that he was in his room back at the manor. "Remarkable," he whispered. A quick investigation revealed that the only thing the room was missing was his clothes. Other than that, it was exactly as he remembered it. "Perhaps this won't be as bad as I thought." With a wave of his wand, he unpacked his belongings and settled in for the night.

While neither Hermione nor Professor McGonagall had told Ron and Harry about Lucius being at Hogwarts, she knew she would have to bring it up. The two of them would be unable to search the Room of Requirements for the time being, and they would want to know why. She had spent most of the night trying to determine the best way to break the news to them.

At breakfast, she cornered them at the far end of the table. Since so many students had not returned to Hogwarts, it was easy to find a secluded spot. "There's something important I have to tell you," she said in a hushed whisper. "And you have to keep it secret."

"What is it?" whispered Ron.

She looked around the room, making sure no one was nearby. "You know how I've been having trouble with spells the last few days?"

"Yeah. We've been wondering what you've been stressed about. It's everything that's happened, right?" Harry asked.

"Not exactly." She licked her lips nervously. She had tried to find a way to make sure the Lucius looked innocent. "You see, there was a very powerful spell connecting me, the baby and Voldemort. When Lucius broke the link, he didn't understand the true nature of it. He severed the side that connected to Voldemort. The loose end of the link was looking for someone else. It chose him."

"And?" asked Harry.

"I don't understand it, but somehow our two magical abilities were connected with that new link. After several days apart, we both started having problems with magic. When I woke up yesterday, I found I couldn't do any magic at all. Before I could tell anyone, Tonks and Professor McGonagall told me that Lucius was having the same problem. He had already begun to theorize there might be some sort of link. To test this, Tonks took me to see him. Once we were near each other, we found that we regained the ability to do magic."

"Where is this going, Hermione?" Ron asked.

She took a deep breath. "Last night, Professor McGonagall brought Lucius to the castle. He's staying in the Room of Requirement so that we will be able to use magic. I need it to help you with the search of the castle, and he needs it to decode the book."

"Fine, he's here. But I don't want you going near him," Harry insisted.

"That's not going to be practical. In him we have an expert in the Dark Arts. He'll stay hidden, but I'm not going to pass the opportunity to use him as a resource. Besides, someone will have to see what he finds in that book, and seeing that neither of you can be civil around him, it's going to have to be me." She picked up her bag and stormed out of the Great Hall.

Lucius was enjoying his tea and attempting to work on the book when there was a knock on his door. "Come in," he called politely, hoping it was Hermione. He was disappointed to see McGonagall's stern face. "Good morning, Professor," he said cheerfully.

She looked around the room, disapproval clear on her face. "What happened to the room?"

He gave her a charming smile, hoping to improve her mood. "Well, the room seemed to decide that this was how it should look."

She continued to scowl at the ostentatious display of opulence and placed a scroll on the table. "That is a list of books in the Restricted Section. I'll return at lunch to find out which books you need."

"I will have a list prepared for you, though it will be useful for me to actually peruse the library. I may not recognize a book by its title alone."

"That is still being arranged and will probably happen tomorrow evening." She swept out of the room without saying anything else.

Lucius couldn't help but laugh at how much the change of surroundings had thrown her off balance.

Transfiguration was incredibly tense since Harry, Ron and Hermione shared a table. After class, Professor McGonagall held the three of them back. She had a stern look on her face as she addressed them. "I can understand that not all of you are pleased with recent events. There was no other choice."

"But, Professor, if he's working for Voldemort, we've just let him into the castle. The last time we had a Death Eater in the castle, he killed Dumbledore."

"That's enough, Potter!" chastised McGonagall. "Rest assured that Mr. Malfoy cannot leave his room. Over the past nine months, he has earned a measure of trust. After his work saving Miss Granger's life, I thought you would realize this. Now, Miss Granger, off to class with you."

As Hermione left the room, she could hear Professor McGonagall telling Harry and Ron they were not to bother Lucius, and that Dobby was keeping an eye on him.

Normally, Hermione loved Arithmancy, but today, she found that she could barely concentrate on class. As soon as class was over, she hurried up to the seventh floor corridor so she could see Lucius. When she opened the door, she found him sitting at a desk. She was surprised to see that he had recreated his room at his manor. He smiled at her, when he saw her. "How are you doing?"

"Quite well. And you?" he asked as he rose to greet her.

"Much better now, thank you." She collapsed into his arms, taking comfort from his embrace. She could see the book sitting on the desk. "Have you made any progress?"

He regained his seat, encouraging her to sit on his lap. "Some. I have managed to reveal another dozen or so pages. I will have to spend time studying those to reveal more."

She picked up the book and flipped through the pages. "Are all Dark Magic books this complicated?"

He laughed softly. "Only the most dangerous ones. So far, I have not revealed anything truly dangerous or useful."

He nuzzled against her neck and she pushed him away. When she tried to get up, he tightened his grip around her waist. "Lucius, please be serious." She noticed the book list on the desk. "Do you need me to get any of these for you?"

He stopped trying to kiss her and replied, "Professor McGonagall will stop by at lunch time to see which ones I require. Are you trying to get away from me? Do I bore you that much?"

"No, it's not that. It's just..."

"I know that it was a horrible experience for you. I'm here for you." He rubbed her back to reassure her that nothing would harm her.

She nodded and changed the subject. "I told Ron and Harry that you are here. They aren't pleased, but Professor McGonagall has told them to stay away from you. Do you really think we can find the answer? That we can sever this connection?"

"Of course I do," he replied confidently. He picked up the list of books. "I have seen several tomes here that might be useful. Probably more from an historical perspective than a practical one, but if I can find any other record of something like this having happened before, it might provide a clue as to how to sever this link."

She shifted nervously. "Lucius, are you still having problems with your magic?" When he gave her a confused look, she continued, "I mean, I can cast simple spells, but today in Transfiguration, I was having problem with a new spell. I never have problems, not even with the most difficult spells."

He frowned. "Honestly, I have only tried the simplest of spells. I know I am being watched and didn't want to draw too much attention." After she stood, he tried to think of a complex spell to perform. Human transfiguration was difficult, but he didn't want to risk injuring her. While it wasn't as difficult as a Vanishing Spell, Lucius decided to transfigure his footstool into a dog.

They were both disappointed when all that happened was the footstool grew a little furrier and now had a wagging tail. "Are you good at Transfiguration?" she asked tentatively.

"Quite good." He began pacing. "Clearly, there is something more to this spell. If we do not possess our magic in full, the remainder must be going somewhere. I have not heard of any sort of spell that will rob a witch or wizard of their power permanently."

"It wouldn't be going to our daughter, would it?"

"I don't believe so. Your connection to her was severed, or you would not be alive. Talk with Professor McGonagall. Tell her I need to get into the library tonight."

"Right." She kissed him and hurried out of the room. This whole situation was very complex and was showing no signs of becoming simpler. She hoped that the library would provide some much needed information.

A/N: Once again, thanks to Mimy for being my beta reader. It is so wonderful to have someone to bounce ideas off of. And thanks to those who have left reviews. I'm glad that so many are enjoying this story.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Chapter 18

Lucius was staring at the fire, waiting for someone to take him to the library. He knew it was late enough that the students should all be in bed. When McGonagall had come by earlier, she had indicated that he would have access to the library tonight. He had revealed a few more pages of his book, but found that he could not concentrate on the task very well. He still had very little idea about what was causing their loss of magic.

When he answered the knock at his door, he was disappointed to see McGonagall. It had been foolish to expect Hermione, but he had.

"Are you ready, Mr. Malfoy?"

He picked up his parchment and quill so that he could take notes. "After you."

She scowled at him, indicating that she would follow behind him. Once they were in the library, McGonagall said, "Madam Pince will keep an eye on you. I believe Miss Granger is already in the Restricted Section. You have two hours."

"But two hours..."

She cut him off. "I will not further inconvenience my staff on your account. I suggest you use your time wisely to find books that will be useful. You will be able to check books out."

Lucius looked over at Madam Pince and flashed her a charming smile, hoping he might gain some more time in the library. She gave him a disapproving scowl, and he turned away, heading for the Restricted Section.

He found Hermione at a table with a stack of books beside her. "Tell me, is Madam Pince always so cross?" he asked quietly.

"Most of the time. We don't think she smiles."

Shaking his head, he decided to make the best use of his time and sought out several of the books he thought might be interesting.

When the two hours were over, Madam Pince cleared her throat. "The library is closing. Bring your books to the front."

Lucius charmed a stack of about twenty books and took them to the front desk, pleased that he could at least do that much magic.

Pince gave him a disapproving look. "You may only have five books out at time."

Lucius tried to be as charming as possible, though it was difficult given her sour demeanor. "Madam, as I am sure Professor McGonagall explained to you, I am here under special circumstances. As I will not be able to visit the library regularly, surely you can see your way to letting me check all these books out?"

"Five books," she repeated sternly.

He became more adamant. "Madam, I am not leaving here without the books. The research I am conducting is *vital* to the war and will save lives. Rest assured, they will all be cared for and returned in the same condition they are in now. I am not some careless student."

"The policy applies to all, teacher and student. Five books."

McGonagall's voice came from the door, "Let him have the books, Irma. He has special dispensation."

Pince didn't look happy, but replied, "Very well."

Lucius noticed Hermione was standing at McGonagall's side. He would have to thank her later for her intervention.

After two weeks of research, Lucius didn't feel he was any closer to finding a solution. There were only a handful of pages that he had not decoded. He was beginning to doubt that Severus had any idea of what the curse was or how to cure it.

He heard the door open, and knew it was Hermione.

"Anything?"

"Nothing new."

She set a few books on the table by the fireplace. "I don't know if any of these will be useful."

He joined her by the fire and began paging through the books. After only a few minutes, he went to his desk and retrieved the Dark Magic book. Pointing his wand at the book, he spoke a soft incantation. He and Hermione watched in amazement as the book opened to one of the blank pages and text began to appear.

"You did it!" she said and wrapped her arms around him.

"With your help." Returning her embrace, he gave her a passionate kiss and lowered her to the couch. When he heard the doorknob rattle, he pulled away from her.

"Hermione? Are you in here?" asked Harry.

"What do you want, Harry?" she asked, slightly irritated.

"We think we found something, and we need your help."

"Can it wait?"

"Hermione, we've been looking for this for ages."

"So it can wait. Lucius just revealed some more pages in the book, and he's going to need my help with them since they are written in runes."

Lucius glanced at the book and saw she was right. He hadn't really noticed, having been too excited celebrating the prospect of finally having the whole book revealed. He flipped through the rest of the book and saw that there were no more blank pages. "Hermione, go with Mr. Potter. I do know a little of ancient runes, and I might be able to decipher something. Your search for the final Horcrux must take precedence." He was pleased to see the shock on Potter's face.

"Lucius," she protested.

He brushed her cheek. "Darling, we mustn't let our personal quest take the focus away from the more important task. The book isn't going anywhere." He could see Harry growing angry at the affection he was lavishing on Hermione and gave her a slow kiss on the lips to further incense the young man.

Once Harry and Hermione were heading down the stairs, she asked, "This really could have waited, couldn't it? You just had to make sure that there was nothing going on, didn't you? Whether something is going on or not, it doesn't matter. We are both adults."

"He's, he's... How can you?"

"Did you even find something or is this just a ploy to keep us apart?"

"We found something. I wouldn't lie to you about that. It's down on the second floor. We need you, Hermione. There's a spell we can't get past."

She sighed. "Fine. Let's take a look at it."

As they moved into the depths of the castle, away from the classrooms, she saw Ron standing guard outside a doorway that had not been there before.

"Hermione, glad to see that Harry found you. There's an inner door that we can't get past. It's covered in runes."

"All right." She entered the room, using her wand to illuminate an antechamber. The arched doorframe was indeed carved with runes.

"What does it say?" Ron asked.

"I'll need a few minutes to translate it," she replied. As she studied the runes, she began to wish she had some parchment. "Does either of you have quill and parchment?"

"Sorry, no," replied Harry.

"Well, I'm going to need some."

"I'll go," offered Harry.

After a few minutes of uncomfortable silence, Ron asked, "Are you okay? I mean, with everything you've been through."

"I'll be fine," she replied. This was the last thing she had expected from Ron. He had never really demonstrated any sort of perceptiveness.

"If you want to talk, I just want you to know that I'm here for you." He shifted nervously. "I hope that we can still be friends."

She turned away from the door and looked at him. "I don't want to lose your friendship either. I do like you, Ron, I just think we're better as friends. But, I am going to need you to accept Lucius."

He started to protest, "Hermione..."

"Ron, please. He didn't trick me or ply me with a potion. I chose to be with him, and I would do it all over again. And whatever happens, he is the father of my child. I know it's hard for you to accept. It's still hard for me to accept." She wrapped her arms around herself, striving for comfort.

Ron gave her a reassuring hug. "We're here for you. If there's anything we can do..."

She regained control of her emotions. "Thanks, Ron. I just want this to be over."

"We all do."

When Harry returned with the parchment, she quickly copied the runes and began translating them. The problem with runes was that they did not use the same sentence structure as English.

It took her nearly fifteen minutes to translate the runes to her satisfaction. "Okay, here it is. I think we've actually found something useful this time."

"That's what we thought when we saw the second door," offered Harry.

Before showing the paper to her friends, she said, "I think we ought to get Professor McGonagall. We don't know what we will find behind the door."

"We could find a lot of old cauldrons. I think we should open it before wasting her time," replied Harry.

She looked between them before picking up the parchment and reading the translation. "Enter those who are loyal to those principles upon which the school was founded."

"That's it?" asked Ron.

"It's not very useful, is it?" added Harry.

Hermione shrugged. "I don't know. You did try opening the door, didn't you?"

"Of course we did," replied Harry. "We tried every unlocking spell we could think of and nothing has worked."

Hermione moved closer to the door and cast a probing spell in it. The spell was immediately rebounded. She then started pacing, trying to figure out what the message on the doorframe meant. After a few minutes, she said, "The school was founded by four people, each with different beliefs. What if we need a representative from each house?"

"We can get Luna and Ernie, but who would we get from Slytherin? I don't really trust any of them," said Harry.

Hermione looked at the two of them. "Lucius."

"NO! I won't have him down here, knowing what we are doing. Besides, we would then have two more people that know he's here."

"Yes, but they wouldn't know why. We can tell them part of the truth; that he has repented and is here to use the library to help us defeat Voldemort," Hermione rationalized. "Unless you have a better idea."

It took several seconds before Harry replied, "Fine. But I'm going to get the others first and explain it to them."

"I'll meet you back here in fifteen minutes," she replied before leaving.

"Did you find anything?" Lucius asked when she entered his room.

"We aren't sure yet. There's some sort of charm on an inner door. We have an idea to open it, but we need someone from each house there. Since you are the only one from Slytherin we can trust, they have agreed to let you help." She then explained what the others were being told about his reason for being at Hogwarts.

"Sounds intriguing. I look forward to seeing what's behind the door."

"Can you do me a favor?"

"Anything, darling."

"Can you not spar with Ron and Harry? You know they are going to bait you."

He pulled her tight for a kiss. "Of course. I shall retain my diplomatic calm in their presence."

By the time they arrived at the hidden room, the others were already assembled. Lucius had been expecting the uncomfortable silence. "Well then, which of you three will represent Gryffindor?" he asked.

Harry, Ron and Hermione all started talking at once, eager to volunteer. "Harry, I don't think it should be you, in case there's something dangerous," said Hermione.

"I'm not going to let you risk yourself," said Ron to Hermione.

"You didn't say anything about anything dangerous," interrupted Ernie.

Lucius watched, once again reminded of why he was glad he was not a teenager.

"Ron, I'm better at Dark Arts than you. I should be the Gryffindor representative," said Harry.

"Harry, no!" said Ron and Hermione in unison.

"Is there something dangerous?" asked Ernie.

Lucius watched Luna playing with some ridiculous necklace that she was wearing.

"No, Ernie. I don't think so. I'm just being cautious," replied Hermione.

"My father says there's a colony of Bumblebeezers here at Hogwarts. Perhaps they are protecting what's behind the door?" Luna offered.

"I don't need you protecting me," retorted Harry, ignoring Luna's comment.

Lucius longed to step in and make the decision, but he knew he must remain quiet. They would only resent his interference.

With Ron and Hermione both vehemently against his being the representative, Harry finally said, "Fine. Ron, you will be the Gryffindor."

"Right then. What do we do?" Ron asked.

Everyone looked to Hermione. "Well, er, I guess you all four have to try to open the door at the same time."

"It's that simple?" asked Ron.

"I really don't know. It was just an idea. I don't know if it will work, but we do know that at least three of the founders espoused teamwork, and the Sorting Hat has told us that we have to work together."

The four representatives took hold of the door latch and pulled. The door creaked and moaned and slowly began to move. The air behind it was stale and dusty, having been trapped for centuries.

Luna was the first into the room and Hermione quickly followed her. Ernie cautiously moved into the room, leaving Ron and Harry staring suspiciously at Lucius.

"I will remain here until you have finished your investigation," he offered.

"Harry, go ahead, I'll watch him," said Ron as he brandished his wand.

"All right." Harry tried to walk through the door, but bounced back as though hitting a solid wall. He spun on Malfoy. "What did you do to the door?"

"I've done nothing. I have not drawn my wand and have no reason to."

Ron moved toward the door and cautiously put his hand up. He could not push it past the frame of the door. "What's going on? Hey, Hermione! Are you okay?"

"Ron, would you come in. There's nothing dangerous in here," she called back.

"We can't. We can't get through the door. Malfoy's charmed it."

"For Merlin's sake," she muttered, and walked back into the antechamber. "What are you talking about?"

"How'd you do that?" Ron asked as he reached for the door. This time, he found his hand could pass through the barrier. Tentatively, he stepped through the door.

"Honestly, the two of you are enough to drive a person mad." She spun back towards the door and bounced off an invisible barrier.

Lucius caught her before she fell to the ground. "That is very interesting." Once she was steady on her feet, he reached his hand toward the door and found it passed through.

"What's going on?" asked Harry.

"Isn't it obvious? It took one person from each house to open the door. Only one person from each house can enter the room," said Lucius.

"Ron, come out of there," ordered Hermione. Once Ron was on her side of the door, she took Lucius' hand and pulled him through with her. "Come on."

"Why is he going with you?" Ron asked.

"Something tells me we will need someone from each house in the room to fully reveal the secrets. We'll be fine."

"Hermione, trade places with me," insisted Harry.

"I was the one that opened the door," said Ron.

"Neither of you can read runes, and if there are more of them, someone will need to translate them." She and Lucius walked farther into the room, both using their wands for illumination.

"Where are the others?" he asked as he looked around the colonnaded room.

"I don't know. Ernie? Luna?" she called as she searched the room. Due to the columns, it was impossible to see the whole room at once.

A/N: Thanks again to all those that have taken the time to review. It really means a lot to me and helps keep me motivated. It also seems to spur the muses to take complete plot tangents to prevent anyone from guessing what's coming next. LOL

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Chapter 19

Lucius and Hermione began searching the room for signs of their missing companions.

"Do you see anything?" she called.

"No...nothing," his voice trailed off as he began to feel something pulling at the very core of his being. "Hermione," he said softly as he moved into one of the alcoves.

"What is it?" she asked as she crossed the room.

"Don't you feel it?" he asked, his voice taking on a far away quality.

"Feel what?" she replied as he moved further into the darkness. It seemed to swallow the light from his wand. "Lucius?"

He turned and held his hand out for hers. "Come with me."

She didn't like the idea of him following some strange force that she couldn't feel. As he led her down a set of spiral stairs, she began to feel something, but she couldn't describe what it was. "Lucius," she cautioned.

"Don't you see? This is what we have to do; this is why we are here." He sounded very eager to continue on his way.

When they finally reached the bottom of the stairs, they found Ernie and Luna staring at a waist high pedestal in the center of the room.

"There you are. Why did you leave without us?" Hermione asked. When she didn't get an answer, she moved toward them.

Lucius grabbed her arm. "No. Don't touch them."

"What's wrong with you?" she asked.

His voice maintained the ethereal quality it had taken since he started toward this chamber. "Feel it. Let it flow through you; stop fighting it."

"Stop fighting what?" she asked, but he didn't respond. She watched as he walked to the far side of the pedestal, as if in a trance. He took up position across from Luna. Not understanding, and not liking, what was happening, she decided to find a way to get Ron and Harry into the room. When she reached the doorway, she bounced back. "Okay, don't panic. The founders wouldn't want to hurt anyone." She looked back at the others; they all appeared to be in some sort of trance, staring at the pedestal.

With nothing else to do, she decided to take a closer look at the pedestal. The four sides of the base had intricate carvings. The side facing Ernie had a mountain, Luna's a tornado, Lucius' the raging sea, and the empty side had a fire. There were no runes and nothing on top of the pedestal. She was confused. Lucius had told her to let it flow through her, but the idea of the unknown scared her.

Closing her eyes, she took a couple of deep breaths, and tried to relax.

"Come, my child. Take your place. Stand by my symbol," a masculine voice said.

She found she wanted to do as the voice asked, even as a small part of her wanted to know where the disembodied voice had come from, and took her position in front of the fire symbol. Once she was in position, a bright light emanated from the pedestal and engulfed all present.

It sounded as though four voices were speaking at once. "You have chosen to seek us and the protection we left. This is a power not to be used lightly. This power can only be used when you all work together. Together you are stronger than you are individually. Four will come together as one to safeguard that which we created."

When the voice stopped, it felt as though something hit her in the chest, but she found she couldn't move. Without warning, whatever was holding her vanished, and she collapsed to her knees.

"Did you hear that?" asked Ernie.

"What was that all about?" asked Hermione, who looked to Lucius for an answer.

He shrugged his shoulders. "My best guess is that we are somehow representatives of our respective houses."

Luna was standing at the pedestal. "What are these?" she asked as she reached for something on top of it.

"Don't touch it!" said Hermione and then moved closer to examine the new object. Looking down, she saw a silver disc that was divided into four. Each quarter was engraved with the same image that was on the respective side of the pedestal. "Earth, wind, water and fire. The four elemental powers," she whispered.

Lucius reached for the water one and picked it up. He found it had a silver chain. "It seems we are meant to wear them."

"For what?" asked Ernie.

Hermione was replaying the words in her mind. "To protect the castle. Somehow, I think we have become the Protectors. You've heard the Sorting Hat. For the last two years it has talked about how we have to be united, and how Hogwarts is in danger. It makes sense that the founders left a way to protect the school. That's why we started this search." Noticing the others had all picked up their symbols, she quickly put the chain over her head. She didn't feel any different when she put it on, which relieved her.

"Now what?" asked Luna.

Everyone was looking around the room, but it was otherwise undecorated. "I think we have fulfilled our purpose here," replied Lucius.

"The door is sealed," said Hermione, remembering getting bounced off an invisible barrier.

Ernie approached the door cautiously, keeping his hand in front of him. Once he was on the first step, he said, "Looks like we really are done here."

Hermione placed her hand on Lucius' arm, holding him back while Ernie and Luna climbed the stairs. "Why couldn't I feel the magic like the rest of you?"

"I'm not sure. It could be because you are so analytical."

"What?"

"You approach everything as a puzzle to be solved. The rest of us approach things more emotionally. I think that's why we were more receptive. We should go before the others start getting worried." He escorted her up the stairs.

When they emerged from the hidden chamber, Ernie and Luna were relating what had happened.

"So you're the Protectors?" asked Ron.

"That's what they told us," replied Ernie.

"Who told you?" asked Harry.

"I believe it was the Hogwarts founders," said Hermione. "Everything in that chamber pointed to the founders having put it there. There needed to be four of us; there were representations of the four elemental powers. And each house corresponds to one of the elements." She noticed they were staring at her blankly, and she quickly explained how the houses corresponded.

Harry asked, "So what does that mean? You being Protectors."

"I don't know. We were told that we are to act together to safeguard what they created."

"So there will be a battle here," said Harry.

Lucius replied impatiently, "That is what I have been trying to tell you. I have told you that the Dark Lord is interested in Hogwarts. He has been researching ways to break past the protective wards."

"Fine. So you did," said Harry shortly.

"I think we should tell Professor McGonagall. She needs to know about this and who the Protectors are. Maybe as headmistress she knows something more about it?" said Hermione.

Not long after they emerged from the secret chamber, McGonagall arrived in the hallway. "Mr. Malfoy, what are you doing about the corridors?" She gave them all a disapproving look.

"I believe Miss Granger can explain it better than I can," he replied.

Hermione quickly related the evening's events.

When she finished, McGonagall said, "Mr. Macmillan, escort Mr. Malfoy back to the Room of Requirement; Miss Lovegood, return to your dormitory; you three, follow me."

"But Professor, I need to help Mr. Malfoy translate his book," protested Hermione.

"You can do that later," McGonagall replied sternly.

As Ernie led Lucius back to the Room of Requirement, he kept giving Lucius suspicious looks. Lucius knew that he would be fighting his reputation for some time.

After a few minutes, Ernie asked, "Do you think we will have to fight?"

"I would not be surprised. Though I believe it will be more in the defensive capacity."

"Oh," replied Ernie. After a few seconds, he continued, "And you're really on our side now?"

"I am. I learned that I was wrong in the past, and I wish to atone for those mistakes. Do you think the magic of the founders would have allowed me to be chosen if I wasn't sincere?"

"I suppose not," Ernie replied. They finished their walk in silence.

When Lucius entered his room, he was quite surprised to find dinner waiting for him. He had expected Dobby to not be anywhere near as cooperative as he was. It was a welcome relief.

After giving Professor McGonagall a full report on the evening's events, Hermione, Ron and Harry were sent back to the dormitory. While she really wanted to discuss what had happened with Lucius, she was forced to go back to the dormitory. She wanted nothing more than to go up to her room, but Ron and Harry started asking her questions, trying to get more details about what had happened in the chamber.

Finally, she managed to excuse herself. Unfortunately, it was still quite early and the common room was quite full. She knew it would probably be a couple of hours before everyone went to bed. For the first time, she wished she had Harry's Invisibility Cloak.

As she heard her roommates enter the dorm, she did her best to feign sleep, but she found she was having a hard time remaining still, anxious to see Lucius. Once she thought it was late enough, she slipped out of bed and down the stairs. Peering around the corner, she could see that the common room was deserted.

It didn't take her long to reach the Room of Requirement from the common room. Slowly opening the door, she saw that the room was dark and quietly slipped in. She could hear Lucius' gentle snoring and crawled into bed with him. Nuzzling against him, she felt him wrap his arm around her. She continued snuggling against him, trying to wake him up.

"Not now, Cissa," he mumbled.

She shoved him onto his back and crawled on top of him. "Guess again," she whispered.

He opened his eyes, and in the dim light of fire's embers, he focused on the woman in bed with him. "Hermione? What a pleasant surprise."

"I had to come see you." She started showering him with kisses.

He eagerly returned her affection and pushed off her nightgown. "Feel free to wake me like this anytime." Rolling over so that he was on top, he quickly stripped out of his nightclothes and returned his attention to Hermione. "You don't know how long I've been waiting for this."

He captured one of her nipples in his mouth and let his hand drift down her stomach. She moaned and writhed at his touch. For months, he had dreamed about being with her. That dream had involved hours of luxurious lovemaking. He realized that he wasn't going to last that long, at least not at first. Though, from her behavior she wouldn't last that long either. Now, it was about primal urges. Later, he would take his time with her.

Lucius woke to someone tugging on the blankets on his bed. He heard a squeaky voice imploring, "Master Malfoy? You is needing to wake up, sir."

Finally, he registered that the voice belonged to Dobby. "What is it?" he muttered. He and Hermione had been up until the early hours of the morning. She had been insatiable, not that he was going to complain. Though, he thought he remembered having to beg her off so he could get some sleep.

"It is time for breakfast, sir."

When he tried to get up, he found that his arm was pinned. He leaned over and whispered in her ear, "Darling, it's time for breakfast."

"Not right now," she mumbled.

"Yes, right now. I believe you have class this morning."

"Class? Oh no! What am I going to do?" She saw the light streaming in the window. "I can't go back to the dorm like this." She started panicking.

"Dobby, would you fetch clean robes for Miss Granger?" Lucius asked. Once the elf was gone, he turned back to Hermione. "We'll eat breakfast together, and then you can clean and dress for class. There's no need to panic. No one need know you spent the night here. In fact, I like this little arrangement. We'll have to do it more often." He flashed a sly grin.

Realizing his plan sounded feasible, she slipped on her robe and joined him at the table for breakfast. "I don't know that we should do this more often. If I start missing meals, they will start asking questions."

He reached across the table to hold her hand. "Let them. They already know how you feel."

"I just think it's too much right now. No one else gets to do this, so I shouldn't either." She was embarrassed that she had so completely lost control last night.

He chuckled softly. "You are sorely mistaken if you think none of the older students are doing this. This is a very large castle."

In her duties as prefect, she had caught people, but always before it progressed too far. "It's just..."

"Darling, you should not be ashamed. We are affianced; even if they aren't willing to acknowledge that fact, it is hard for them to ignore that we have a child together." He paused a moment. "Will you have time later today to help me with the book?"

"I don't have class after lunch. I'll come by then."

Dobby returned and said, "Miss, I has brought your robes."

"Thank you, Dobby. Put them in the bath." She turned back to Lucius. "If you'll excuse me."

He rose to follow her, wrapping his arms around her before she made it to the bathroom. "I could join you," he offered playfully.

She pushed him back. "If you do, I'll be late. I'll see you after lunch."

"Have lunch with me," he offered.

"Tempting, but I do have to put in an appearance at the Great Hall. I really do need you to let me go."

Reluctantly, he released her.

Hermione tried not to act flustered as she took her seat in Charms. She had nearly been late since Lucius had joined her in the shower.

"Where have you been?" whispered Harry.

"I had to run to the library first thing this morning. I had some ideas last night," Hermione lied. But she knew it was the one thing the two of them were likely to believe.

Harry waited until Flitwick explained the day's charm before casting *Muffliato*. "Are you sure? You look kind of odd."

"Odd? How can someone look odd?" She hoped that they wouldn't suspect anything because Ron was now examining her, too.

"I don't know. You look more energized."

"She does," agreed Ron.

"Well, I finally got a good night's sleep last night. Now, I think we have an assignment we should be doing." She turned her attention to the board and practicing her charm. She was shocked when she successfully performed the charm on the first try.

Flitwick saw Hermione's fire dancer and exclaimed, "Well done, Miss Granger!"

She barely heard him as she watched the small figure. Something had happened to return her magical powers to normal levels. She just didn't know what.

Lucius had spent the morning trying to make sense of the runes in the book. They were an obscure variant, one that he was not familiar with, so he had made little headway. Unfortunately, none of the books he had from the library were rune dictionaries.

Instead, he resigned himself to searching for clues in the rest of the book, even though he had read it multiple times. As he perused the book, he realized he felt...different. It wasn't something he could quantify, though. He wondered if it had anything to do with being named a Hogwarts Protector.

By the time lunch arrived, he had a few incomplete ideas. Whether there was anything to help his daughter in the book or not, there was quite a bit of useful information. He had already organized much of it onto several sheets of parchment that Hermione could give to the others.

He was just finishing lunch when Hermione entered the room. She was pacing nervously. He knew enough to wait for her to be the first to speak.

"Do you feel...different?" she asked.

"How so?" he asked, trying to control the excitement that he felt.

"I don't know, exactly. Have you tried any magic today?"

"I rarely have occasion to use magic. Why?"

"Well, I was in Charms today, and I had no problem doing the difficult charm that was our assignment."

"That's good news, isn't it?"

"Normally, yes, but I don't know. I just...don't feel quite right. Not in a bad way, though. Just...different. With the problems I've been having lately, I shouldn't have been able to do that spell so easily."

"Perhaps it has something to do with what happened in the chamber last night?" he offered.

"I thought that at first, but I managed to track down Ernie and Luna, and they don't feel different or have any special powers."

"We don't have special powers, either." Wondering if his magic was also fully restored, he once again tried to Transfigure his footstool. This time, he successfully produced a cocker spaniel. He watched it run toward Hermione and jump for attention. "Perhaps whatever happened there restored our magic, counteracted whatever spell we were feeling the effects from?"

Hermione pet the dog a few times before restoring it to a footstool. "I don't think so. If that had been the case, we shouldn't have felt different, should we?"

"No, I suppose not. Well, I don't know that dwelling on it will gain us anything. I have parchment and quill ready for you to work on your translation. I was unable to make much progress." He helped her get situated at the desk before he took a seat by the fire and began going through some of the books he had borrowed from the library.

As he tried to concentrate on the book, he became aware of the unique scent of Hermione's shampoo. He could see himself touching her hair, playing with the unruly curls, feeling the soft tresses slip through his fingers. Realizing his thoughts were counterproductive, he tried to push them from his mind.

Hearing the scratching of the quill, his mind began to drift again. He imagined her delicate, though firm hands running across his body, touching him all the places that excited him. He took a deep breath and adjusted himself for comfort. *Concentrate on the books*, he chided.

He was just starting to shut out the distractions that she was causing, when he felt her hands on his shoulders.

"You look tense," she purred.

The small bit of resolve he had built up crumbled around him, and he leaned back relishing her touch. After a few seconds he jumped up and moved across the room.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"This."

She moved closer to him. "What's wrong with this."

He continued to back away. "Think, Hermione. Don't you find how you are acting odd? I knew I should be concentrating on the books, but I found my mind wandering to you, I couldn't control it. Even now, it is hard for me to control my desires."

She raised her hand to her mouth. "You're right. What's happening?"

"I don't know. I think you should take the book elsewhere and work on the translation."

"But we have to be near each other in order for our magic to work. If I stay away from you, it will hurt us both."

"It's vital you translate those pages. Severus claims that what is in that book will help us. Perhaps it will provide and answer to what we are experiencing, but we need to know what is in that book."

"Right. I know. I was just thinking ahead."

He moved closer to her, wanting to comfort her. As he closed the distance and reached for her, he found he had an overwhelming desire to throw her to the sofa. Wrapping his arms around her, he found he could barely control himself. "We must do this for our daughter. You must go...now," he whispered as he gently pushed her away.

"I'll come back when I've finished the translation."

After she was gone, he cursed the Dark Lord, the founders, Severus, anyone that came to mind. If there was one thing he detested, it was losing control and that's exactly what was happening to him.

A/N: I hope that you are enjoying the story. I have it pinned down to 24 chapters and an epilogue, which is nearly complete. As long as I remember, I'll be updating this rather frequently.

I'd like to thank Mimy for being my beta and nota and Giton for providing a sounding board for my ideas.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Chapter 20

A/N: Many thanks to Bitter Pearl who has signed on as my new beta for this story. Also, thanks to Mimy who continues to provide valuable assistance.

I thought I would start this chapter with a note to prevent confusion on the Horcrux search. Currently, five of the seven (diary, ring, locket, cup, and Ravenclaw dagger) have been found and destroyed. As of Christmas, there were three left. Somewhere between Christmas and the quest for the dagger, another unspecified Horcrux was found and destroyed, the details of which I never revealed.

Now, on with the story.

Hermione slammed shut the book, hiding the offending parchment from sight, glad to be done with it. It had taken a lot of effort to translate the runes. Not due to the difficulty of the runes, but because of the repugnant nature of the subject. She had known that this was a book of Dark Magic and had thought she was prepared for what she would find. The rune pages had contained some very disturbing Blood Spells; ones that made her stomach turn. She didn't see how any of them could help their situation. She could barely bring herself to read about them, let alone imagine performing any of them.

Now that she had finished the translation, she decided to return the book to Lucius. Never before had she been so eager to have a book out of her hands.

When she entered his room, she shoved the book at him. "Take it." Once he had hold of the book, she began wiping her hands on her robe, as though trying to clean the taint.

He set the book on the desk and moved toward her to comfort her. "Is something wrong?"

"That that book...it's horrible." She still felt dirty, as though all the water in the world would not wash away the filth.

He wrapped his arms around her. "All Dark Magic is ugly. Once you become accustomed to that fact..."

"Accustomed to it? Are you used to things like *that*?" The thought that anyone could grow comfortable dealing with that sort of magic disturbed her.

"You misunderstood me. I was not referring to becoming accustomed to the magic; I was referring to the idea there is ugliness in the world, and that it cannot always be avoided."

She felt slightly better now that she was in his presence, though she was still concerned about his casual attitude toward Dark Magic. "Perhaps you can tell me how any of that might be useful. I couldn't, but then again, I don't want to think about what's in those pages."

"Dobby," he called and waited for the house-elf to arrive. "Some tea for Miss Granger."

"Yes, sir," Dobby replied before disappearing.

Once the tea service arrived, he poured her a cup. "Drink this while I take a look at what you've translated." He sat at the desk, opened the book, and perused the parchment on which she had written the translation.

"Ah, Blood Magic. That would explain a great deal. This could indeed be useful." He began skimming the pages, trying to determine where to focus his attention first.

"You're familiar with it?" she asked in a voice filled with disapproval.

"It is the most powerful form of Dark Magic. I don't know if you are aware, but this is the type of magic that allowed the Dark Lord to return."

"And you've done it before?"

He looked up from the parchment and replied, "Do you really want me to answer that question?"

After thinking for a few seconds, she replied, "No." While she was curious to see how any of those spells might be useful, she couldn't bring herself to go near that book or the information it contained. Quietly, she drank her tea while waiting for him to read through the information. After a few minutes, she asked, "Have you found anything?"

"The language is archaic, and it will take some time for me to fully comprehend all the information." He turned to face her. "You look exhausted. Why don't you lie down and get some rest while I read through this?"

"I want to know if it can help," she protested.

He rose from his seat, leaving the book at the desk, and took hold of her hand. "It will be several hours before I have digested everything on those few pages." Leading her to the bed, he continued, "The rest will do you good. I can tell that you have been working on this for quite some time." Being this close to her, he found he was having a hard time controlling his desires. What difference would a few hours make? He stretched out next to her, showering her with lazy kisses.

"Didn't you want to read the translation?" she asked, even though she found she couldn't keep her hands off him.

He laced his fingers in her hair. "I believe we can afford a short break," he said silkily before smothering her with a passionate kiss.

The door burst open. "Hermione!" Ron froze just inside the door. "What in Merlin's name!"

"Good evening, Mr. Weasley. How may we assist you?" Lucius replied smoothly as he propped his head on his elbow.

Hermione noticed that Ron had not moved from the door. "Ron, what did you need?"

"We, that is, Harry and I found the last Horcrux, and we need your help." Ron kept glancing suspiciously at Malfoy even though he was talking to Hermione.

"What sort of help?" Hermione asked. She was now sitting up and fully attentive, unaware of the protective manner Lucius held her.

Ron tried addressing Hermione, but was distracted by Lucius' behavior. "Well, er, we tried to go after it, but we couldn't figure out how to get to it. Do you have to do that?" he snapped at Lucius. When he received a confused look from Lucius, he continued, "Would you stop touching her like that?"

Lucius removed his hand.

Hermione ignored the two of them. "So you need me to help you get past whatever's protecting it?"

"Yeah. Harry and I tried everything we know, but none of it would work."

"All right. When do we leave?"

"Right away." When Lucius started following them, Ron stopped. "You aren't coming."

"You do not have a choice in this matter," Lucius replied smugly.

"He's right. He has to come. I can't do magic if he's not around." She hadn't given her disability much thought until now. Given this revelation, she was starting to have doubts about going with Harry and Ron. She knew what would happen to Lucius if the Death Eaters caught him.

"Harry's not going to be happy," Ron muttered, as he left the room.

Lucius grabbed his cloak and placed his arm around her. "Are you all right?"

"I'm just a little nervous. I don't want them to find you."

"I would think that with the four of us, we prevent anyone from getting captured."

They met Harry outside the castle, having exited through a side door so as not to draw unwanted attention.

"What is the Horcrux?" Hermione asked.

"What's he doing here?" growled Harry.

"He has to come. Remember?" replied Ron sarcastically.

Harry scowled at Lucius momentarily before deciding to ignore him. "Dumbledore had said that the hat and the sword were the only two remaining Gryffindor artifacts. I've found evidence that there was something else, a small griffin. Ron and I found an abandoned Druid temple in Wales, and we think it's in there, but we can't figure out where exactly. That's why we need you. You have to translate the runes."

Lucius scowled. He knew that the Dark Lord had been disdainful of the Druids due to the relationship they had had with the Muggles of their time. He wondered why the Horcrux would be hidden in such a spot. "Have you considered this might be a trap?"

"Since we've been there already and nothing happened, I think that proves it's not a trap."

Lucius assumed Snape had likely planted the information Potter had found, and that the information had provided in the past had been reliable, but he could not suppress the uneasy feeling he had. He knew that Snape's loyalty was as fickle as his. "Of course. It was merely a precaution on my part in case the Dark Lord knows you have learned about this particular artifact." Even though the others seemed at ease, he would remain vigilant.

The four of them quickly made their way across the castle grounds past the protective wards so they could Apparate. Harry pulled out a map and showed them their destination. "Now that you know where we are going, Ron, you go with Malfoy, and I'll go with Hermione."

"I *will* travel with Hermione, not Mr. Weasley," replied Lucius.

"Did anyone ask you?" retorted Harry.

"Harry, he's right. I need to go with him. We know that our magic doesn't react well to us being separated. I would hate for us to land in the middle of something and find both of us are useless," said Hermione.

Harry looked between the Hermione and Lucius before relenting, "Fine. You go with Malfoy," he said to Hermione.

She reached out and took hold of Lucius' hand before Apparating them to their destination.

The four of them were standing in a clearing staring at a circle of Druid runes.

"Over here," Harry announced as he led them to tunnel.

Lucius looked about nervously. He was not sure what it was about this situation that bothered him, but something did. He held his wand at the ready as he descended into the underground chamber. While Harry showed Hermione the runes on the back wall, Lucius continuously scanned the room, paying particular attention to the tunnel.

"This might take a little while," Hermione said.

Lucius didn't like the idea of being confined underground. "I'll stand guard outside," he offered as he started toward the tunnel.

"Oh, no you don't. You're going to stay right here where we can keep an eye on you," Harry ordered.

"And what am I going to do? If I get too far from her, I am useless," Lucius asked pointedly.

Harry pointed his wand at Lucius. "You're going to stay here with us."

Lucius continued scanning the room, straining to hear anything unusual. "Out of curiosity, why are none of the adult members of the Order here?" This question had been bothering him for some time. From what he had learned about the Horcrux quest, Potter was the only one pursuing it in earnest. He knew that at least Remus was aware of the search, but he did not remember any of the other adults speaking of it. He found it odd that something so important would be left to one as emotional as Potter.

Harry glared at him and refused to answer.

Lucius continued, "Would not your search might be more successful if you had someone with a little more experience assisting? I realize it would be difficult for Professor McGonagall to get away from Hogwarts, but you also have Mr. Lupin and Mr. Moody at your disposal, both very capable wizards."

"Are you saying I'm not capable?" Harry asked angrily.

"Not at all. I'm simply asking why such a dangerous and important task is being accomplished by so few." He realized this was a volatile line of inquiry.

Before Harry could answer, Hermione started speaking and a door opened on the back wall.

"Come on," ordered Harry.

Lucius did not want to enter the new room. He still did not like being in this first room. "I am not going in that room."

Harry brandished his wand. "Yes, you are."

Lucius decided to stand his ground. "No. I am not. Someone has to stay here to keep an eye on the entrance. I do not like this situation."

"Harry, let's just hurry up and get the Horcrux so we can go," said Hermione. She didn't want to waste time with a needless argument.

"Ron, keep an eye on him," Harry said.

"Right," replied Ron as he leveled his wand at the older man.

Lucius watched Harry and Hermione disappear through the doorway. After they were gone, he once again moved toward the tunnel to the outside.

"Where do you think you're going?" Ron asked as he noticed Lucius moving slowly up the tunnel.

"We are too confined in here."

"The Death Eaters don't know we're here. It's fine."

Lucius strained his ears, trying to determine if he heard anything from outside.

Harry and Hermione came running out of the back room, Harry carrying the statue. "We've got it!"

"Excellent, we can leave now," said Lucius.

As they made their way up the tunnel and back outside, Lucius could feel the hair on the back of his neck standing up. There was something wrong. He stopped at the top of the ramp to look around, but Ron shoved him outside.

"Quit being nervous. No one knows we're here," Ron insisted.

Lucius spun about, looking for the source of his discomfort. After so many years dealing with Dark Magic, he had developed a sense of when it was being used in his presence, and he had that feeling now. "We should leave," he whispered.

Harry and the others had looked around the area, and could see nothing unusual. "I want to destroy the Horcrux first; make sure we haven't been fooled with a fake." He walked to a stone slab lying on the ground and set the griffin down.

Lucius remained nearby, trying to determine from which direction the attack could possibly come.

As soon as Harry began the incantation to destroy the Horcrux, Lucius saw a flash of red as a Stunner flew at them. He was able to block the spell and shoved Hermione toward the protection of the stone circle. "Take cover!" he yelled as he dove away from the attack. "Hermione! Get out of here!"

She crouched beside him, looking for their attackers. "I'm not leaving without you. You'll be helpless if I leave."

"Quit being brave. Take the statue and leave. That is the most important thing. Potter, give her the statue." Lucius flinched as it felt like he had been hit by a spell. Looking around, he could see that he was not exposed. He noticed Hermione rubbing her arm in the same spot.

"Hermione?"

"I'm fine. I don't know what it was, but I'm fine."

He would have liked to dwell on this strange occurrence, but hexes were flying overhead. "We need to move. Since they know where we are, they will surround us if they have not already done so." He started moving along the embankment, and he could hear Harry protesting, but didn't stop. They hesitantly followed him.

As they made their way to a more secure location, Lucius tried to determine whom they were facing. It was obviously Death Eaters, but if he could determine which ones, he could exploit their weaknesses.

Once behind the relative safety of the temple stones, the four continued trying to keep their attackers at bay. "Someone needs to remove the statue from here," Lucius said between hexes.

"Hermione, you take it," ordered Harry.

"I'm not going. You need me here. Send Ron back," she protested

"I'm not leaving," Ron insisted.

"I'm better than you at Defense Against the Dark Arts. It makes sense that you are the one to go back. Just because I'm a girl doesn't mean I can't defend myself," she replied before launching a hex at a Death Eater that was rushing the temple.

"They outnumber us. We need a large distraction so we can all escape," Lucius said. He knew that Apparating while repelling hexes would be impossible.

"You aren't in charge here!" growled Harry.

Lucius was growing exasperated. He was an expert in Death Eater tactics, and he was being ignored. It took a great deal of self-control for him to resist hexing Harry.

"Hey, look at that!" shouted Ron.

They all looked out across the clearing and saw a young girl. Lucius had a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. He knew what the child was, but from his position, he couldn't get a clear shot at her. "Stop her!"

Without thinking, Ron launched a Stunner at her. Both Lucius and Hermione were knocked off their feet. "She's still coming!" Ron shouted and prepared to launch another.

Lucius struggled to find his voice. "NO!" he croaked, but it was too late. As the Stunner hit the child, he was knocked to the ground, and out of the corner of his eye, he could see Hermione lying motionless. "Stop! You're hurting Hermione."

Harry looked toward Hermione and saw her lying prone, Lucius crawling to her side. "What's going on?"

"We need to leave. Now!" Lucius barked. He pulled Hermione to him and gathered his remaining strength in the hopes of Apparating her away.

A/N2: Mwahahaha! You had to know it was coming. How could I not leave you with a nasty cliffhanger. Once this story shifted more to an action and less of a pure romance, it really lent itself quite nicely to cliffhangers. I promise not to make you wait too long for the next chapter.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Chapter 21

Lucius fell to the ground as soon as he arrived at his destination. He lay there for several seconds, ensuring that he had not splinched himself. Once he was sure that he had been successful, he rolled over to check Hermione. She was likewise whole, though still unconscious. Knowing they were not far from the Druid temple, he brushed her cheek and whispered, "Hermione, can you hear me? Darling, please, wake up." She moaned softly, and he took this as a good sign. "We have to leave. I need you to come back to me."

"Lucius?" she asked groggily.

He smiled at her, pleased to be looking into her warm brown eyes. "I would never leave you. How do you feel?"

She tried to sit, and only managed it with his assistance. "Weak. What happened?"

"I am not entirely sure. I have a theory, but I would prefer to wait before I share it with you. I'm sure Potter and Weasley will be quite interested. Do you think you can Apparate?"

"I don't think so."

Knowing it was not wise to remain in the open, he made his decision. He knew that he could not Apparate them both to Hogwarts, but they were close enough to Wiltshire that he felt confident he could get to his manor. He helped her to her feet and protectively wrapped his arms around her. "Hold on."

Hermione looked around as she recognized the grand foyer of Malfoy's manor. "How?"

"Later, darling. Gupper!" he called as he led her to the receiving room. When the elf arrived, he ordered, "Have tea and sandwiches sent up immediately. You will then go to the Hogwarts main gate and wait for Mr. Weasley. Tell him that I have Miss Granger here, and that he and Mr. Potter are welcome to join us." He could not believe he was saying that, but he knew they would come whether they were welcome or not.

Once he examined her in the light of the receiving room, he saw that she was terribly pale. When the tea arrived, he turned to the house-elf. "Find some Invigorating Draught."

"Master, we is not having any," the elf replied nervously.

"Then go find some," he growled.

"You shouldn't yell at them," she whispered.

"It's for you. You don't look well." He handed her a cup of tea.

"You don't look so good, either," she replied. "What happened?"

"Blood Magic happened. I have not yet had time to dwell on it."

"That girl. That was..." she found she couldn't finish the sentence.

He brushed the tears from her cheeks. Now that his adrenalin was dissipating, he found that his strength went with it. "She is."

"He he..." She found that she couldn't control the tears.

He set the teacup on the table and wrapped his arms around her. "As I feared, she has become a weapon. When we return to Hogwarts, I will search for a solution in the pages you translated. Perhaps those pages will compliment what I have learned in the rest of the book." He could feel her crying into his shoulder and found that he was having a hard time controlling his emotions. This was not at all what he had anticipated happening when he had decided that she would be his wife.

Weasley and Potter came running into the room. "What are you doing here?" demanded Potter.

"She was too weak to Apparate. I knew that had I tried to take us both to Hogwarts, we would end up splinched. Why so concerned? I sent my house-elf to tell you exactly what had happened." He was frustrated with the level of distrust the two youths continued to show him after he had proven repeatedly that he was trustworthy.

"What did you do to her?" demanded Ron.

"Nothing." He found he did not have the strength to argue. "When you attacked that child, you were attacking our child. The Dark Lord has invoked some sort of Blood Magic. Did you not find it odd that when you hit the child with a Stunner, it had no effect?"

"A little, but she could have blocked it," replied Harry.

Hermione was listening intently.

"She was not blocking the spells. The energy of those spells was dissipated to the two of us. That is why we were both knocked down when you hit the child with a Stunner."

"But that would mean..."

"Very good, Mr. Weasley. While that child is our daughter, I fear that she is not herself anymore. The magic that birthed her likely destroyed her soul. She is a tool of the Dark Lord, and he did everything in his power to safeguard her. Any spell that you attack her with, will harm the two of us. I suspect that if you tried to kill her with magic, the two of us would die. You must inform that Order not to hurt the child."

"Fine. Can you break the connection?" Harry asked.

"I have no idea. Perhaps in the book back at Hogwarts. I have no familiarity with this magic."

Harry looked to Hermione.

She shook her head. "I haven't seen anything on this sort of magic. This isn't the type of thing I normally read about."

"We need to get you back to Hogwarts," Harry said.

"We need time to recover, first. She is in no condition to travel."

Hermione tried to stand. "I can make..." She fell back to the sofa before she could finish her sentence.

"We will return in the morning. You may stay the night." He wanted to carry her up to bed, but he could not trust his strength.

The house-elf returned. "Master, Ippy has found the potion you was asking for." Timidly, the elf held out a bottle.

"What potion is that?" Harry asked suspiciously.

"Invigorating Draught. I will take some first to reassure you that it is not poison." He poured some into an empty teacup. Reassured the elf had procured the correct potion, he poured some for Hermione. "Drink this." As he watched her, he could feel his strength returning. Once she finished drinking her dose, he said, "Come. Let me take you upstairs so you can rest."

"I'll take her," Ron said.

Harry raised his wand at Lucius. "Since you're feeling better, I'll lock you in your room."

"Really, Mr. Potter. I have been unsupervised for weeks. If I was going to cause havoc or report back to the Death Eaters, I would have done so. There is no need to be so terse."

"How do I know you haven't tried? You just don't know how to get through the wards at Hogwarts."

He sighed. "As you wish." As they walked upstairs, he said, "You do realize that we are betrothed, don't you? When this is all over we are to be married. I would think that if she trusts me, you would likewise adopt that trust."

Harry spun Malfoy to face him. "Take that back. You aren't marrying Hermione."

"I believe that is her decision. I have provided you with invaluable information, I saved her life, and I have been named a Hogwarts protector. What more do I need to do to earn your trust?"

"Die," Harry replied maliciously.

"How cliché. I assure you, I do not have the Gryffindor trait of noble self sacrifice." He continued on to his room, leaving Potter to follow in his wake.

"Yet you expect us to trust you."

"I will do everything in my power to keep you alive to fulfill the prophecy. My knowledge and my library are at the disposal of the Order. Destroy the Dark Lord. Follow your destiny."

Harry burst into Hermione's room. "Tell me you aren't marrying Malfoy!"

"You're what?" asked Ron.

"Harry..." she said gently.

"What sort of potion has he given you?"

"I've already told you that he hasn't given me any potion. I love him for who he is."

"How can you love him? Look how much trouble he's caused for you," argued Harry.

"I'm not going to get into this with the two of you. You are both too pig-headed to see that people can change. It's my life and I'll do what I want."

"But, Hermione, this is *Malfoy* we're talking about. What could you possibly see in someone like him?" asked Ron.

"Believe it or not, but he's actually a very nice man. He's never treated me harshly, is supportive of my ambitions and is quite romantic."

Ron and Harry looked like they were going to be ill. Harry asked, "Have you considered that he might want something from you?"

"You saw him when I was in the hospital." She had heard from Ginny and Molly how concerned Lucius had been about her. "We love each other and we will get married. Now, if the two of you will leave, I'd like to get some rest. Oh, one of you needs to get to the word out to the others about our child."

Harry and Ron glanced at each other for several seconds before Ron said, "I'll go."

She rolled over, hoping that with her back to the two of them, they would take the hint and leave.

Lucius paced his room. Events of the evening were keeping him awake. First of all, he was still concerned about Hermione. The attack on their daughter had affected her worse than him. The second was his daughter. The Dark Lord had invoked some sort of Blood Magic. He was almost sure they would need her blood to counteract the spell. The third seemed inconsequential, but he was tired of the lack of trust he was shown by Potter and Weasley. He feared that they would be successful in converting Hermione back to their side.

Lying on the bed, he tried to will himself to sleep, but sleep eluded him. No matter how hard he tried, he could not calm his mind.

Just as he was drifting to sleep, he heard his doorknob turning. Not knowing whom it was, he rolled from bed and held his wand at the ready.

"Lucius?" Hermione asked quietly as she slowly opened the door.

Lighting the lamps, he rose from his crouch and crossed the room to greet her. "How are you feeling?" he asked as he led her to the sofa. Once she was seated, he poured a couple of drinks and handed her one.

"Much better, thank you." She accepted the glass and took a sip, making a face at the bitterness of the liquid. She tried to hand the glass back.

He gently pushed it back to her. "Drink it. You will feel better."

She took a few more small sips before asking, "Our daughter how did he do that to her? If it's Blood Magic, wouldn't he have needed blood from both us?"

"He would. Yours would have been easy to obtain."

"But what about yours?" she interrupted.

"The Dark Lord likes to ensure the loyalty of his followers. After he returned, he took blood from each of us. As soon as he learned I was the father, I'm sure he used my blood. It would give him an opportunity to not only rid himself of one of Mr. Potter's closest confidants, but the traitor as well."

"Do you think you can find a solution?"

He could hear the nervousness and fear in her voice. "I am assuming that Severus gave us that book because it has the needed information. I hope that the way to break the bond is in there."

"And then we'll have our child back?" she asked hopefully.

He pulled her into a tight embrace. "Her soul is corrupted, if it even exists anymore."

"So there's no hope for her?"

He could feel her tears soaking the shoulder of his pajamas. "I do not know, but I am not optimistic."

She started sobbing. "I don't want to be alone tonight."

Leading her to the bed, he wrapped his arms protectively about her and pulled her close, finding comfort in her presence. He wished he could tell her that everything would be all right, but it would be a lie. All he could do was be there for her.

After returning to Hogwarts, Lucius immediately began reading through the translated pages, hoping for a solution. Potter and Weasley had been quite upset to find Hermione in his room that morning, but she had told them to 'stuff a sock in it' and ignored them. He was incredibly proud of her for that and hoped that she would try to win them over to his side.

It took him the entire morning to read through the translations. Some of it didn't seem to make sense, and he made note of several areas to bring up with Hermione. He knew she did not want to deal with this book any further, but it was necessary.

The one thing he had learned was that the book was not at all written in a coherent fashion. There were some ruin passages that belonged with other parts of the book, and even those parts written in English did not flow smoothly. He knew that many Dark Magic books were purposefully cryptic, but this one was definitely more so than any he had encountered previously.

He called Dobby and sent a message with the elf that he needed to see Hermione at her earliest convenience.

Hermione burst into Lucius' room mid-afternoon. "Have you found an answer?"

He could see the look of anguish on her face. "Unfortunately, no. I have spent the morning going through the book, and it was not written chronologically. That's why little of

it makes sense. I have started searching for clues to link passages together, but I had a few questions on your translation." Holding the book, he walked toward her.

She backed away. "I can't. I can't look at that book again."

"Darling, I know how difficult it must be for you, but it is necessary," he said gently. Setting the book on the table, he wrapped her protectively in his arms. "I cannot do this without you. Our lives depend on it."

She sniffed. "I know. It's just so horrible. I can't stand to look at it. It makes me feel dirty."

"You don't have to look through all of it. I have marked the passages in question. Once you have finished, I can work on my own."

After a few seconds, she pulled away and moved to the sofa. "Okay. What do you need help with?"

He opened the book. "This is the first passage. Let me get my notes."

As she worked on retranslating the passages in question, he moved to the desk to work on organizing his notes, hoping the distance would make it possible for them to work. He still did not understand how the magic that bound them to their child also resulted in the nearly uncontrollable passions they felt when near each other.

The two of them worked until dinner. They only knew it was dinner when Dobby brought it to them.

Lucius reached over and closed the book. "That will be good enough. I believe I can sort through the rest of it."

"Are you sure? I mean, I can stay and help."

"That's quite all right. I know how much this book disturbs you. You have cleared up the questions I had. I will devote my time to organizing the passages. I will notify you as soon as I have an answer. Now, we should eat before it gets cold."

After dinner, he sent Hermione away so he could work on the book. With her in the room, he had found it difficult to concentrate.

Hermione had not had time to see Lucius in the days following their return. She had been helping Harry try to determine where Voldemort was hiding. He was determined to do away with his nemesis as soon as possible. Unfortunately, they had been unable to learn anything. No one in the Order had learned anything from any of the captured Death Eaters. She had suggested they ask Lucius, but her recommendation had been turned down. Harry was determined not to accept anything else from the man.

When she finally found time to see if Lucius had learned anything, she found parchment strewn everywhere in his room. There were now several long thin tables along the walls, and on those tables were scraps of paper. "What's going on?"

"Ah, Hermione. Good to see you. I've been going through the book, copying out passages and trying to arrange them in a manner that will aid us."

She noticed that his clothes were disheveled and his hair looked unkempt. "Have you been getting any sleep?"

"Not much. This has been all consuming. These two tables contain the most relevant information. There are still a few passages missing, but it's nearly complete."

"And what have you learned?"

"We must capture her. Once we have her captured, we will have to perform Blood Magic on her. Something similar to what the Dark Lord used to bind her to us." He moved to the end of the table. "Once that binding is broken, I have found the spell to vanquish her."

"Are you sure there is no other choice? She's a child. I can't just kill a child."

"Hermione, she was taken from us. As soon as the Dark Lord cast that spell on you when you were his prisoner, she was lost to us. Her soul is gone, replaced with something Dark and corrupt. That cannot be undone."

She turned away from him. "Then you'll just have to take care of that."

Placing his hands on her shoulders to quell her fear, he said, "I can't do it alone. We both have to perform this magic."

"And if I don't?"

He sighed. "Would you condemn her to an existence similar to that of an Inferi?"

She shuddered. "You aren't serious, are you?"

"Very much so. She is gone. You must stop thinking of her as our daughter. She is a servant of the Dark Lord. Though, unlike the others, she cannot be permitted to survive. There is no chance of rehabilitation."

Ron burst into the room. "They've found her. She seems to be leading an attack in Liverpool. We need to go."

"Everyone knows not to hurt her, right?" asked Hermione.

"Yeah, I told them. Have you figured out how to capture her?"

"We have a plan, sort of," she replied. She was used to always having the answer, but this time, she did not.

"That's great. Let's go."

Hermione clutched Lucius' hand briefly before releasing it and following Ron.

A/N: I know, I'm evil. It's really not me, it's the muses and the plot bunnies taking over. I had no visions of being this dark when I started writing this one.

As always, thanks to Mimy for beta reading and Giton and nota for continuing to be my sounding boards for ideas. The three of them have helped me make this story what it is.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Chapter 22

No one looked pleased when Hermione outlined the plan she and Lucius had devised.

"That's it? You expect to go into a mob of Death Eaters and be able to just strike her on the back of the head?" Harry asked incredulously.

Lucius could no longer control his irritation. "If you had paid attention, you would have noticed that everyone has the responsibility to isolate her so that capturing her will be possible."

"Why you?" asked Harry.

"Because I have to survive. Without me, that child will continue to live. You do your part, I'll do mine."

"We don't have any more time to waste," Moody said.

Lucius noticed that Moody always seemed to keep at least one eye on him. He was grateful to have the argument stopped before it could really start. In times like these, he could hardly believe that Potter was to be the savior of the wizarding world.

Lacing his fingers with Hermione's, he gave her a reassuring squeeze before they departed. While they had assembled more than twenty Order members, he had the feeling it might not be enough. Normally, the Dark Lord liked to send small numbers of his minions on raids, but he had the impression this would be something different. He had expressed his belief this was a trap and found it was one that Moody shared. Unfortunately, they had no choice but to spring the trap.

When they arrived, they found that the fighting was raging in a Muggle area of the city. Most of the Muggles had fled or were injured, but the gang of Death Eaters was searching out new victims. Aurors were Apparating to the area, trying to control the Death Eaters.

"How are we going to find her?" asked Hermione as she ducked down an alley.

"She should be at the center of the action." Looking around, he realized they had already been separated from the others. "Stay very close. It will be safer if we stay together."

"Right." She followed close behind as he moved through the alley towards the sound of the fighting. After they had ducked through many alleys and carefully hid from sight, she asked, "Shouldn't we be doing something to help our side?"

"We can't draw attention to ourselves. If someone recognizes me... Well, you know what they will do to me. I would not be surprised if they don't expect me to be here, but I don't want to advertise my presence."

"I know, but we could move faster if we reduced their forces."

"Perhaps. We discussed that stealth would be our best weapon." He continued scanning the surroundings, searching for danger.

"But if she's protected like you seem to think, we will have to fight."

"Only when it is unavoidable." He took her by the hand and pulled her behind a car.

As they moved closer to the center of the fighting, they were forced to attack some of the Death Eaters.

"We could Apparate in small steps," Hermione offered.

"No. They could find us from the noise and the ripple the magic causes. And we would be temporarily disoriented. It's safer to make our way like this."

She wanted to ask about the ripple Apparition caused, but this was not the time for that sort of academic discussion. In the distance, she could hear familiar voices and fought against the urge to help them. "We must be getting close," she whispered.

"Yes."

She noticed Lucius was staring in the distance, as though trying to hear something. "What is it?"

"Magic has a signature of sorts. For lack of a better word, I am *listening* for her signature. If I am close enough, and she is using her magic, I should be able to find her."

This was something Hermione was not familiar with, but she assumed it was a learned skill that manifested itself with practice. "Which way?"

"I'm not sure, yet." He pulled her toward another alley.

After another ten minutes, Hermione was worrying they were running out of time. She doubled over in pain.

"The Aurors. They don't know. We must hurry." He pulled her along, forcing her to ignore the pain. "This way," he said confidently.

As they peered around a corner, they could see their child pinned down by several Aurors. They didn't see any members of the Order in the area. This was a doubly dangerous situation for Lucius. Both the Death Eaters and the Aurors would attack him if he were seen. "I can't get close her. It has to be you," he said.

"But I can't hit her. She's just a child."

"Hermione. You can. It is our only option. I have faith in you. From here, it should be easy to sneak behind her. Strike her swiftly on the back of the head. Once that's done, Apparate her back to Hogwarts. I'll join you."

"Lucius..." She grunted as she felt the effect of another spell.

"You must hurry." He gently shoved her away.

She moved down the street, trying to hide in the debris. Trying to avoid notice, it took her longer than anticipated to get close the child. There were a couple of Death Eaters in her way, and she could tell that she had no choice but to attack first. Aware that this would draw attention, she prepared to move quickly, hoping to be at her destination before anyone realized how close she was to them.

Lucius watched as Hermione picked her way down the street. She wasn't always in his view, but most of the time, she was. At one point, he saw one of the Aurors moving into position to attack the child, and he risked giving away his position to stun the man. If a spell were to hit her, it could prove fatal to both him and Hermione.

When she was nearly there, an Auror hit the child. As soon as he recovered from the blow, he tried to find Hermione and saw her lying unconscious on the ground. He could see multiple Aurors moving in, and he knew they would continue to attack the child. Realizing there was only one action he could take, he started attacking the Aurors as he sprinted for the child, hoping to take her by surprise. He knew that word he attacked Aurors would get back to the others, but it was his only option.

Without thinking he rushed forward, stunning Aurors as he ran. Thankfully, they were not expecting an attack from his direction. The child was suitably distracted by the other action that he was able to move behind her and strike her on the head, knocking her unconscious. He gave a quick glance toward where Hermione had fallen, but knew he had to leave the area immediately, and there was no way he could Apparate all three of them. With a heavy heart, he departed for Hogwarts, hoping the Aurors or the Order would get to Hermione before the Death Eaters.

Arriving at the Hogwarts main gate, he realized he had a problem. He did not know how to get through the protective wards. And even if he did, it was unlikely he had the ability. Looking down at the unconscious child, he examined her features. While she had Hermione's bushy hair, it was dark blonde rather than brown. And she had the pointed Malfoy nose. He brushed his hand against her cheek, wishing circumstances were different, that he could have raised her from birth.

"What are you doing here in the open?"

Lucius spun on the voice, wand at the ready, and saw Snape. "Severus? What are you doing here?"

Severus saw the small shape clutched to Lucius' chest. "Ah! You've come to destroy the abomination. Why are you waiting out here?"

"Because I can't get through the gates. You do realize they are locked," he sneered.

"I would have thought they would give you access."

"Of course not. They tolerate me, not trust me. Now, what are you doing here?" Lucius was getting irritated by the word games Severus liked to play.

"I noticed that you did not return to your manor, so I came here."

"Why?"

"In case you required assistance. I believe the magic you need to perform involves a rather complex potion, and while you performed adequately in Potions, I believe this is beyond your capability." Severus moved toward the gate, casting several spells in an attempt to unlock the gate. None of them worked. "You should return to your manor."

"It won't do any good. All the information I need is in the castle." Lucius leaned against the gate and heard a barely perceptible 'click'. Experimentally, he turned the handle and was surprised when the gate opened.

"How in Merlin's name?" asked Severus.

Lucius quickly moved through the gate. "I don't know, but I will accept this good fortune." He didn't care whether or not Severus followed him. He had to get the child to the castle and restrained before she regained consciousness. As he hurried up the path, he began to suspect that his position as Hogwarts Protector might have something to do with his ability to open the gates. The school was a repository of much ancient and forgotten magic.

He started to head up the stairs toward his room. Severus stopped him. "This way. It would be better to imprison her in the dungeon where I will have easy access to potions ingredients. You can get your notes after she is secure."

Rather than start an argument that might draw attention, he followed.

Severus unlocked what had been his private workroom and was quite pleased to find it had not changed. With a wave of his wand, he cleared off a worktable, and Lucius set the child on it. He then started gathering what he would need to start the base of the potion.

"Aren't you going to restrain her?" Lucius asked.

"Why don't you do it?"

"Courtesy of the Dark Lord's marvelous spell, I am unable to use magic unless Hermione is nearby. As she is not here, I cannot conjure restraints." It pained him to admit this, but he had no choice.

"And where is Granger?" Severus asked as he restrained the child and cast a spell to keep her from performing magic.

"I was forced to leave her in Liverpool." Realizing the traipsing through the castle was probably not the best idea, he called out, "Dobby!"

"Yes, sir. You are calling Dobby?"

Severus raised an eyebrow, but said nothing.

"Yes. I need you to do two things. First, I need you to collect all the notes on the desk in my room and bring them here. Second, I need you to look for the return of Miss Granger, Professor McGonagall, Potter or Weasley. You need to tell them where we are."

"Yes, sir," Dobby replied and popped out of the room. In a few minutes, he returned with the notes and left for the main gate.

Lucius shuffled through the notes, looking for the pages Severus needed to start the potion.

The door banged open, "What's going on... Malfoy? Snape?" exclaimed a very confused Slughorn.

Acting quickly, Severus cast a body-bind on Slughorn. Realizing that they could not let him go, he levitated Slughorn into an out of the way corner.

Lucius took away the man's wand. "Sorry to do this to you, old chap, but you really should have been less nosy." He could see the look of fear in the old man's eyes. "Don't worry. We aren't Death Eaters any longer. Once the others are here to explain the situation to you, we'll release you. Unfortunately, we can't have you raising the alarm."

"Hermione, can you hear me?"

Hermione heard the voice, and she thought it sounded like it was off in the distance. As it continued to call her name, she focused on it, following it back to consciousness.

"I think she's coming around," said a second voice.

Slowly, she opened her eyes and was pleasantly surprised to find that it wasn't too bright. "What?"

"Hermione! Are you okay?"

She could see that Ron and Harry were at her sides. "I'm not sure."

"Can you move?" Ron asked.

After experimentally moving her hands and feet, she tried to sit up and was overcome with a wave of dizziness. Thankfully, it passed quickly. "I'm starting to feel better."

"Where's Malfoy?" asked Harry.

"I...don't know. He was back there," she pointed over her shoulder. "I don't know what happened after I was knocked out."

An Auror approached them. "Excuse me? I heard you mention Malfoy? Do you know where he might be?"

"Why?" Hermione asked cautiously.

"He attacked several Aurors before the fighting died down."

Harry gave Hermione an 'I told you so' look.

"No, we don't know where he is," Hermione responded.

The Auror walked away without saying anything else.

"He's run back to them," Harry growled.

"Harry, please. If he hasn't run back to the Death Eaters by now, he isn't going to. I'm sure he went back to Hogwarts. I mean, the fighting stopped so he must have got to her."

Harry frowned as he helped Hermione to his feet. "You have entirely too much faith in him. Let's see if he did go back. Ron, we'll meet you there." After Ron left, he looked to Hermione. "Ready?"

She nodded. "Ready." Holding tight, she felt a nearly overwhelming wave of nausea from the Side-Along Apparition. She could hear Dobby talking to Ron, but couldn't make out the words.

Ron turned to face them. "Hurry up. Malfoy's here and so's Snape."

"Snape! That bastard. I'll kill him."

"Harry, no! Remember, he's been helping. Please, be calm and logical." Ron was already through the gate and Harry was running after. She realized there was no way she could keep up. "Ron, Harry! Please, wait up. I can't run right now."

The two of them look annoyed at her, but waited and walked with her.

"Dobby says they are down in the dungeon. He didn't know what they were doing because Malfoy sent him out here to wait for us," Ron explained.

Hermione offered, "He's probably working on the potion needed to break the connection. If Snape's with him, it would make sense that they went to the dungeon. No one was ever able to get into his office after he left."

Lucius stood watch over the child. It was better than meeting Slughorn's gaze. After several minutes, he began to wonder if Slughorn's stare would be the better option. The more he looked at his child, the more he imagined how things might have been, and he realized he was making the whole process more difficult. Unconscious, she looked innocent and peaceful. She looked normal, even though he knew she was far from normal.

Abruptly, her eyes snapped open and focused on his. He noticed they were the same steel grey as his.

"He said you would come for me, Father," she said in a voice that sounded far too mature for her child-sized body. "He hoped that I would be the instrument of your destruction. He is right. You cannot destroy me. Hurting me will only hurt you, but I think you know that already." She flashed him a cruel grin.

He refused to dignify her taunting with a reply.

"You always thought you were so smart. You lied to stay out of prison. You pretended to be loyal. Oh yes, he knows it was an act. One you proved when you turned against him again. I am the instrument of your destruction. I will cleanse the Malfoy blood of the taint you have given it. I will be raised to a high place in the new order."

"Severus, shut her up!" Lucius barked.

"Yes, my impotent father can't cast the smallest of spells." She didn't get to finish as Severus gagged her.

Lucius paced, trying to avoid looking at the child and Slughorn. Unfortunately, that was virtually impossible in the tight confines of the room. He spun to face the door when he heard it open.

Harry, Ron and Hermione were standing in the doorway. The boys had their wands drawn.

"What are you doing here?" Harry demanded of Snape. "And what did you do to Professor Slughorn?"

"I am here to assist with the brewing of the potion, though I can't remain much longer or my absence will be noted. In a few minutes, I will have the potion at a point from which Miss Granger should be able to complete it. As for Slughorn, he was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and we couldn't have him sounding the alarm. You may release him." He returned his attention to his potion.

Harry quickly released Slughorn, but learned nothing from questioning the Potions master.

Hermione ran to Lucius' arms for comfort. When she looked down at her child's eyes, she was startled by the malice.

Lucius turned her away from the child. "Don't look at her. It will only make our task more difficult." He could only imagine how difficult this must be for her. She had been protesting that she could not do this, but she had to.

Severus stepped back from the potion. "I have done all that I can. The rest is up to you. I must go before I am missed. Good luck."

"Hey! Wait a minute. You aren't going anywhere," ordered Harry.

"Are you under the impression you can finally defeat me? And even if you could, you need me to help you locate the Dark Lord. The time is rapidly approaching, and I must be at his side." He swept out of the room before Harry could act.

Lucius ignored the drama and led Hermione to the cauldron. "It won't take long for us to finish the potion."

With work to focus on, Hermione regained her emotional control. Lucius helped her finish the final few steps of the potion.

When they reached the last step, the addition of the blood, he asked, "Are you ready?"

She bit her lip and nodded. "I'm ready," she whispered.

Lucius used his wand to cut the palm of his hand. Once the seven drops of blood were added to the potion, he healed the small cut. He then took hold of Hermione's hand. "It will hurt." After she nodded, he added her blood to the potion.

When he turned to face the child, he could see the fear in her eyes. With a small wave of his wand, the cauldron levitated across the room until it was next to the table. Grasping the child's hand, he smirked. "And you thought I was weak."

For a third time, the door banged open. "What in Merlin's name is going on here?" McGonagall's gaze froze on Malfoy. "You attacked Aurors?" she asked incredulously.

"Well, yes, but only because it was necessary. If you could hold your questions a moment, we are at a time critical point in the brewing of this potion. I will answer all questions once we are done," Lucius replied

"What potion?" she demanded.

"This is the potion that will sever the link we have with our child," Hermione explained. "Please, Professor. Let us finish."

Lucius was already adding the child's blood to the potion. After he had the requisite seven drops, he did not bother to heal the wound.

"Blood magic? This really isn't appropriate," McGonagall said with an air of disapproval.

"That was how the spell was cast. It is the only way to remove it. Ugly things happen in war, Professor."

"About your attacks on the Aurors?"

"It was most unfortunate. The plan was for members of the Order to try to isolate the child. Unfortunately, they weren't able to do so. As Hermione was moving to capture her, a group of Aurors arrived and started attacking the child, not knowing about the link. I knew that allowing them to continue their attacks would only continue to injure the two of us, if not kill us. As such, I was forced to attack them. I employed non-lethal methods, and there should be no serious injury to any of them." He resisted the urge to make a snide comment about how it would not have been necessary if the Order members had done their job.

"It is true that you did not seriously injure any of the Aurors, but that still does not change the fact you violated the terms of your parole. I will speak with Minister Scrimgeour and inform him of the extenuating circumstances surrounding your actions. He *may* be convinced to excuse your behavior."

Lucius forced a polite smile. "Of course." He knew how protective Scrimgeour was of the Aurors and was not overly hopeful. "Now that the potion is ready, I would ask that you all leave the room. When the Dark Magic is excised, it would be best for you not to be in the area. I believe that one hundred yards should be sufficient."

"What's going to happen when this *evil* is expelled?" McGonagall asked.

"I do not know what the exact results will be, but I would assume something similar to what happened shortly before the child's birth." He didn't think there was any danger if any of them remained in the room; he just wanted Hermione to have privacy when she did this difficult task. Once they were alone, he ladled some of the potion into a goblet. He took a swallow of the potion, grimacing at the bitter taste. Even though the potion was warm, he had the sensation of ice water flowing through his veins.

He handed the goblet to Hermione, who tentatively took it from his hands. He gently brushed her cheek. "This is the way it must be."

"I know." She stared at the goblet, almost afraid of the contents.

A/N: I know, yet another evil cliffhanger. It's the evil plot bunnies conspiring with the muses. I swear. The action is about to start fast and furious. There are just a few more chapters to go. I'm going to force myself to write them. There's a part of me that is sad to see the story coming to the end and is therefore reluctant to write the last few chapters.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Chapter 23

"Darling, you must do this," he urged gently.

She looked at the child bound to the table. "She's just a child."

"We both know that isn't true. Remember what she did in Liverpool." He could see the look of indecision on her face. He placed his arm around her shoulder. "There will be other children," he reassured her.

That seemed to stiffen her resolve, and she finally put the goblet to her lips and drank the foul liquid. Once again, Lucius felt the chill running through his body. Looking over at the child, he could tell that she was finally realizing what they were doing. When he approached her, she struggled against the magical bonds, trying to escape. Standing by her head, he looked into her cold grey eyes. "I wish it had never come to this. Your birth should have been a cause for celebration."

Placing his hand under her jaw, he used his fingers to pry her mouth open. "Hermione," he urged.

"I know. It's just..."

"Don't look at her eyes. Don't let her get to you. Remember all the death and destruction she has caused, what she will cause if not stopped. This is our final option."

Slowly, Hermione poured the potion into the girl's mouth. Tears streamed down her cheek.

Once the potion was poured, Lucius closed the girl's mouth and pinched her nose, forcing her to swallow. After she swallowed, he released her and moved closer to Hermione, wanting to comfort her.

For the first few seconds, nothing happened. Without warning, they both went rigid. Lucius thought it felt as though someone were trying to rip his soul from his body, and he began to wonder how much more abuse his soul could take. He jerked as the mysterious force tugged at him. It pulled and pulled until he could hardly stand it. Finally, it felt as though a rubber band snapped and the pain went away. He found himself thrown backwards into the wall.

The next thing he noticed was Hermione at his side. "Are you all right?" she asked.

Somehow, he had managed to keep his feet. "I think so. And you?" He placed his hand on her arm.

"Fine." She glanced over that worktable. Seeing the motionless form, she slowly moved toward the table.

Lucius held her arm, trying to stop her. "Hermione. Don't."

She tried to shrug off his grip. "I have to...make sure," she finished in a whisper.

He decided to let her go and took his place behind her.

Placing her hand on the child's cheek, Hermione could no longer control her emotions. She collapsed on the still body of her child, a child forced to be evil.

Lucius rubbed her back, trying to comfort her the only way he could. He knew that words would not help. After a short while, he realized that he would have to tell the others what had happened. If he waited too long, they would come. "I'll be right back," he whispered before gently kissing the side of her face.

After closing the door, he took a few deep breaths as he tried to determine how he would present the news to the others. He would stick with the basic facts. As he ascended the stairs, he found the others waiting for him.

"Where's Hermione?" demanded Harry.

"She is well. She just needs some time. The potion succeeded. The child is no longer a threat."

"What does that mean?"

"It means she's dead. Does that make you happy, Mr. Potter?" Lucius snapped. He instantly regretted it. He had always prided himself on being able to maintain his calm.

"Is there anything we need to do?" McGonagall asked.

"After we leave, I would like the child's body taken to my manor for interment. No matter what, she was a Malfoy, and I will show her the respect she is due." He shot Potter and Weasley venomous looks, daring them to talk back to him.

She replied, "I'll see to it. Is there anything else?"

"No. That will be all for the night. I would prefer you not wait up. I will see that she gets rest." He knew that Hermione would not want to be alone and would want to spend the night with him. Before they could say anything else, he returned to the dungeon.

He found Hermione still crying over their lost child.

"It's so unfair," she wailed as she collapsed into his arms. "She was so young."

"I know, darling." This was one of those situations where the less he said, the better it would be. When he felt her sobbing subside, he suggested, "I think you should get some rest."

"I don't want to be alone," she whispered.

"Come to my room." He gently led her away from the body. "She will be taken home and treated with respect."

"Really?"

He wrapped his arm around her shoulder. "She is family, and family is very important to me. You are very important to me." He was glad that the castle was quiet, that everyone was abed. They saw no one as they made their way to his room. Once there, he led her to bed and held her in his arms until she was asleep.

Over the next several days, Hermione spent most of her spare time with Lucius. They didn't talk about what had happened. It just felt good for her to be around him. All effects of the spell were gone. Most of the time, she just sat in his room, doing research or homework, gaining comfort and drawing strength from his presence.

One evening she was sitting on the sofa with him, leaning against him, enjoying his embrace. "Why her?"

"The opportunity presented itself," he replied simply. "First and foremost he is an opportunist."

"If I hadn't been... What would he have done to me?"

He squeezed her tightly and kissed the top of her head. "You don't want to know."

"I do."

"It's not important."

"To you, no, but it is to me. You have saved my life several times. And I need to know if this was another of those times."

"I have no doubt he would have used you as some sort of bait to draw Potter to him. Or more appropriately, to a position where the other Death Eaters could have dealt with him. Please, I don't wish to discuss this. It's quite morbid."

"So they've done that with other children? I wasn't a special case?" She wasn't sure if this made her feel better or worse. To know others had gone through, and would go through, what she did nauseated her.

"No. You were not. You've seen some of the horrible Dark Magic out there. Can we please discuss something more pleasant? Perhaps discuss the guest list for our wedding?"

"Wedding?" She found this change of topic quite abrupt.

"Well, you did agree to marry me," he replied playfully as he leaned down and gave her several kisses on the forehead and cheek. "Or have you changed your mind?"

She started giggling. "No. I haven't changed my mind. But surely the wedding is some time off."

"I had thought that once the war is over would be a good time, and as you know, the end is coming very soon. The Horcruxes are destroyed." He caressed her arm.

"I know. It's just that there is so much to think about." A wedding was actually the furthest thing from her mind.

"If you would agree to it, you could wear my mother's gown. It would suit you perfectly. The house-elves will take care of the food and decoration as the ceremony would be held at the manor."

Playfully, she shoved him away and straddled him. "You would plan my wedding, take away my fun?"

"You have not struck me as the type to be concerned about social affairs, but if you wish to take a more active role... That would of course mean delaying our nuptials," he replied as he nuzzled playfully against her neck.

"Are you afraid I'll change my mind?" she asked as she rubbed against him.

"Not at all. It's just that the thought of living without you is unbearable."

"Would you marry me right now? Without the big ceremony or making it a social event?" She figured this was the best way to make sure he was sincere and silence Harry and Ron once and for all.

"Whatever you desire for our wedding is what you shall have. That is why I wanted to discuss the guest list."

"And if I said I wanted a small wedding, who would you invite?"

"Remus, obviously. Tonks and her family as they are just about my only remaining family." He thought a few seconds. "My mother and my sister."

"Hold on. Your mother is still alive *and* you have a sister?"

"My mother has been living in France for the last twenty years or so. And I have a half sister. My father disowned her for the same reason Andromeda was disowned."

"You haven't seen your mother for twenty years?"

He shrugged. "She didn't agree with my father's decision to support the Dark Lord. Now, who would you invite?"

"Why are you changing the subject?" she prodded.

"There is nothing more to discuss. I come from a very dysfunctional family, and I don't wish to dwell on it. I cannot change the past."

"I guess I'd invite a lot more people than you would. And if we had a big wedding?"

He chuckled softly. "I daresay that would be quite an interesting guest list. Anyone respectable in the business world would be invited, as would senior Ministry officials, and my family, of course. And then whomever you decided to invite. I think many would come just to see if I had been disgraced and if it was a sham. I would delight in lavishing you with affection." He pulled her close. "I would leave no doubt in anyone's mind that I do love you."

She returned the kiss for a few seconds before pulling away. "My parents!"

He tried to hold her to him, but she pulled away and began pacing. "What of them?"

"What are they going to say about this? You're about the same age as my mum."

He rose and wrapped his arms around her waist. "How could they disapprove of their daughter being in love?" He had forgotten that Muggles placed such importance on age.

"With someone who is something of a criminal."

"Reformed." He continued to lavish her with kisses.

She pulled away again. "Lucius, I'm serious. They don't really understand the wizarding world, and I'm sure Harry and Ron will explain things in a way that won't make you look good."

"Don't worry about your parents. I can sufficiently charm them so that they are assured of your well-being. And failing that, I have found that grandchildren are a wonderful unifying force."

"You wouldn't really charm my parents, would you?"

He realized she thought he was referring to magic. Chuckling softly, he replied, "Not the magical charm."

She sounded relieved, "Oh, okay. Grandchildren? More than one?"

"If you wish." He hoped that she did. Narcissa had only been able to bear Draco, and he knew that having a single heir was a great vulnerability.

After several seconds she replied, "I want to have more than one. I don't want our child being an only child. It's too lonely."

He started nibbling at her neck. "As many as you want, my dear."

"Even if I want a big family like the Weasleys?"

"Of course." He wouldn't mind a big family anymore. That way it would be Malfoys rebuilding the wizarding world.

She enjoyed his embrace for several seconds in silence. When she finally looked up, she asked, "What do you think will happen next?"

"What do you mean?"

"What will Voldemort do now? He has to know what we are doing."

"He will come here. He has been interested in this castle since he was a student. Have you investigated the Chamber of Secrets?"

"Of course we have. That was one of the first places we went."

"Do you think I might have a look around?"

"Why?"

"Well, I know that I see things differently than you do. You think very honestly and openly. No offense, but Gryffindors are not the best choice for finding concealed locations."

"I'll talk to Harry about it. He won't be happy, but I'll convince him you have a valid point."

Reluctantly, Harry led Lucius and Hermione to the Chamber of Secrets. "I don't think you are going to find anything down here. We've been through every nook and cranny."

"Humor me, Mr. Potter. If your time is too precious, you don't have to remain." Lucius knew that there was no way Potter would leave him alone here with Hermione, especially after that comment. But that was according to his plan. Knowing that both Potter and the Dark Lord were Parselmouths, it was likely to be vital that Potter remain.

After half an hour, he could hear Potter getting restless, but he wanted to be thorough in his search. There was something in this castle that interested the Dark Lord, and Lucius was determined to figure out what it was.

At the end of the first hour, he could hear Harry and Hermione arguing in whispers. As he examined part of the wall, he thought he saw something and cast a cleansing charm, which revealed a carved serpent. "Mr. Potter, a moment of your time, if you please."

"What do you want?" Harry asked angrily.

Lucius pointed his wand at the carved serpent. "Have you seen this before?"

Leaning forward to examine the wall, Harry replied, "No. This wasn't here before. What did you do?"

"I merely cleaned the grime off the wall." Lucius stood back, letting Potter get a good look at the symbol on the wall. As Hermione moved next to him, he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her in front of him. They waited for Potter to speak Parseltongue and determine if there was a hidden door there.

After several seconds Harry spoke the words, and they watched part of the wall slide away. Since he was standing closest to the door, Harry choked from the dust that was disturbed as the door opened.

All three of them entered the revealed chamber, wands at the ready.

"I believe it is safe to assume from the dust here that the Dark Lord never found this chamber," said Lucius.

"Oh, really? And it was just luck that you happened to find it when he didn't?"

"Harry! That's enough. I'm sick of your childishness. People change. You just have to trust that he's telling the truth. I think that Lucius has done more than enough to earn everyone's trust." She started looking through the dusty and seemingly empty chamber.

Out of the corner of his eye, Lucius could see Potter glowering at him. "Thank you for your assistance in opening the door, Mr. Potter." He was pleased to see that seemed to incense Potter even more.

After five minutes, none of them had turned up anything. "Is it possible that someone took whatever was here long ago?" asked Hermione.

"It's possible that there was nothing here. Slytherin may have planned to use it for something, but left the castle before then. Of course, there might have been someone else that came down here in ages past. While Parseltongue is a rare gift, there are always three or four a generation."

"So this was a waste of time," lamented Harry.

"We found a previously undiscovered chamber. I do not consider that a waste of time. If there had been something here, you would not declare it so," chided Lucius.

"And if there had been something here, how do we know it would help us? It was probably some sort of Dark Magic," spat Harry.

"Contrary to popular belief, Salazar Slytherin was not a Dark Wizard. Yes, he was an advocate for complete separation of the Muggle and wizarding worlds, but he was not a supporter of Dark Magic." He thought about adding in a snide comment that Potter might have learned that had he paid attention in class, but decided that might not be wise.

Before he could say anything else, he felt a tugging and looked up towards the main castle.

"Do you feel it?" Hermione asked.

"Yes," he replied

"Feel what?" Harry asked.

"We have to get up to the others. The castle is under attack," answered Hermione.

"How do you know that?"

"We are Protectors. We are being drawn to protect the castle. We have to hurry." Hermione and Lucius ran out of the chamber, leaving Harry to follow.

When they emerged from the Chamber, they quickly found Luna and Ernie.

"It's time, isn't it?" asked Ernie.

"Yes," replied Hermione.

"Where do we go? Is it Voldemort?" asked Harry.

"It is," said Lucius. "As for where do we go, you need to stay with us. We can protect you."

"I don't need your protection," Harry replied defiantly.

"Harry, please, listen to him. Something happened to us when we were named Protectors. You need to be kept safe in order to defeat Voldemort. Stay with us, and we'll get you to him. Did you raise the alarm?" Hermione asked Ernie and Luna.

"We told as many as we saw and told them to spread the word," said Ernie.

The five of them hurried toward the main entrance. McGonagall met them along the way. Lucius stopped her. "You need to get the younger students away from the castle. It won't be safe for them."

"What do you mean?"

"The castle is under attack. The Dark Lord would not do that if he wasn't sure he could get through the protections. The children are the future and must be protected. Use the Floos as long as the network is open. Send them anywhere else."

"Surely not!"

"Minerva, please. He has been planning on taking the castle since his return. He believes there is powerful magic secreted here that will help him rule the world. He will stop at nothing. You must hurry. We will do what we can to protect the castle, allow them to escape. And you must send for the Order if you have not done so. Call in the Aurors. We will need anyone that will fight. He has many supporters."

An explosion in the distance caused the castle to shake. This seemed to spur everyone to action. Minerva summoned the ghosts to round up the children and professors. As the Protectors ran outside, they could see her sending a Patronus for help.

A/N: I once again want to thank Mimy for her help as a beta reader. As you can tell, this story is coming to a crescendo. Many thanks to those who have stuck with the story as it twisted and turned away from a straight romance and into something much more complex than I initially envisioned.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Chapter 24

Once they were outside the castle doors, Potter immediately ran down the drive in the direction of the gate.

"Potter!" called Lucius.

"What?" Harry asked angrily.

"The attack is coming from the lake, not the gate. Pay attention. Now don't get ahead of us."

"I don't have to listen to you," Harry insisted.

"If you want to stay alive, you will," growled Lucius. He knew the enemy, better than anyone else. "Whatever else you do, stay near us. We can protect you, keep you alive. The Dark Lord would like nothing more than to single you out and make you an easy target. Do you understand?"

Harry was about to open his mouth to continue the argument when Hermione interrupted. "Harry. This is serious. This is a large attack. Combined, our magic is stronger than it is apart. Stay with us."

They hurried toward the lake, not wanting to get too close, but wanting to form some sort of protective shield between the invaders and the castle.

"We should go help them," insisted Harry once they could see the Order members at the lake were outnumbered.

"Our purpose is to protect the castle," replied Hermione.

"He will come to us. He wants what is in the castle. They will be here soon enough. Patience. I did not think you were that eager to die," added Lucius.

"I'm not going to die."

"Then you have some skill in the Seeing arts that none of us have." Lucius spared a look for Hermione, hoping it would not be his last, but he knew that once the battle raged in earnest around him, he would have no time to spare for her.

"What do we do when they get here?" asked Ernie.

"We'll know what to do," replied Luna in her ethereal voice.

Since those guarding the castle had not expected an attack from the direction of the lake, they were quickly defeated and the Death Eaters made their way toward the castle. The four Protectors stood in a wedge, with Lucius at the lead, Hermione to his right, and Ernie and Luna to his left. Harry was standing behind them, grumbling about not being allowed to go out and join the fight.

Standing in the front of the wedge, Lucius became the focus for the powers bestowed by the founders. The first wave of attackers was knocked back.

"Blimey!" Harry exclaimed from behind them. "They don't stand a chance."

Everyone was concentrating on the attackers coming from the lake, and they were quite surprised when Ernie fell.

Harry was the first one to react and spun back toward the castle. He saw several of the sixth year Slytherins crouched beside the main door, trying to take out more of the Protectors. "They're behind us!"

Hermione turned to focus on the threat to the rear. "There are too many. We're too exposed here."

"Where are the professors?" asked Harry as he tried to duck for cover amongst the rocks.

"Lucius, you need to get down," insisted Hermione.

"I can only affect those I can see."

"We need to move back to the castle. Something's wrong if McGonagall isn't out here yet," Hermione shouted over the din of spells being hurled from all sides. "We won't last long out here without reinforcements."

"If we move back to the castle, it will make it easier for them to get inside. We have to keep them outside," replied Lucius.

"They already have some inside. The older Slytherins are declaring their allegiance to Voldemort."

Lucius swore quietly and backed toward the castle.

"The door is sealed," said Luna.

"I'm going to open it," declared Harry before running toward the castle, catching the Slytherins off guard.

"Harry, NO!" shouted Hermione, but it was too late.

Lucius could feel her moving further away from the group. "Hermione, you have to stay close by." She wasn't listening to him and he could feel the power diminish as she moved out of range. He knew that he and Luna would not be able to hold back the frontal attack much longer. The spells the Death Eaters were casting were taking their toll. He could feel the shield slipping away, but before he lost his grip, he saw spells flying at the Death Eaters from his right. Reinforcements had arrived and had finally made their way from the main gate.

"Where's Ernie?" Hermione asked after they regrouped. She and Harry had removed the charm from the door and the young Slytherins had fled, unwilling to take on the two of them.

"He fell over there," said Luna as she pointed down the hill.

"Was he still alive?" Hermione asked.

"I don't know. I only saw him fall."

"We need to recover him and see if we can revive him," said Lucius. "Potter, you and Luna will go retrieve him. Hermione and I will cover you." He saw that Potter was about to argue. "Go! While we have the opportunity."

Potter and Luna quickly returned with Ernie. Lucius conducted a cursory examination. "He needs medical attention, but he will survive for the time being. We will have to leave him here."

"We should get him to the Hospital Wing."

"There isn't time and being in the castle could be more dangerous than being outside. Haven't you heard the sound of spells crashing against the walls? If we cannot stop the Death Eaters, it is only a matter of time before they start coming down." He looked around the grounds. "They have changed their plan of attack, we need to move." He could see Potter looking into the distance. "Potter! With us."

"He's over there. I can feel him."

"As wonderful as that is, you cannot single-handedly battle through his supporters. The time will come."

With only three Protectors remaining, they were not able to deflect spells as well. It seemed as though Lucius could feel every hit against the castle, and it spurred him on to work harder to protect the castle.

When there was another break in the action, he looked around. "Where's Potter?"

Hermione looked around. "He was right here. Luna?"

"I saw something moving that direction, but I didn't have time to notice what it was."

They all three ducked as an explosion rocked the castle behind them. Lucius looked up and could see the Astronomy tower wobbling dangerously. "Run!" he ordered as he shoved Hermione in front of him. While he could run faster than her, he ensured he kept her before him.

As the cloud of dust engulfed them, they were attacked. Unable to form a link, they each threw spells randomly at their attackers. Lucius made sure he kept track of Hermione, not wanting to lose her in the confusion. He saw a witch aiming a spell at her and shoved her to the side. The spell grazed his left shoulder, but he thought he saw his Stunner hit the witch before he fell.

Hermione crawled to his side. "Are you okay?"

He couldn't feel his left arm, but that was a small price to pay for her safety. Not wanting her to worry, he replied, "I'll be fine. You?" He could see she was covered in scratches.

"Nothing major."

"We need to move. Potter must be found before he gets himself killed."

"Where's Luna?" Hermione asked.

Glancing around, he didn't see her. "I don't know, but we don't have time to look for her now." He wasn't sure how much time had passed since the battle had begun, but he noticed that there seemed to be more bodies on the ground than standing.

Figuring that Potter would be in the middle of the action, they headed in that direction. Lucius felt a twinge of guilt about leaving the castle vulnerable, even though he knew that finding Potter was a necessity.

As they moved closer to the center of the fighting, they could see Potter, Ginny, Ron and Tonks trying to battle their way closer to the center.

"We have to stop him," Lucius said.

"How?"

He wanted to grab Hermione with his left arm, but found it still wasn't working. "Come on," he started rushing toward Potter, leaving her to follow. When he was close enough, he launched a Leg-Locker Curse at the young man.

Harry looked about wildly ready to destroy his attacker.

"Harry! Why did you run off?" demanded Hermione.

"I don't have time to wait," he growled. "The longer I wait, the more people will die, and I won't let that happen. Now, RELEASE ME!"

Lucius glared at Potter. "You will remain with us. Hermione and I can provide you protection that the others cannot. Do you understand?"

"And if I don't?" Harry asked defiantly.

"We can Levitate you to keep you close," Lucius replied with a wry grin.

As the ragtag group moved closer to the center of the battle, which was occurring at the rear of the castle, Hermione looked around nervously when they passed the wreckage of the greenhouses. She forced the grief for the loss out of her mind when she saw a foot sticking from the rubble. There would be time later to look for survivors.

"What are they doing back here?" asked Hermione.

"They have obviously decided not to enter the castle through the front door. That was a diversion to draw Order and Ministry personnel away from their true point of attack."

She felt she should have thought of that.

"I'm not letting him get in the castle," growled Harry.

"We don't want that either, but we must not be reckless," replied Lucius. He addressed the others. "Stay close so we can protect you."

Hermione's head was on a swivel, the adrenaline rush suppressing her fear. Even though the fighting waged around them, they seemed to have found a clear path.

"There he is!" Harry shouted out.

"You must wait. We have to get past the others," retorted Lucius.

Hermione surveyed the battlefield. "This way. We can approach from the side, and hopefully, they won't see us coming right away." She knew that Lucius' white-blond hair would attract attention. So far that had not encountered any high level Death Eaters, but she knew that if they did, Lucius would be a target.

Harry and Ron kept trying to run ahead. Lucius had apparently given up on hexing Harry, and the group was moving a light jog to make their approach. She nearly tripped over a rock and fell a little behind everyone. Looking around to make sure it was due to her carelessness and not due to being on the receiving end of an attack, she saw motion out of the corner of her eye.

Peering into the darkness, she could see a group of the younger students being herded toward the forest by an adult. Wanting to make sure the children weren't in danger, she tried to identify their steward and recognized Remus. She was relieved to see that they were in good hands.

As her gaze returned to her companions, she could see a group of Death Eaters closing in on Remus and the students, and she knew that he wasn't aware of their approach. She started running toward them to intercept the enemy, but she realized she would not arrive in time and yelled out a warning. At the same instant, a wall of fire erupted from the ground between the two groups.

Searching the field, she tried to see who had cast the spell, but before she could locate the students' savior, she saw the Death Eaters thrown several yards through the air. The ferocity of the attack left her frozen. She no longer had a reason to run to Remus' aid, and she could see him leading the students away from the fighting.

Snape growled, "What are you doing? The two of you need to protect Potter. That is your only goal. I'll worry about them."

After the briefest pause, she ran back toward her companions. Lucius was running toward her. She noticed that he grabbed her with his right arm, and that he didn't seem to be able to use his left arm. "Your arm?"

"It doesn't matter. I can still use my wand. Come on, before he gets too far ahead of us." He gave her a quick embrace. "Please, don't do that again."

The two of them ran to catch up to the others, who were engaged in a skirmish with a half dozen Death Eaters. Hermione noticed that Ginny was lying on the ground, but there was nothing they could do for her at the moment. Their arrival caught the Death Eaters by surprise, and the tide was quickly turned, though it did draw the wrong sort of attention.

From their right a bolt of green light flew into their midst and struck Ron. Lucius sent a retaliatory spell that direction.

"You'll have to do better than that, brother," shouted a derisive female voice.

By now the survivors had ducked for cover. "So will you, Bella," he retorted.

Hermione could feel the tightness in her chest. She knew that Voldemort would keep his closest and most powerful supporters closest, and the fact that Bellatrix was there meant that the others were likely nearby. They had to act quickly to get past them and to Voldemort before he realized what was happening.

Looking over the rock that Bellatrix was crouched behind, she could see that Bellatrix had also chosen a defensive position. Hoping to flush her into the open, Hermione cast a spell that caused the rock to explode in a ball of fire. She could hear Bellatrix shriek and couldn't suppress the grin.

Harry used this diversion to rush toward the Bellatrix screaming, "Murderer! You'll pay for killing Ron!"

Hermione, Lucius and Tonks were left to follow.

Drawing from his anger, Harry cast the Cruciatus Curse on Bellatrix.

"Harry, no!" shouted Hermione once she realized what Harry was doing. "Not an Unforgivable."

"It's what she deserves," Harry growled.

Lucius struck Bellatrix with a Stunner. "We don't have time. She will get her just reward in the end."

The group moved towards Voldemort. Looking at Harry, Hermione could tell that he was now focused solely on the goal that had been set forth for him that fateful night his parents were killed. She didn't watch him long, wanting to keep an eye on their surroundings, looking for further attacks. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a blue spell hit Tonks and was able to retaliate against Tonks' attacker.

Before she could do anything else, she was frozen. "Lucius! Can you move?" *Please don't let him have been trapped, too*, she pleaded.

"No."

"What spell is it, Malfoy?" demanded Harry.

Hermione was dismayed that they had all three been so easily captured.

"Yes, Lucius, tell them what spell it is," chided a softly sibilant voice.

Lucius made a hissing noise in response, and Hermione wished she could see what was happening.

"You who professed to be my most loyal follower are now my greatest failure. It is for the best that your line will end tonight. And you have brought the lovely little Mudblood. After you have watched her die, I will have to find out how you kept her alive. But I think Potter will have to be first. I won't take chances this time."

"Riddle!" shouted a voice from the far side of the clearing.

As she strained to turn and see who was calling Voldemort by his given name, she suddenly found herself released from her invisible prison.

"Severus!" Voldemort hissed.

After that, everything moved too fast for Hermione to comprehend. Voldemort raised his wand to attack Snape, Lucius was running to Snape's side, and Harry was preparing to cast a spell on Voldemort. In this moment of indecision, she was frozen, a witness to the horror unfolding before her.

Lucius was hit by a spell from Voldemort, and she added her hex to ones from Harry and Snape. Voldemort spun on Harry, recognizing the young man as the greatest threat. She wanted to ensure that Lucius wasn't seriously injured, but the battle between Harry and Voldemort had her transfixed.

She watched the spells fly back and forth between the two men, neither seeming to gain the upper hand. The battle raged on, and she thought she could hear the distant cry of a phoenix growing stronger as spell after spell was cast. Harry and Voldemort were focused solely on each other. If there were any surviving Death Eaters in the area, they were as transfixed as she was.

She felt a hand on her shoulder. "We need to move away from here," said Snape quietly.

"But Harry," she protested.

"He is doing what he is meant to do. We cannot help him." Snape gently pulled on her arm.

When she turned away, she saw that Snape had an unconscious Lucius Levitated. "Lucius?"

"He is alive. I will examine him more closely once we are someplace more secure." He hurried her from the duel toward the castle.

Once they were nearly at the castle, they heard a tremendous explosion coming from the direction the battle had been raging. Hermione turned to run back to where Harry was.

Snape grabbed her arm. "It's over."

"What do you mean?"

"Potter has done his job. Voldemort is dead."

"And Harry?"

"Choose who you want to help, Lucius or Potter."

"What do you mean, 'choose'?" she asked cautiously.

"I cannot reverse the spell that Lucius took on my own. If you go to check on Potter, who may not even be alive, Lucius will surely die."

She knew she had one choice and followed Snape.

A/N: First and foremost, I'd like to thank everyone for being patient with me. This chapter was very hard for me to write. When I set out on this story, I never imagined that I would be writing the final battle scene.

I have thoroughly enjoyed writing this story, and once it is complete, I will begin in earnest on "The Price of Glory" sequel to "To Regain Glory".

Epilogue

Chapter 25 of 25

Lucius Malfoy has finally realized the Dark Lord has been spinning nothing but lies. Unfortunately, it took him losing his family to realize this. Now, he is trying to atone for his sins. Will anyone trust him? Will anyone help him regain his place in society? He has a plan. Set after HBP. Rating is for later chapters. Additionally, there are two chapters that have some torture, but nothing overly graphic. **Nominated for Feb 2006 Multifaceted Awards in Best Dramatic and Best Het (Adult) Fics**

Hermione hadn't really wanted to come, but she knew she had a responsibility. No matter where she went in the room, she saw smiling faces, people celebrating. There had been a time when she wanted to be noticed, but now she would have given anything to remain anonymous.

She had tried standing still, but a crowd had quickly surrounded her, everyone wanting to congratulate her. When she walked around the room, people would stop her as she passed by. There was no anonymity. Looking around the room, she tried to find Lucius, but could not see him. She heard his laugh, but he was surrounded by a crowd, enjoying the attention.

As more and more people came to congratulate to her, it felt as though the room was closing in around her, and she knew she needed some space. Carefully excusing herself, she made her way to the terrace. Standing by the railing, she closed her eyes and took several deep breaths, forcing her heartbeat to slow.

"Couldn't take it either?" asked Harry from her left.

Facing him, she smiled weakly. "No. I just don't understand how they can celebrate."

"I know what you mean," Harry replied simply.

Now that she had started talking, her anger took control. "All the horrible things that happened a year ago and now they celebrate it? We lost so many good people that night." The horrors she had seen that night would never be surpassed. She had seen friends and mentors slain and wounded that night. For a while, she had thought she had lost Harry, too. He had spent two weeks in St. Mungo's after his duel with You-Know-Who, and it had taken another month before he seemed more like his old self. The Healers were never able to say exactly what was wrong with him, but his scar had faded until it was barely noticeable anymore.

Most of the wounded had recovered, but not all. Neville, Ron, McGonagall, Luna... She had to stop thinking about it. Once the battle had ended and the wounded treated, the surviving Protectors had been drawn back to the hidden chamber. The medallions were returned to their places on the pedestal. She assumed that one day when the castle was in danger again, new Protectors would be sought.

Harry placed his arm around her shoulder. "I know. But I think they need it..."

She sighed. "And they expect us to be here. I know. Lucius and I discussed that." It still didn't make her feel any better. She would have rather had a quiet night at home. Hopefully, they would not insist on a big celebration next year. She wasn't sure that she could do this every year. Deciding to change the subject, she asked, "How's Ginny doing?"

The smile faded from Harry's face. "She's still down. That's why she didn't come."

Hermione knew how hard it was to lose a child. Harry and Ginny had been so excited about having a baby, but Ginny had miscarried last week. "Would she mind if I came over for a visit tomorrow?"

"I think she'd like it, though you should leave Wulfric at home. Well, I really should be going. Molly's with her, but I told her I wouldn't be long." He kissed Hermione on her cheek.

Lucius was in his element. There were very few things that he enjoyed more than being the center of attention. While others had been surprised at how readily the wizarding world had accepted his redemption, he was not. As much as they might not like to admit it, they needed him, and more specifically, his money.

As he chatted, he tried to keep an eye on Hermione. He knew that she had not wanted to attend the Anniversary Celebration. For her, there was little worth celebrating, and this only served to remind her of those that could not be here.

Realizing it had been quite some time since he had seen Hermione, he excused himself from his conversation with the Head the Department of International Cooperation to find her. When he couldn't locate her in the ballroom, he pulled Remus away from the crowd. "Have you see Hermione?"

Remus glanced toward the door to the terrace. "I saw her heading outside a few minutes ago, but I don't know if she's come back in yet."

"Thank you," Lucius replied and started to walk away, but was stopped by Remus' hand on his arm.

"In case I don't see you again before you leave, I'd like to meet with you tomorrow morning to discuss a new marketing idea."

"Come by the office at ten o'clock." One of Hermione's many political projects had been to secure better living conditions for werewolves. The Ministry had been forced to admit that their current treatment of werewolves had led to a segment of society that was only looking for a reason to revolt, something the Dark Lord had exploited. They had been quite open to providing werewolves with the Wolfsbane Potion and creating incentives for businesses willing to hire them. Lucius had led the way by hiring Remus as a Marketing Director. Once Remus realized he was not going to be ostracized, he thrived and was quickly promoted to the head of marketing for Wizard Gate Books.

As Lucius walked onto the terrace, he could see Hermione standing by the rail and Harry walking away from her.

Harry gave Lucius a friendly nod. "Lucius."

"Harry. Calling it a night?"

"If I can sneak out without being noticed." He leaned closer to Lucius and whispered, "I think you should get Hermione home. She's quite upset."

"Thank you for looking after her." Lucius crossed the terrace and stood behind Hermione, wrapping his arms around her. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm sorry. I couldn't take it inside that ballroom anymore."

"There's nothing wrong with that. Do you want to go home?"

"I do, but Harry just left. What will people say?"

"I think they would understand us wanting to get home to our son."

Gazing into the night, her voice took a distant quality as she asked, "It is over, isn't it? I mean, he's not coming back this time?"

"No, darling, he's really gone this time. You, Harry and Ron made sure of that." He leaned forward and kissed the side of her cheek. When he noticed the tears running down her cheek, he turned her to face him and gently brushed them away. "Come, let's go home."

He wrapped his cloak around her and led her along the periphery. Whenever someone tried to approach them, he glared in a way that encouraged everyone to ignore them.

Once at home, they checked on Wulfric, who was sleeping peacefully. Lucius smiled at the sleeping bundle. His son had thick, curly blonde hair, taking after his mother in that regard. Looking down into that innocent face, it was so easy to forget the cruelty in the world.

Before they could leave the room, he started fussing and Hermione picked him up to feed him. Lucius watched the two of them and could feel a contented grin spreading across his face.

Two years ago, he had set out to gain his release from prison. He had carefully orchestrated a plan to earn the trust of members of the Order of the Phoenix, and most specifically, Hermione. When he had set that plan in motion, he had never imagined this was how it would end. She had merely been the only attractive, single witch that he wasn't related to. Now, she was something so much more. Even though he was quite a bit older than she, he found he enjoyed her company far more than he had enjoyed Narcissa's.

Watching her with Wulfric, he was suddenly struck by how incredibly lucky he was. His release from Azkaban had been made permanent when the Minister of Magic pardoned him due to testimony provided by Hermione, Harry, Severus and Ernie. As he had suspected, Severus had been readily exonerated. Dumbledore had left a memory behind, one that proved beyond a doubt that everything Severus had done had been in the service of the Order. This had actually given Severus' testimony some weight in Lucius' defense.

They had even awarded him an Order of Merlin Second Class. Though he believed his actions were worthy of First Class, he would never complain. After the pardon was finalized, he outlined a recovery plan to the Ministry that showed it would be best for him to retain his position of prominence in the wizarding world. Of course, that had also entailed donating an obscene amount of money to various philanthropic entities, but that was only a minor setback. After all, he had assets of which the Ministry had no knowledge.

Once he was secure in his position, he and Hermione had planned their wedding. Deciding there was no point in delaying it, it was held less than a month after his pardon. He could remember it as if it were yesterday...

It was a lovely summer's day and the garden looked magnificent. The centerpiece of the ceremony was a delicate arch covered in flowering vines. Lucius waited nervously, Remus at his side. Severus had politely declined duties as best man, preferring to remain out of the limelight and resume his quiet life at Hogwarts, albeit under a new headmaster.

Even though he knew that Hermione would be wearing his mother's dress, he had not expected her to look so stunning. Her hair had been tamed and was laced with flowers. The ivory dress was covered in intricate lace and hugged her curves quite nicely. From the moment she began walking down the aisle, she became the sole focus of his attention. Even now, he could remember little of the actual ceremony.

The reception had been a moderate affair. Most of the guests were friends and family, but Hermione had realized the importance of making a few political invitations. Of course, everyone wanted to be at any event that Harry Potter attended, and there were those who were curious to see the marriage of a former Death Eater to a heroine of the War. Thankfully the magic protecting the manor had kept out uninvited guests.

During the reception, something rather odd had occurred. Harry had approached Lucius and apologized. Lucius could only ascertain this odd behavior had been a result of Harry's near death experience. While the two of them had not become friends, they were at least on amicable terms with each other. Which was good since Hermione liked to invite Harry and Ginny as guests for the weekend.

A little over nine months later, tiny, perfect Wulfric had been born. He did not think he had ever seen a more beautiful child. He had not argued when Hermione told him she wanted to honor Albus Dumbledore when she named their son. Of course, there would be advantages to naming the boy after a man that was being lauded as a hero.

Once Hermione placed Wulfric back in his crib and was out of the room, he pinned her against the wall and kissed her hungrily. "I have been waiting all evening for that."

"Have you?" she asked playfully.

"Indeed I have. While you look absolutely stunning in your robes, I have been thinking of little else besides getting you out of them."

"Oh, really? You seemed quite enmeshed in conversation." She ran her hands down the front of his robes, unfastening the clasps.

"It was all mindless and left me plenty of time to think of you." Leaning down, he nibbled at her neck.

"You speak with a silver tongue," she teased.

"That's not all I do with my tongue." To emphasize this, he slowly ran his tongue along her ear and was quite pleased when she quivered at his touch. Sweeping her into his arms, he carried her next door to their bedroom.

He placed her gently on the bed, and she asked, "So, what else can you do with that tongue?"

Shoving her robe over her head he grinned mischievously and decided to show her rather than tell her. Picking up her foot, he slowly removed her stockings and then kissed his way up her now bare leg. He was quite pleased to see that she hadn't worn any knickers.

When he reached her soft folds, he parted them with his tongue. After teasing her briefly, he sucked deeply, sending an involuntary shudder through her body.

"Oh, Lucius," she moaned as she laced her fingers in his hair and tried to pull him deeper.

Knowing her limits, he quickly brought her to the edge of release and held her there. She begged for him to continue, exactly what he wanted to hear. When he felt he could no longer wait, he pulled away.

"Please, don't stop," she panted. "I'm so close."

He silenced her protestations with a deep kiss before thrusting into her. She moaned in ecstasy and he had to close his eyes to maintain control. But even that didn't work, and he soon found himself thrusting more quickly and quickly reached climax.

After showering her with kisses, he rolled next to her and pulled her close. He liked the way she fit next to him. As she drifted off to sleep, he realized that he finally had everything he wanted.

A/N: Thank you all for reading. I hope that you have enjoyed this story. It was a real joy for me to write, even if the evil plot bunnies took over from time to time and forced me, at wandpoint, to do some rather awful things.

Once again, I would like to thank Mimy for helping me out in tough spots and Owlbait for offering some fantastic advice on how to close this story out. Endings can be hard to write, and they made it easier.

If you enjoyed this, I encourage you to check out my other work and keep an eye out for new stories. I am working on a sequel to "To Regain Glory" titled "The Price of Glory" that I hope to be posting this weekend or early next week. Of course, that Lucius is slightly different from this one.