

Lost, Found

by Terra

Draco thinks he loves Hermione in the morning, in the fall, in the desert, in no place special at all. A tale of eight different times they could've fought, fell, laughed, loved and saved the world.

Winner of dramione_idws Round Six.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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When they see the endless dunes of the desert they are portkeyed to, only a canteen and one green apple between them, they agree to split the burden.

Hermione is so far past hunger she hears throbbing beneath sore ribs and is used to its unsteady cadence. "One slice," she says.

Malfoy passes her with limping footfalls. "No."

"One bite, then."

"No."

"Malfoy," she snaps, jerking to a halt. "I'm going to faint in the next ten minutes. What's the point if we're too weak to eat it?"

A fist spasms against his thigh, and he turns, face burnt, contorted in a facsimile of condescension. "You mean, *if you're* too weak."

"Right," she says, voice thick with scorn and dry heat. "Between the two of us, I'm clearly the selfish one."

"We agreed tomorrow..."

"We won't last that long!" she shouts, hoarse. "The water's gone," she throws the empty canteen into the sand, "so we've got what? A day, two at most?"

Malfoy clenches his jaw and lurches toward her, digging callused fingers into her arm. "I don't have time for childish histrionics. We have *to keep moving*."

A horrifying epiphany dawns on her. "Oh my god," she breathes. "You ate it, didn't you?"

He flinches, as if slapped. "And that's the kind of man you think I am?"

It's worse than listening to a voice cracking from thirst, low and hollow in a way that has nothing to do with three days in an arid wasteland. Her first thought is retreat, but she's already trudged through miles of changeless desert, punishment for a mistake so amateur she'd Avada herself if she weren't already dying, while he's been silent, a beacon of sanctimonious suffering, and there's only *so much she can take*

"I don't know," she answers. "Show me. Prove me wrong."

Malfoy's grip is so tight their bones gnash together, a dull pain she welcomes. "So the entire time, this whole partnership," he snarls, "this is what you really thought of me. All those times you said you trusted me, you were really thinking, *fuck you*. I'm good enough to track Dark artefacts with and get pissed with in pubs and shag in secret, but not..."

"What are you on about?" she yells.

"You fucked up, Granger. And I didn't say anything, because you were already flogging yourself. But you can't handle being in the wrong, can you?"

"You're *mad*..."

She rears when he yanks her close, pressing something brittle between her teeth. It bursts wet and sweet in her parched mouth*ecstasy*, but Malfoy is walking away, and she discovers that lashing out at the man she trusts...may one day love...more than anyone hurts magnitudes worse than stupidly touching a Dark artefact and whipping them into a cyclone of sand.

Hermione runs and clutches fistfuls of sandy shirt. "Draco, I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

She wants to apologize for what little remains of forever, heart in her throat choking sound, but he takes her hands, continues walking and doesn't let go.

Demanding Satisfaction

She was absolute rubbish at cooking.

That first month, he would roll out of her bed and start the tea while she rummaged through creaky cupboards*no woman ever needed a house-elf more*, to pull out knives and jams and crusty bagels, offered to him with a sheepish smile that said, *well, it's the thought that counts, right?*

Draco disagreed, but told her, "I'll take apricot."

Then he'd Floo back to Malfoy Manor, vast clean empty, and find toast, cod steak, stewed fruit and boiled egg laid out for him in chromatic symmetry on his desk, the *Prophet* beside perfectly brewed tea. It never took a second longer than the walk to his study for his unseen, unheard house-elves to deliver the bounty.

The second month, he invited her to stay the night at the Manor.

She lowered her eyes, exhaled slowly, and nodded so casually he knew she'd been expecting it, had long coached herself into practiced acquiescence. He read in that splinter of a moment rejection of the face he wore for everyone else, son heir pride, and in that mad instant, wanted to punish her for presuming to know him, for daring to *strip* him naked, no wealth or titles...*what good was he as only a man?*

He fell into irrational anger, plied her with enough wine that by night's end she was staggering, and ravaged her in the Malfoy ancestral bed. In the morning, there were two identical trays at the foot of the bed, as though the presence of another person glitched the smooth machinery of his invisible kitchens and it spat out two of everything in sheer frustration.

She looked at the laden trays and turned to him, amused, smiling softly. "So that's why you're always tearing out in the morning."

Shame battered his composure, shredding the careful nonchalance he'd planned to show her. "I'm sorry," he said instead, voice thick. "It wasn't about me, was it?"

"Only a little," she said, looking away, eyes distant. "Mostly, I didn't want to remember that night, with Bellatrix, in your drawing room."

She could've have said, *your aunt*, but she didn't. "I'm sorry," he murmured.

She stroked the inside of his left wrist, tracing the curled black scar. "You will be," she said at last, crumbling the tension, "if you ever go medieval Lord of the Manor on me again."

He arched a brow. "Oh, is that what deafening me with *yes, yes* meant?"

On the first day of the third month, he dropped a stack of recipe books on her kitchen counter and two trunks in her closet.

"The only thing worse than your...and I hesitate to even call it...cooking is eating alone," he told her, affecting the pompous air that drove her mad. "If we're going to try this happiness thing, I'm bringing you up to scratch."

Hermione threw a dishrag at him, and then hauled him down by the lapels into a fierce kiss, hard soft everything.

Now

There is madness in the air.

How else to describe the kaleidoscope of light, lethal, corrosively beautiful, bending the space around him? He is slowly drowning in fear.

Two years ago, that fear would've been for his parents, helpless before an indiscriminate lunatic.

One year ago, it would've been for himself, *stupid to betray the Dark Lord*...he's already killed Mother for letting Potter escape...what use was it to carry on in vengeance?

Today, it is for the woman who took him in after the massacre, a holocaust razing his home, his everything, into the ground.

Draco knows it's all wrong. He's heard of Nightingale Syndrome, patients deluded enough to mistake bedside manner *for caring*, and he sees its symptoms in himself, but knowing and believing and feeling are continents apart; it doesn't make the sight of her burn any less. Granger is his anchor in a world that won't stop convulsing, keeps ripping the ground from beneath his feet, and he thinks that maybe, maybe he loves her.

One hour after Potter enters Hogwarts, hunger rules his every thought, more primal than food. He is starving for a glimpse of her, just one to put her out of his mind. She

has to be alive so all of this, *any* of this, will be worth it...

"Draco!" shouts a voice that pounds joy into his chest.

Granger leaps from behind a pillar in the crumbling courtyard, shooting jets of light over her shoulder, grim smile lit with conviction and hope. "Voldemort's coming!"

He kneels to draw the last rune with his blood. A black shadow bursts through the courtyard, and Draco can see its pale face, agony lacerating his left arm. The Dark Lord flies after Granger, and for a cutting heartbeat, Draco thinks the monster will make it, but then the runes cresting the battlefield glow and the Dark Lord smashes into a wall of lightning, each second he is ensnared draining a year of Draco's life.

Then Potter emerges from the castle, bleeding, bruised, battered, yet still gripping his wand in a steady hand. "Only one way to find out who's the master of the Elder Wand, Tom!" he cries. "*Avada Kedavra!*"

The Dark Lord hisses the same, but the collision of light rips the wand from his skeletal hand, leaving him barren before the maelstrom of unrelenting, unforgiving green. When his body falls, Draco's lightning vanishes, air pulsing with the smell of burnt ozone, and its loss pitches him to the ground.

"Draco," murmurs Granger over him, eyes wide, elation warring with fear. "He's gone. Harry did it. We all did it!"

Now, he thinks. Somehow he finds the strength to curve a hand behind her neck, tugging her closer. "That was ten years," he tells her, breath ghosting over her cheek.

"What?"

"That snake bastard took ten years. So it's only fair, I want ten from you. With you," he says, and kisses her like it is the first, last, only time.

A Proposal

There was a creaky, old swing on the edge of the Forbidden Forest.

It reminded him of that eighth summer when he'd flown so far and so long he didn't recognize the place for a Muggle playground until he'd touched down, rain-battered and exhausted. A grimy girl peeked out from under the dented slide and stared at him, gap-toothed.

"How'd you do that?"

"Do what?" he said, shoving the broom behind him.

"You *flew*."

"No, I didn't."

She teetered fully into view, grubby hands tight around her skirts, and nodded at the rickety wood plank strung up by rusty chains. "Sometimes, I pretend I can fly too."

He puffed out his chest. "I wasn't pretending," he told her, forgetting all about secrecy and no-magic-in-front-of-Muggles.

She jabbed a finger at him. "Prove it."

Draco eyed her. He'd been warned about dirty Mudbloods and how they could make you sick if you got too close, but this was a matter of pride. This was ~~a~~*challenge*. "Get on, then."

He slid onto the broomstick and hauled her after him. When he shot into the air, she dangled behind him, knobby fingers digging into his ribs, incoherent gasps in his ear. They scooped the air above the crumbling swing-set, hovering over the worn park. "There, see!" he shouted, triumphant.

He pivoted to catch her expression, and his breath caught at the stunned wonder in her wide eyes. "I'm flying," she breathed. "*I'm flying!*"

When it was over, Draco never saw the little girl again, but something about her face stayed with him. What for him was ordinary and commonplace ~~was~~*magic* to her, and he'd felt so proud to chip off a piece of that intangible wealth and share it with someone who had so little. He had sparked her inexorable joy, *him*.

"That was nice of you," said Hermione, as she fell back down to earth, planting her heels into the dirt below the swing. "What happened between eight and eleven to turn you into a git?"

Draco clasped the metal links above her shoulders, and she swung her legs forward, tipping her head back to meet his gaze. "I don't know. It's easy to believe propaganda about yourself when you're surrounded by ancestors and riches you had nothing to do with. You forget none of it means a damn and you're just a freeloader. But it's all hollow. Fool's gold when there's no one else."

He watched her eyelids drift slowly closed in the cool breeze. "Is that what this is about? Realized you're the ruler of an empty kingdom?" she murmured.

"No," he said, tracing the ridges of her collarbone, each soft breath prompting one of his own. "Just looking for someone to see, feel, eat, breathe...be stunned in wonder with."

Hermione turned and pressed her cheek against his chest, a rueful smile curving her mouth. "Ah," she said. "Good answer. Mine is too. Yes, I'll have you.*Yes.*"

A House is Not a Home

"I haven't got a home."

A wry smile touched her lips. "I don't believe you."

Hermione tilted against the wall to face him. They sat on opposite ends of the grate, a fire crackling between them and wafting warmth into the crisp air.

As far as abandoned cabins in the countryside went, she'd seen worse. She tried to imagine Harry's and Ron's reaction when they learned she'd shacked up with the Order's latest stray while on the lam from Death Eaters, and bit back a laugh.

"The idea must mean a lot to you," she murmured.

"Not really." Malfoy shifted and slanted her *adrop* *it* look.

But they'd been cooped up from a raging blizzard for hours and she was in no mood to be obliging. "You've got an ocean of money, an estate and loads of relatives. Any

one of those things gets you a home."

He let out a sigh. "I never said I didn't have a physical home. Look, when wherever you're sleeping is home to you, the word loses any meaning."

"So this...," she swiped at the air between them, "...this shanty is a home to you?"

"Practically speaking? Yes."

"Then impractically speaking, why did you run away from the *Manor*...if you won't call it home? You can't drop these cryptic remarks and expect me not to pry."

Malfoy gave a bark of laughter. "Expect *you* not to pry? Only an idiot's that optimistic. If you're so keen on it, you tell me what the hell a home is."

She considered, snagging her lower lip between her teeth. "I suppose...it's not a place, really. Or a collection of things, like the house where you grew up or the food you ate when you were a child. It's more a feeling. That you're safe and you belong. Not real but at the same time, probably the realest thing there is."

"What," he asked, "does that even mean?"

"I can't tell you what it *is*. It's just... It's home!"

"All right. Then let me tell you what it's not. Home's not where your family has got to tiptoe and whisper," he said through gritted teeth. "It's not where *Drucio*-happy warden's decided to swallow the key. Where nothing makes sense anymore because if Muggle blood makes you less of a wizard, then what the hell does that make *him*? Neat enough of an explanation for you?"

In the stinging silence, she reached over and gripped his wrist. He flinched, pulse slamming against her fingers and eyes dark with need and hunger for something to hope for.

"You don't have to pretend home doesn't mean anything because yours was stolen. You, me, the Order...we're not fighting for lofty ideals or queen and country. Just for our homes," she told him softly. "And we're going to win, Malfoy. We're going to win and go home."

Slowly, he freed his wrist and squeezed her fingers. They sat bathed in comfort and flickering light until the sun rose.

Our Life

People are strangers until they're forced to live together.

This, Draco learns when he moves into Hermione's flat, and it's an unmitigated disaster. He's a man of simple wants and needs. That isn't the problem.

She is.

He's an afternoon, scotch, cigar, and dark, bitter chocolate man. She's a morning, fruity wine, *cancer stick out of my face*, and *floss! floss!* woman. Had either asked their friends, none of them mutual, how likely their relationship was to survive cohabitation, they would've been laughed out. On some subconscious level, they knew this and didn't ask.

The first week, they're both on their best behavior toilet seat up, no hair clogging drains, clothes folded and hung. The sex, of course, is fantastic. This, Draco thinks, is the life.

The second month, he always forgets tea coasters (which makes her scream), she constantly borrows his razor (which makes him see red) and neither of them can agree whose turn it is to do the chores. He tentatively suggests hiring...*hiring* for God's sake...a house-elf and his ears ring for days. This, Draco thinks, is hell.

The third time he is forced to sleep on her lumpy, tattered couch with only Crookshanks for warmth...he doesn't care how gobsmacked with bliss they are, Potter and Weasley are too young to get married...he begins to rethink the impulsive decision to move in. Relationships, his mother once told him, are made or broken on the backs of compromise. Having been all of seven at the time and spoiled so rotten he's still surprised at his turning out to be such a wholesome...he doesn't care what Hermione says on this subject...*tactful* man, he grimly acknowledges his mother may have been onto something.

This, Draco thinks, calls for a compromise.

"Maybe you should move out," says Hermione over takeaway that night.

And somehow he completely forgets he was going to tell her the same thing. "No," he says instead.

"Whatever this is," she gestures between them, "it isn't working. I need...we both need space. Just for a while."

"No," he says again, cold with the certainty that 'for a while' is code for 'forever.'

Her brows arch in exasperation. "What do you mean no?"

"I mean, no, I'm not leaving."

"But this is my flat."

"Not anymore."

"Not *anymore*...?"

"We made a deal," he tells her, throat scratchy as sandpaper. "We'd live together until one or both of us fell out of... out of..."

"Love?" she finishes. "See, you can't even say it!"

"Well, I haven't," says Draco. "Have you stopped loving me?"

She crushes her eyes closed. Her silence is a terrible, wretched thing that claws the insides of his chest. "No. I still do. Very much," she says at last.

"Then we don't have to live like this." Heart soaring, he shows her the brochures he hid beneath their plates. "Look, this one's even got two showers."

Hermione laughs and grips his hand.

This, Draco thinks, is *our* life.

Of Truths and Serums

The truth was often unpleasant.

In the case of underpaid, overworked Ministry employees poisoned at a holiday party with Veritaserum-spiked flour, 'unpleasant' was more like someone sneezing in your face, and while you're wiping your cheek, picking up the nearest sharp edge and slugging you. They're lumpy *heart*-shaped cookies, Draco thought, a dead giveaway someone's trying too hard to make them look harmless.

To his left:

"...don't even try to deny it! Everyone knows you fudged those budget numbers to get me sacked," screeched Romilda Vane of Pest Advisory.

Katrina Keener of Goblin Liaison fired back, "After you drugged my boyfriend! Love potion chocolates? *Really?* What are you...a third year?"

To his right:

Lenny Tinks said to Michael Wormwood, best friend and adjacent cubicle-occupier, "Listen, mate, it was just the once! Was thinking about you the whole time, and I daresay, so was your wife..." whereupon his former best friend picked up the eggnog ladle and clubbed him.

Draco pondered his options. He could, one: mine his co-workers for blackmail material or, two: get out while the getting was still good.

"Oh fudge," someone murmured behind him.

He turned to find Granger glaring at their brawling colleagues who had, up until five minutes ago, resembled civilized, if rather allergic to intelligence or any semblance of wit, people. He chose option three: blackmail Granger. "This prissy, killyjoy front really isn't an act, is it?" he said. "You can't curse even with your inhibitions magicked away."

"Malfoy," she jabbed a finger at him, "if I find out you're responsible, I will slap you black and blue, see if I won't..."

"Don't hold back," said Draco sarcastically. "Tell me what you really think of me."

It took him a long second to process that statement. Her eyes widening in dismay, Granger gritted her teeth and fought furiously not to answer. "No, it's not an act!" burst out of her. "I really am as dowdy and uptight as you think. And everything's horrid and *mad*, and I think I've got a brain tumor because I have this ridiculous idea that the most exciting part of my day is trading pithy insults with you after morning meetings..."

She clamped a hand over her mouth, mortified. Draco tried not to gape. "Come again?"

She mumbled incoherently until he jerked her hand away. Then she blurted, "You heard me the first time, you tosser! Every time you nod off during my presentations with that sleepy, condescending smile, I want to grab you and shake you into a concussion or-or *kiss* you into paying attention to me. And then there's your hair!"

"What?"

"It's shiny. And soft. Makes me delusional and think you're good-looking!"

He wondered if someone had put hallucinogens in the eggnog. "Granger, you...*like* me?"

She swallowed hard. "No! I don't know. Yes," she said, horrified. "I get a swooping feeling in my stomach every time I look at you because I'm this hopelessly romantic girl who thinks you only pick on me because you might like me, too. Oh *God*, I'll have to Obliviate myself after this. Or you...no, definitely you!"

Draco laughed. "What, and make me have to spike cookies all over again?"

"So it was you!" she breathed and moved to throttle him with murder in her narrowed eyes.

He evaded behind the refreshment table and snatched a cookie. He bit into it, smiling crookedly. "And now we're even. Ask away. But just for the record," he said, "*you* are a hopelessly romantic girl, and I was only picking on you because I like you, too."

Something True

Listen. Just listen, Hermione.

You said, *Tell*

I don't believe in the fatalistic bullshit gauzy-cloaked women are always peddling. I believe in rhythm. People who can have everything only want comfort. I get up and balance numbers in ledgers, then lunch, and more ledgers, then dinner from that takeaway place with to-die-for Mongolian beef, my only concession to Muggle living, and maybe a scotch or two, then sleep, and waking up, rinse and repeat. That's rhythm, same and safe and always.

me

Then there's you, and you don't fit. You're this pinpoint of pain in my side, the way bone aches in the cold (when you're gone) and suffocation flares in the chest (when you're here), tight and breathless burns that I want to make a wound that bleeds *in* instead of out, all heated edges and sharp anticipation, until I'm lightheaded for you. Sometimes, after the third or fourth scotch, I think I want to be something for you.

something

You're this maddeningly hopeful girl, wrapped in your upward glances and motivational speeches. Yes, you've warped me. But don't get me wrong. I'm not waxing rhapsodic about a good girl saving a bad guy...you can't and you didn't...but if I have to snatch some words out of the air and name the difference when I'm with you, it's that... I laugh more.

true.

Don't put that four-lettered box around us. This can't be love. Love's when a woman waits up every night and her husband returns with diamond bribes to forget, and she accepts. Love's when a boy carves ink into his wrist for a father's approving nod and after it gets *real*, barely manages not to splash his shoes with sick. Love's when a man finds everyone else unworthy so the only people left, pure of blood, are the only ones he can love.

Tell me something true.

This is true: Everything about you breaks rhythm.

This is also true: You make the past feel past. What do you say to scraping off the residue from those other definitions of love and making a new one someday?

Yes.