

Hidden in Plain Sight

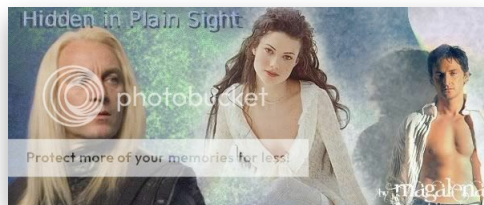
by magalena

There have been two murder attempts against Lucius Malfoy. Harry, Ron and Draco are all Aurors and partners, and have been assigned with the task of protecting Lucius. What better place to hide him than in a Muggle neighborhood, where no one will think to look for him: hidden in plain sight. This story was written for pokeystar for the 2010 Im_hgfixchange on LJ.

One

Chapter 1 of 6

There have been two murder attempts against Lucius Malfoy. Harry, Ron and Draco are all Aurors and partners, and have been assigned with the task of protecting Lucius. What better place to hide him than in a Muggle neighborhood, where no one will think to look for him: hidden in plain sight. This story was written for pokeystar for the 2010 Im_hgfixchange on LJ.



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Hermione wheeled around the corner and pulled into her drive, hitting the button to pop open the garage door.

After the war Hermione had found her parents and restored their memories, but in the end they had decided to stay in Australia. They'd signed her childhood home over to her, and she'd also been gifted with her dad's precious baby, his '96 Ferrari F355 convertible. Bright red and an extravagance he could easily afford. Her mother had called it his mid-life crisis, and said that she could deal with an expensive toy better than him turning to a younger woman. It was sleek and fast. For a witch who hated flying, she'd learned that she had no such aversion to speed on four wheels. She had talked her way out of a number of speeding tickets and usually without even having to use magic.

Shutting the side door to the garage behind her, she stopped dead in her tracks upon seeing a welcoming committee sitting on her back step: a blond, a brunet, and a redhead. She knew immediately this meant trouble and she wanted no part of it.

"Oh no, it's Larry, Moe and Curly. Whatever you stooges want, the answer is no," she stated firmly, hands on her hips.

"Now, Mione, don't be like that," whined Ron. "Maybe we just stopped by because we miss you."

"If you missed me, you'd owl me more often, or meet me for drinks and dinner when I ask you. Lately, the only time I see any of you, if I don't initiate it myself, is if you want something from me. I'm telling you up front, the answer is no. Whatever it is, no, no, no!"

"The last time you conned me into helping you, I wound up stranded in Borneo during the rainy season for five days with no wand, and you know what happens to my hair in humid weather! I have a busy life of my own, thank you very much. I don't need you three coming in and mucking it up," she concluded as she pushed past them, pulling out her wand to drop her wards.

"You're right, Hermione. We know you're right," said Harry in an attempt to placate her. "And we're sorry we haven't dropped by or owled you or Floo'd, but we're here now. Could we come in and visit for a bit?"

"Yeah, look, love, let us come in for a bit, won't you? I've brought this lovely bottle of wine to share," wheedled Draco, holding up a bottle of Merlot, which he knew was her favorite.

Hermione's eyes narrowed in suspicion as she eyed the bottle and the three friends. "You're not fooling me, Draco Malfoy; you probably stole that from your dad's wine cellar," she said with a sniff as she opened the door and billowed past them. "Of course, your dad does have very nice wine. Well, don't just stand there; come on in," she ordered.

"She's been hangin' around Snape too long. She's starting to act like him," whispered Ron.

"I'm right here in the same room, Ronald. I can hear you."

"Oh. Right. Sorry."

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Harry, Ron and Draco were all Aurors and very good friends these days. Things had changed a great deal in the ten years since the war had ended.

Hermione had worked at the Ministry herself for a couple years in the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. However, while the boys' jobs as Aurors had been legitimate, her position at the Ministry had been nothing more than a token for PR purposes. No one in the good-old-boys network had taken anything she proposed seriously. She'd eventually come to the conclusion that she was never going to accomplish anything she really wanted to, so she'd quit. But then she'd stupidly let herself get talked into going into the MLE with the hope of changing things through legal means. Once again, all her efforts had been thwarted time and time again. She realized eventually that, though the Ministry liked keeping her there as a figurehead, they were never going to let her initiate the kinds of idealistic policies she'd always dreamed of.

Three years ago, after quitting one day in a glorious display of fury, throwing all of her things helter-skelter into a box and shrinking it down, she had stormed out of the Ministry for good. Afterward she'd been drowning her sorrows in a drink or four when she'd run into Severus Snape. He'd invited her to join him at his table in the Leaky Cauldron, and after listening to her bitch and moan for the better part of the night, he'd made a proposition. She should start her own business; in fact, he had one in mind and he was looking for a partner. And that was how she'd ended up in a partnership with Severus Snape. They'd formed Grasna Security, specializing in personalized wards for home or business. Ward making was tricky. While most witches and wizards could toss up simple wards, really secure warding took a bit more finesse, and both Hermione and Severus were very skilled at it.

After a couple of years of building their business and reputation as the best in the private community, Snape had gone after the big guns. Gringotts. He'd convinced the Goblins...who better to help find the best way to protect their banks than the very witch who had engineered a break-in into the impenetrable fortress while still in her teens? So they were now co-owners and partners in an international wizarding firm that handled security for Gringotts branches around the world in addition to all of their other clients.

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"So cut to the chase," she demanded. After setting her briefcase on the kitchen table, she kicked off her heels and loosened the top buttons on her blouse. She'd had a meeting with a potential client and had dressed to impress. Reaching up into the cupboard, she got down four wine glasses and handed them to Draco. "What exactly is it you guys want this time?"

"Couldn't we just want to spend some time with our good friend who we haven't seen in a long time?" asked Harry innocently. "You know it's not just us. You're so busy all the time with your business and Snape that it's hard to get a hold of you."

Hermione took a sip of her wine and looked pointedly into her friend's eyes. "Is that so? Tell me, Harry, have you honestly ever tried to reach me when I've not gotten back to you?"

He looked down and flushed guiltily. "Okay, you win. We're all horrible friends. But we really are sorry."

She studied them all closely. They looked everywhere but at her, avoiding her gaze. There was more going on here than them just wanting to pay her a visit, she was sure of that. "So you three just popped over here on a whim, then. Just for a visit?"

The three looked surreptitiously at each other. The guilt lay so thick in the room, if it had been shit she could have fertilized her mum's prized rose bushes for a year. "Just spit it out," she finally demanded, deciding to put them out of their misery.

"We need your help," admitted Harry.

"I knew it! I knew you wanted something all along!"

"It would only be for a week, Hermione," added Ron. "No more than two at the most. Maybe three."

"Three weeks!"

"Probably not that long," Harry said quickly, shooting Ron a look to shut him up.

"We have someone who we need to hide in a safe house," explained Draco. "Someone's tried to kill him, twice already. He's been damn lucky so far."

"Yea, but we need a place to hide him out, just until we catch the perp who's trying to off him."

Ron's really been watching too many American cop shows, thought Hermione. "So you want me to design the wards for this safe house?" she asked. It seemed like a reasonable assumption; she should have known better than to assume that these three would ever suggest something reasonable.

"Well, no... err... that is... Well, we thought we could bring him here. Hide him in your house," explained Draco.

"WHAT!" she screeched. "Are you insane? You want to bring a wizard here, to stay in a Muggle neighborhood. A wizard who has already had two, not one, but two attempts made on his life by some crazy psycho. And you want to bring him here? Where whoever is trying to get him could follow? What about my Muggle neighbors?"

They could be in danger. Hell! What about me? I could be in danger. Do you even care about that?"

"Hermione, of course we care," assured Harry. "It would be safe. We'd be guarding the house. And besides, your wards are impenetrable. We tried to break them while we were waiting for you to get home, and we couldn't even come close. If three of the top Aurors in the department can't break them, I'm sure this stalker can't."

"You tried to break into my house?"

"Just to test the wards, Granger," Draco explained. "They really are top notch."

"Well of course they are. It's what Severus and I do, for Merlin's sake. Still, you can't expect to just bring a stranger in here and dump him on me."

"He's not exactly a stranger," blurted Ron, as both Harry and Draco made faces and shook their heads frantically at him.

Hermione turned in time to catch them and gave them a glare that could have melted steel. "Who?"

"Granger..." said Draco.

"Who is it?"

Harry sighed. "It's Lucius."

"NO!"

"Mione, we really need your help on this," pleaded Ron.

"No, no, no!"

"Hermione, at least think about it," begged Harry.

NO! N. O. No! No, no, no, and no. What part of that don't you understand?"

"We need to keep him safe. You're the best at what you do. Your security here can't be breached. Besides, no one would ever think to look for Lucius Malfoy in a Muggle house. It's the perfect set-up." Harry listed all the reasons, trying to convince her.

"Harry, it's Lucius-fucking-Malfoy. Lucius-I-Hate-Muggles-and-Mudbloods-Malfoy. How can you even suggest this to me?"

Draco stepped in front of her. Laying his hands on her shoulders, he looked her right in the eyes. "Granger, he's not like that anymore. He's changed. I promise." Silver-grey eyes met brown. She could see the turmoil inside him and the fear. His voice held a desperate tone. "Granger, he's my dad... I don't want this guy to kill him... He's missed twice but only by pure luck. Hermione... Please."

She closed her eyes and wrinkled her nose. Draco never called her Hermione. It was always Granger. It wasn't said nastily or sarcastically. It was just his nickname for her, a term of endearment, so to speak. So when he called her Hermione and said "please" so sincerely, she knew she was lost. "Oh shit! I am so truly fucked!" She gritted her teeth and growled out, "All right, yes, he can stay here."

Draco wrapped his arms around her and hugged her tight. "Thank you."

"There will be rules," insisted Hermione.

"That seems reasonable..." agreed Ron readily.

"Maybe..." replied Harry, his eyes narrowed.

"What kind of rules, exactly, Granger?" asked Draco uncertainly.

"He'll have to turn his wand over to me when he gets here," she demanded.

"What? No way!"

"Now, Hermione. Be reasonable," said Harry.

"Granger, there's no way he's giving up his wand. There's someone trying to murder him. You wouldn't agree to that if it were you and you know it," Draco rationalized.

Hermione had known they would never agree to that, but by putting such an outrageous proposal out there first off, she hoped it would make them willing to agree more readily to any other things she demanded. "All right then, he can keep his wand, but no magic here in my house unless he's under attack. This is a Muggle neighborhood and I do not want to have to go around Obliviating my neighbors. And he has to take care of himself while he's here; I'm not his maid, cook, housekeeper or his mommy."

"No problem, he'll just bring a house-elf from the Manor," said Draco.

"What part of no magic didn't you understand? No magic means no magic, none at all. Not inside this house."

"But he's not used to getting by without using any magic at all. He's bound to slip up, make mistakes," wheedled Harry. "You can't hold that against him."

"Hmmm... I've been working on some special wards to protect delicate Muggle electronics from magical interference. Maybe I can work from home and do some testing while he's here. I could ward certain areas to make them techie friendly, but I definitely can't have any magic around my computers or any electronic equipment, until I've perfected the wards. Okay then, maybe I'd be willing to allow it, but only in certain designated areas, and only once my experimental wards are in place. But house-elves are still forbidden."

"Great," replied Draco, "now all we have to do is convince my dad."

Hermione snorted. "So he doesn't even know about this brilliant plan you've concocted? Well good luck with that. He'll never agree to come and stay here. It looks like I have nothing to worry about, after all," she said with a smile.

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"I'm not leaving my home, Draco, and that's final," declared Lucius emphatically.

"It would just be for a few days... a week... maybe two at the most."

"Draco, there's nowhere safer than the Manor."

"Is that so? The last attempt took place right on our own grounds. Perhaps next time they'll manage to get into the house. By the time the Aurors get here, it could be too late."

"Honestly, Mr. Malfoy, it would be in your best interest," said Harry, trying to reason with the man. "I know you feel safe here, but the Manor is just too large for us to secure. The safe house is smaller. We can guard it more easily, and it's somewhere that no one would ever think to look for you."

"Let me guess, it's in Muggle London," Lucius stated jokingly.

"Who told you?" asked Ron. Harry and Draco were making faces and waving their hands, trying to get Ron to stop talking, but he didn't notice. "It's a brilliant plan, isn't it?"

"What? Surely you jest?" Lucius looked up from where he was standing by the fireplace. "Draco, he's not serious." Draco just swallowed and gave him a helpless look. "Oh, no... No, no, no... Absolutely not," declared Lucius.

"Dad, please be reasonable," begged Draco. "We need time to find this guy. We've got some really good leads, but we can't chase them down if we're spending all our time guarding you. If you agree to go to the safe house, then I won't have to worry about you."

"It's the truth, Mr. Malfoy. Like I said, it would just be for a short time," coaxed Harry.

"But Muggles! Honestly, I wouldn't even know how to behave among them."

"No worries, sir," said Ron. "It's just in a Muggle neighborhood, but you'd be staying with a witch."

"A witch? Living in a Muggle area?"

"Well, she's Muggle-born, you see. So she's used to it there. It's where she grew up," explained Ron.

Lucius turned to look at Draco and Harry. "How could a Muggle house be safer than here at the Manor? And why would this Muggle-born witch be willing to allow me to stay in her home? Why would any Muggle-born care what happened to Lucius Malfoy? I would think they might hope this maniac kills me."

Draco stepped toward his father and admitted, "It's Hermione, Dad. The witch is Hermione Granger, and to tell you the truth, she didn't want to let you go there. That was all our idea, but she agreed to it as a personal favor to us... to me. And her house is warded so tight, even the three of us together couldn't break in. And we honestly tried. Her wards are unbreakable."

"From what I hear she and Severus are the best there is in security ward design. I've been thinking of hiring them for Malfoy Industries." Lucius sighed in defeat. "All right, Draco. I don't like it but I'll agree. Only for a short while, though. You three had better find this madman, and in a timely manner, or you may have a different murder investigation on your hands. I'm just not sure if it will be my murder or Miss Granger's."

Lucius had no idea how close to the truth his words were.

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Two

Chapter 2 of 6

There have been two murder attempts against Lucius Malfoy. Harry, Ron and Draco are all Aurors and partners, and have been assigned with the task of protecting Lucius. What better place to hide him than in a Muggle neighborhood, where no one will think to look for him: hidden in plain sight. This story was written for pokeystar for the 2010 Im_hgfixchange on LJ.



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Hermione wanted to scream. It was only the third day of having that man in her house, and she wanted to kill him. "Lucius!" she shouted. "Get your lily-white arse down here right now!"

The first day he'd fried her laptop when he'd *forgot* about her restrictions on magic and had used his wand to cast a warming spell on the entire room, as his majesty was chilly. She'd managed to keep her head and not go berserk on him, showing him how to adjust the thermostat to control the heat.

Luckily she'd done a full backup before he came, anticipating something like this might happen. But still it had taken all day yesterday to go get a new laptop and install all the programs and download her files and bookmarks; and now she was back at square one with a second brand new totally dead laptop. She would have to repeat the entire process again tomorrow. Perhaps she could convince the techie guys at the store that they had sold her a bad machine.

She couldn't figure out quite how he'd managed it this time as she had created a special ward that would not allow him to enter the room with his wand. She had planned to start working on her tech-wards, as she was calling them, this week, but she was spending all of her time replacing computers. She'd also come to the conclusion that she needed to get some cheap, old used equipment to test on. She couldn't very well keep replacing state-of-the-art equipment.

"You bellowed, Miss Granger?" he asked in that cultured, butter-wouldn't-melt-in-his-mouth, voice.

"It's Hermione," she sighed. "Just Hermione. I won't stand on formality here. Lucius, as you know, I have asked you not perform any magic in my home. I realize this is difficult for you, but it's only for a few days until I get these new tech-wards worked out. The first day here, the warming spell you cast fried the motherboard on my computer."

He looked confused by her statement, but she forged ahead. "I spent most of the day yesterday replacing that computer and re-installing all of my files and software, and now this computer is totally dead as well."

Not knowing how to respond to this, he merely stood, hands clasped behind his back, staring about the room. Finally he responded, "I'm... err... sorry for your loss."

Hermione rubbed her fingers across her forehead as if soothing a headache. "Lucius, it's not as if a person has died. You needn't offer condolences. It's a machine. It's just that this is all very frustrating, expensive and time consuming. Did you somehow do magic in this room today in spite of my wards prohibiting you from bringing your wand in here?"

He thought about it for a bit and then frowned. "I do believe I may have Accio'd the book that I was reading from my room. I did it without even thinking, wandlessly."

"Wandless magic is even more powerful," replied Hermione. "Enough to destroy the electronics. They are very delicate and especially sensitive to magic."

"I don't understand the purpose of these *electronics*. Could you explain it to me?"

Hermione thought for a moment. Then, she proceeded. "Think of Muggle technology as their way of compensating for not having magic. They can do all sorts of things, Lucius. As you've seen, with the flick of switch, they can heat their homes without spells. They have machines to clean their clothes, wash their dishes, sweep their floors. With computers and telecommunications, they can contact people in an instant on the other side of the world."

Lucius looked skeptical at her claims.

She laughed. "It's true, I swear. If my laptop wasn't dead, I'd show you."

He looked pointedly at her lap.

"Not *my lap*, for Merlin's sake. My laptop computer. There are big computers people keep on their desks and more portable computers like this that they can actually take anywhere with them. I can write a note to my mum, hit a button and within minutes she can read it in Australia. It's faster than an owl or even a Patronus. Or, I can dial them up and speak to them in person without having to get down on my knees and talk into the Floo."

He still looked doubtful, so she pulled out her mobile and hit the speed dial to her parents. Within seconds, she was talking to her mum and even had her say hello to Lucius and tell him where she was.

Once she was off the phone, she proceeded to explain the many uses of her computer for filing, writing, accounting, communicating, storing pictures, doing research, even playing games or watching videos.

He asked many questions and seemed genuinely interested, so she offered to have him come with her the next day to purchase yet another new computer. She stipulated that they would have to bring one of the boys along for security.

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A few days later, Hermione was congratulating herself on converting Lucius to many things Muggle when the next bomb dropped. She'd decided to stop and pick up dinner on the way home, but the restaurant refused her credit card, saying it was maxed out. She knew that was impossible and figured it was some sort of glitch, so she paid with cash and was on her way. However, as she drove home, she began to worry. Had someone tried to steal her identity, or hacked into her accounts?

Upon entering her home, she was shocked by piles of delivery boxes stacked in her front hall. Shoving boxes aside and climbing over a few, she made her way to her study where she found Lucius, leaning back in the desk chair, clearly engrossed in something on her computer. "Lucius, what in the name of Hades is all this?"

He sat up abruptly, slightly turning the laptop away from her. "Oh, Hermione, you're home. I've done a little shopping. Since I'm not supposed to go out without a guard, I've been using your interwebs, and over the last few days I've ordered a few things. These Muggles are very ingenious; they bring the things right to your very door."

"Uh... Lucius, how did you pay for all of this stuff?"

"Oh, I watched you and knew I needed your little card with the numbers on it, so I borrowed one of yours."

Hermione gulped, closed her eyes and counted to ten, took a deep breath and counted to twenty. "*You borrowed* my credit card? Lucius, that little card is linked to my bank account, and there is a limit on how much I can charge. How much did you pay for all of this stuff?"

"Hmmm... I'm still a bit unsure of the conversion rates you explained to me, but in wizard funds I'd guess around two thousand Galleons," he commented, nonchalantly.

She sank to the sofa, stunned into disbelief. "Two thous... but that's ten thousand pounds."

"Is that a problem? I'll have Draco transfer the funds into your Gringotts account to cover all the expenses. Perhaps I could get one of those little cards for myself."

Hermione groaned and rubbed her forehead; this was getting to be a habit. She was going to have a perpetual headache as long as he was around. Sweet Salazar! She'd created some kind of monster! An internet-junky, shop-o-holic... The next thing she knew, he'd be into online gambling and porn.

At that very moment she heard moaning and grunting and heavy breathing coming from her computer. "Oh, yes... yessss. Oh baby, that's it, more... Oooohhh baby, you know what I need... harder, give it to me harder!! Please, oh pleeeeeease... Oh, oh, oooooohhh!"

Hermione turned very slowly to stare at Lucius, who actually had the grace to blush. "What in the name of Godric's goatee is that?"

"I found some... err... very interesting things on the lines today," he explained. "When you said that you could simply type a subject into Gaggle and it would give me a multitude of responses, I doubted you, but you were quite right."

"Online and Google," she corrected. "So I suppose from the sounds currently emanating from my computer that I should assume that you have discovered online porn?"

Hermione pinched the bridge of her nose and had a sudden mental image of Lucius sitting in her study, in her own leather desk chair, his blond head thrown back in ecstasy as he watched porn and wanked to his heart's content. And the really sad part was, she wasn't nearly as disgusted by the whole picture as she felt she should have been. In fact, she was rather turned on by it all. "Ummm, Lucius. What you do with yourself... er... or rather when you're alone, is your own business. But I'd rather not come home to find porn on my computer."

"I understand completely. That's why I ordered a laptop for myself. Would you help me set it up after dinner? And could you explain e-bay to me? And why is there a site called Amazon? I thought the Muggles were unaware of the Amazonians."

Hermione sighed. *Well at least it would keep him away from my computer,* she thought.

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The next several days went more smoothly. There were no more computer deaths. Hermione was able to somehow keep her mind off visions of Lucius wanking to internet porn and was even able to spend some time working on her new project.

She had come to the conclusion that it was possible for her to ward the study, which protected the computers from magical residue from elsewhere in the house. So, for example, she could do magic in her bedroom or the living room and it would not affect the computer in the study. But it didn't allow her to use magic anywhere in the study itself. This was not entirely practical, as she at times would like to take her laptop into the kitchen or her bedroom. So she began shrinking the area contained by the wards until it was just a small portion of the study in the area immediately around her desk. This seemed to work, and she could safely do magic anywhere else in the room.

She decided that the next step would be to make the wards small enough and strong enough that she could cast them on the area directly around the electronic equipment itself. This would enable her to take it anywhere she wanted as long as the wards were in place. But the trick was not to fry the thing while she was in the process of casting the wards. It was slow going, but she was finally making some progress.

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Unable to sleep, Hermione wandered downstairs with the intention of having a cup of chamomile tea to calm her nerves. She was just in the process of pouring the boiling water into the tea pot when, not used to having someone else in the house, she was startled by a movement in the hallway. This caused her to splash herself with the hot water.

"Oowww!" she cried, setting the kettle down quickly and turning to run cold water on her hand.

Lucius rushed to her side, grabbed her hand while pointing his wand at it and murmuring first a pain relieving then a healing spell. "You silly girl, what were you thinking? You're a witch, and quite a powerful one at that. Why are you sticking your hand under cold water rather than healing it yourself?" he chided her.

Great Godric, had he just paid her a compliment? "I guess old habits die hard, Lucius. My instinctive reaction is to first respond by Muggle means."

He examined her perfectly healed hand, his fingers softly caressing the skin on the back as his thumb traced circles along the sensitive flesh of her inner wrist, sending delicious shivers down her spine. He spoke softly, so softly that she had to lean close to hear his words. "Well, I suppose you have already taught me that Muggle means are not all bad, after all," he concluded with a small smile.

Hermione suddenly realized how close they were, and that Lucius wore a silky dressing gown that had come untied and gaped open revealing that underneath he wore only a pair of Slytherin green silk boxers. So much naked skin, suddenly it was hard to breathe. She felt a flush wash over her as she wondered what his lips would taste like, and then what other parts of him would taste like as well. She became a bit off balance as she mentally pictured herself sliding his robe off and pushing him back against the counter while she slipped down his body, touching, kissing, licking and tasting every bit of all that lovely naked skin until she knelt before him to take him in her mouth. With a gasp she pulled back and stepped away from him. *What on earth is wrong with me? This is Lucius Malfoy for Circe's sake.*

Lucius couldn't help but notice the blush that came over Hermione's face and felt her pulse race beneath his fingers before she abruptly pulled away from him *What is going on in this little witch's head*, he wondered.

She grabbed the mug and poured her tea. "I couldn't sleep," she explained nervously. "I thought some herbal tea might help...chamomile. My mum swore by it."

"Hmmm... yes, Severus as well," replied Lucius, pulling down another mug and holding it out for her to fill. They sat awkwardly for several minutes, sipping their tea and saying little. Hermione finally stood abruptly and announced that she was going back to bed and then rushed from the room.

She got to her room and slammed the door shut behind her, locking it both with wards and the Muggle way. Slipping beneath the covers, she lay there for a while, thinking about what had happened downstairs. *Gods above, I can't be lusting after Malfoy. It just isn't possible. It must just be the tension*, she thought as her hand slid down to touch herself intimately. Before long her fantasies played out in her head as her fingers eagerly stroked and circled over and over, just as she liked it, and soon she was crying out her release.

Lucius was on his way back to his room when he paused by her door. He could hear her moans and knew exactly what she was doing in there. He leaned his forehead against her door frame, his cock hardened as he pictured her, and he knew precisely what was happening behind that door. Before very long he heard her cry out as she came; he swore he heard his name on her lips. He wandered slowly back to his own room, reflecting on what had just happened. He closed the door quietly and proceeded to finish what the witch had started.

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Things were a bit awkward at breakfast the next morning, but nothing was said regarding the previous evening's activities. They had fallen into a routine for meals, as Hermione had held true to her word. She refused to wait upon Lucius Malfoy like some sort of glorified servant, and while he had little experience in cooking or cleaning, he had been more than willing to share the work. Since neither of them normally required a full English breakfast, they had got into the habit of coffee and toast for the morning meal. Hermione had developed a taste for a good cup of coffee as her drink of choice in the morning, and Lucius had adapted to her habit after the first few days. So she made the coffee while he buttered the toast.

While sipping their second cup of coffee, they heard the pop of Apparition and a knock on the door. Hermione checked and then opened the door to admit Ron and Draco. Lucius observed closely her interaction with the two men. Weasley greeted her with a quick, brotherly buss on the cheek while grousing over her choice of coffee over good English tea. She teased him right back, saying if he wanted tea he was capable and more than welcome to make it himself, which he proceeded to do, asking where she kept the tea.

Lucius couldn't help but take note of, and wonder a bit about, Draco's easy familiarity with Hermione. He brushed a quick kiss across her lips, then leaned in to whisper something in her ear. This caused her to giggle as she gave him a bump with her hip. Draco's arm draped across her lower back to rest on her opposite hip and pull her close to him in a quick hug. He noted that while Weasley didn't even know where she kept the tea, Draco knew where the silverware, mugs and napkins were as well as where to find the marmalade and juice. In fact, he seemed quite at home in Hermione's kitchen.

Hermione popped more toast in the toaster, passing the first two slices to Lucius which he automatically buttered without even thinking about it. Draco eyed his father quizzically; he'd never seen Lucius bother to butter toast. Draco looked at Ron, who had noticed it as well and who just waggled his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders at him.

While they finished their breakfast, Ron and Draco brought them up to date on what was happening with the investigation. Lucius asked many questions, but the boys kept their answers fairly general, unwilling to reveal too many details, which irritated Lucius to no end. Draco soon took his leave, assuring them that they were making progress, while Ron made more toast and finished off the pot of tea he'd made.

After Draco's departure, Lucius complained about being cooped up in Hermione's house and the lack of physical activity. This caused Hermione to recall the types of things she'd been imagining doing to him, and she blushed to the very roots of her hair as she gathered the dishes and quickly turned away.

Ron seemed puzzled by her reaction, but ignored it, turning instead to Lucius. "Draco says that you were quite the dueler in your younger days. Do you still practice?"

Lucius looked at him and nodded in response. "Why, yes. I participated in numerous competitions and held several awards in my youth. I do still practice on occasion...when I have a competent partner to work-out with, that is."

"Hmmm... Mione, do you still have the basement workout room warded to prevent outside detection of magic?"

Hermione looked at Ron and realized where he was going with this topic. "Yes, Ron, it's still warded and magically expanded, so if you'd like to take Lucius down there, you

could both work on burning off some of that excess energy."

"Great!" exclaimed Ron. "Whadda' ya say, Mr. Malfoy? Care to give me a lesson or two?"

Lucius eyed the eager redhead for a moment before agreeing. "Give me a few moments; I'll go up and change. Then, I'll join you downstairs."

Ron bounded down the stairs as Lucius headed the other way. Hermione stopped him with a hand on his arm. With a smile she warned him, "Don't let Ronald pull the wool over your eyes, Lucius. He acts like a big goofy doofus, but aside from Quidditch, his two favorite pastimes are wizard chess and dueling. He's one of the best in the whole Auror department."

Lucius' eyebrow arched in response to her warning. "Ah, good to know... I do so love a challenge." His eyes roamed over her, and his words seemed to take on a double meaning.

tbc

Three

Chapter 3 of 6

There have been two murder attempts against Lucius Malfoy. Harry, Ron and Draco are all Aurors and partners, and have been assigned with the task of protecting Lucius. What better place to hide him than in a Muggle neighborhood, where no one will think to look for him: hidden in plain sight. This story was written for pokeystar for the 2010 Im_hgfixchange on LJ.



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Several hours later, Hermione sat in her partner's office, commiserating over her unwanted house guest. "Severus, what am I going to do? He's making me crazy," she whined.

Severus had been out of the country on business for the past month, so prior to this he'd heard nothing of the attempts on Lucius' life. He stood to walk behind her chair. "Lean back, love," he commanded as he began kneading her neck and shoulders. "Merlin, woman, you are tense." He worked on the knots in her upper back and shoulders. "If it's upsetting you that much, send him away. We could ward a safe-house for him that's as impenetrable as yours. Or, he's welcome to come and stay with me, for that matter."

"For some reason, Draco wants him kept away from the wizarding world. He's really scared for his dad, Severus. I could see it in his eyes. He's terrified that this psycho is going to succeed."

Hermione sighed deeply, tilting her neck from one side to the other as he poked and prodded the knots from her tight muscles. She continued, "I honestly don't know what to expect of him. He makes me feel on edge, jumpy. He hasn't been rude or mean or the Muggle-hating Death Eater I expected him to be. He's actually been polite, engaging, interesting..."

"You're attracted to him," stated Severus bluntly.

"NO!" She exclaimed. "That's impossible."

"What is it that's making you crazy then?"

"I don't know. That's what I can't figure out. Since the first few days when he fried two of my computers, he's been fine. I can talk to him like I talk to you; we discuss books, politics, my work, his work. He's very intelligent, well read; he's even funny at times and so sexy I just want to..."

Severus tilted her head back and looked directly into her eyes. His eyebrows raised in a questioning expression.

Hermione gasped in disbelief. "Oh, sweet Merlin, did I just say Lucius Malfoy was sexy?"

"Well, to be completely honest, my dear, it is quite true; he is," he replied. "That's a given."

"Severus, what am I going to do?" she moaned.

He smirked at her. "You need to burn off some of that tension; want to come home with me? Or I could stop by your house later."

Severus and Hermione had an on-again, off-again relationship. They'd been lovers for a time, shortly after starting their business, but at that point neither had been ready to settle down. Over the last few years, they had met on occasion when both of them were unattached and in the mood for sex.

"What about Monique?" asked Hermione of Severus' latest girlfriend.

"She's living in Milan with an Italian count."

"Ahhh... sorry, I didn't know."

"Don't be; it was mutual." Severus leaned down and kissed her softly. "So... you, me, tonight?"

Hermione was sorely tempted. She and Severus had always been good together, and maybe all she needed to get Lucius out of her head was a rowdy bout of sex. It had been awhile, after all. "I have some proposals to work on at home; could you come by later? I'll open the Floo in my bedroom just for you. How does seven o'clock sound?" she asked hopefully.

"Sounds perfect," Severus replied with a smile.

~~*

Lucius and Ron had spent the better part of the afternoon dueling in her basement, and when she returned they were deeply involved in a game of wizard chess. She offered to order take-away and invited Ron to stay as well, but Lucius said that Draco had asked him for dinner along with Harry and Ron. Since Lucius had been going stir-crazy, Hermione was sure they were offering him this outing as a distraction. And with all of them along for security, he should certainly be safe.

Ron asked if she wanted to join them, but she declined, using the excuse of needing to complete the proposals for clients she was meeting with later in the week. She said she planned to finish her work, take a bubble bath and go to bed early. She made Lucius a Portkey that would transport him safely through her wards and allow him to return directly to her front hallway.

This had worked out perfectly as far as she was concerned. Lucius would be out of the house and well protected with Harry, Ron and Draco, and she would have complete privacy to shag Severus' brains out. Win-win.

Hermione reheated some leftovers, hurried to finish her work, chose a bottle of wine and fixed a tray of snacks to share with Severus later. She took them upstairs to her room to relax in her bubble bath and wait for Severus to arrive.

~~*

It was barely eight-fifteen when Lucius Portkeyed back into Hermione's house. The dinner had been cut short when a message had arrived that the three Aurors were needed immediately for something important. They wouldn't reveal to him what it pertained to, but Lucius was quite sure it had to do with his case. He'd demanded they take him along, but Draco had thrust the Portkey into his hand, sending him off before he could protest further.

Lucius was furious. He checked the kitchen to see if Hermione was there, as he wanted to vent his frustration by ranting to her. The kitchen was empty, however, and he recalled that she'd planned to finish some work and go to bed early. But honestly... eight-fifteen? He poured himself a generous amount of Firewhisky and walked back into the living room to sit and brood.

Being distracted, he disregarded the noises coming from upstairs at first. But suddenly, he came to his senses and realized the bumps and thumps he was hearing were not the normal nighttime sounds of Hermione's house. It sounded almost as if there was a struggle going on, and when he heard a muffled scream, he was up the stairs in a flash, racing down the hallway to Hermione's door, his wand drawn.

He flung the door open, surprised that it wasn't even locked, only to find Severus Snape thrusting vigorously into Hermione. A Hermione whose hands were tied to the headboard, and her eyes covered with a black silk scarf. A Hermione whose legs were wrapped around Severus' body, her heels pounding against his arse, urging him on.

"Severus?" gasped Lucius, disbelieving.

Hermione couldn't escape with her arms tied as they were, but the instant she'd heard the intrusion, she'd tried to get away with all her might, bucking against Severus in an attempt to throw him off her. However, upon the door slamming open, Severus had dropped his weight down upon her to both protect her from harm and to prevent her from escaping him. He muttered reassurances into her ear and slowed his thrusts long enough to cast a wandless shielding spell before he growled menacingly, "Lucius, for fuck's sake! Put your wand down; if you hex us, I swear you *will* live to regret it."

She continued to try to wriggle away in her distress, but he was determined there was no way he was letting her go without finishing this. He'd been too long without his Hermione.

She shrieked, "Lucius, is here? Now? Get off me Severus... mmmffftt..." The rest of her words were muffled by Severus' hand clamping firmly over her mouth. She struggled a bit, but neither did Severus withdraw his hand nor even stop fucking her, although he had slowed down a bit. *Bastard*, she thought, *I think he's actually enjoying this. I've always figured him for a bit of an exhibitionist.* And although she was as embarrassed as hell, she was also more turned on than she could believe at the thought of Lucius standing there, watching them.

Severus spoke calmly, as if he were having a simple conversation with a friend and had not just been caught in flagrante. "Lucius, as I'm sure you can clearly see, we're a bit busy right now. So, unless you want to join us, I suggest you close the door on your way out. I will be more than happy to talk with you later." With that he bent his head to suckle at Hermione's right nipple as he began again to pump enthusiastically in and out.

Lucius considered the two before he grabbed the door knob. "I will be waiting downstairs, Severus," he said, leaving in a huff. But he didn't quite close the door and paused to peek back at the two.

"Mmmphhffftt." Severus' hand was still over Hermione's mouth. "Ferus fu-ing shna tay yer han o eee ight ow!"

"If I remove my hand, will you promise not to hex me?" he asked as he ground against her. She soon moaned against his hand, and it didn't sound like a curse. "I intend to finish this," he warned, nuzzling her neck. "Now do you promise...no hexes?" She moaned again as he thrust deeply, grinding his pubic bone against her clit, driving her wild. She nodded, and he removed his hand and pulled the silk scarf from her eyes.

"Ooooh, Seveerrruusss," she gasped. "Untie me please. I want touch you."

He slowed and looked down at her suspiciously. "Are you sure this isn't a trick? I know your temper, woman."

"I promise, witches oath, I swear. I'll never be able to look Lucius in the eye again, and believe me, I do intend to get even with you eventually. But right now... oh, goddess... right now, I just want you to fuck me, fuck me hard."

"Well then, love, it's my pleasure to grant your every wish." He wandlessly released her hands, and she pulled him to her in a deep kiss.

Lucius soundlessly closed the door the rest of the way and went back downstairs.

~~*

Lucius waited impatiently for over an hour before Severus strolled down the stairs, freshly showered and dressed in casual Muggle jeans with his shirtsleeves rolled up. He looked sexually satiated. For some reason Lucius wanted to punch his friend's face in.

"Took you long enough," Lucius grumbled, handing Severus a glass of Firewhisky.

"Hermione was a tad upset at the interruption. It took me a while to calm her down. She swears she'll not be able to look you in the eye ever again. I'd suggest not mentioning the whole scene to her if you don't want to get blasted to kingdom come," Severus explained with a chuckle.

Lucius cleared his throat. "I didn't realize that you two were together."

"We're not."

"Excuse me? What did I just witness up there then? That was surely no business meeting."

"We're friends now. But shortly after we first started Grasna, we were together, romantically, for a while. She was really just coming into her own at that time, as a witch, as a woman. She needed a chance to experience life on her own terms, and I felt I wasn't able to offer her what she needed in a long-term relationship. We agreed to remain friends and business partners. We do still come together occasionally to work off tension."

"Hmmpf," grunted Lucius. "Why was I never aware of this... relationship? We've been friends a long time, and I don't recall any mention of anything romantic between the two of you."

"It was no one's business but our own," replied Severus quietly. "Besides, you had other things to deal with then. I believe it was during the time you were going through your divorce proceedings with Narcissa."

Severus sipped his Firewhisky and studied his friend from behind hooded eyes. "She's attracted to you, you know," Severus finally informed his friend. At the disbelieving look shot his way, Severus continued, "It's true. She thought that perhaps a rousing bout of sex would get you out of her head."

Severus took another sip of his whisky and eyed Lucius closely. "Personally, I don't think it's going to help at all. Especially after that little interruption, she's not going to be able to stop herself from thinking about you watching us. I think she was actually quite turned on by it all."

Lucius studied his friend closely. "And you're okay with that? It doesn't bother you at all?"

Severus set his drink down and sat for several minutes studying his friend before replying. He sat with his fingers entwined, index fingers steepled, tapping on his lips, considering. "I am going to share some information with you about our Hermione. I tell you this merely to inform you. It's not about gossip, and if you decide not to act upon it, it is never to go any farther than these four walls. I am not giving up this information to you to give you a means to hurt her; and if I think it necessary, I will Oblivate you without any qualms whatsoever."

"Sweet Salazar, what in hell are you planning on telling me, Severus?"

Taking another sip of his drink, Severus continued. "When I say that I could not offer Hermione what she needed to make her happy, I mean that literally." Severus paused, unsure if it was a wise plan to reveal this to Lucius, but in the end he decided to continue. "Hermione has a propensity for polyamorous relationships, and I believe she would ultimately not be happy, in the long term, in a monogamous commitment."

"Poly... are you serious? She prefers *ménage à trois*?" Lucius seemed more curious than shocked. Severus figured that was a good sign.

"I believe it may stem from her early bonds with Potter and Weasley..." Severus tried to explain, only to be interrupted by Lucius.

"So you're saying the Golden Trio...really was a trio?"

"No, Lucius, get your mind out of the gutter. They were children, for Merlin's sake. They were and are like siblings, nothing more. But I am saying the close bonds that were formed shaped her psyche. She subconsciously seeks out that kind of connection. She told me herself, in a drunken night of exchanging stories of our youths, that her first sexual encounter was with twins. And she liked it, quite a lot, apparently."

"Twins." Lucius mulled this over. "Ginger twins, by any chance?"

Severus nodded. "Yes, and over the years, there have been other such encounters."

Lucius took in all of this information without revealing any reaction one way or the other. "Soooo... Severus, when you were together... Did you ever... share?"

Severus got a faraway look on his face. One corner of his mouth lifted into a smirk that was the closest thing to a sappy grin Lucius could ever recall seeing on his friend's face. "Yes, once. But it was just for one weekend. We brought Kingsley home with us from one of the victory anniversary celebrations. He was a little drunk, but he came home with us willingly. It was only the one time, though. He felt that as Minister he couldn't risk the scandal that might come if it turned into a long-term relationship."

"A threesome with Kingsley Shacklebolt, Hermione Granger and you? Dear Lord, Severus, the magical energy in that room must have been simply off the scales."

Severus sighed again. "It was shortly after that I decided that I should let Hermione go. I just couldn't offer her what she needed."

"Awhile back she took the assignment at Gringotts Rome branch, re-designing all the wards. She started to date a wizard she knew from her Hogwarts days. He was working for Gringotts there. Through him, they both became involved with another close friend of his. Hermione and this friend had been at odds during their school days, but they managed to overcome their childhood animosity toward each other. The three of them seemed happy. That's when I started seeing Monique. I figured, at that point, I'd lost any chance of ever getting her back."

"So, what happened to the Gringotts wizard and his friend?"

"Something came between them; I'm not entirely sure..."

Lucius had a thought and interrupted him. "Wait... Severus, doesn't Blaise Zabini work in the Rome branch of Gringotts?"

"Yes, he does, Lucius."

"It was him! And the friend they were involved with... it was Draco, wasn't it? I noticed earlier an easy sort of closeness between Draco and Hermione. I had no idea; Draco never hinted anything of it to me at the time. What happened to them?"

Severus shook his head. "I really don't know, she never revealed to me what caused the break up, and I didn't really care at that point. When I realized that she was attracted to you, I thought perhaps I could use that attraction to my advantage..."

Lucius interrupted him yet again, "Severus, you Slytherin dog! You set me up. You didn't cast any silencing spells; you left that door unlocked and un-warded, just hoping that I'd come bursting in."

"Why, Lucius, I don't have any idea what you're talking about," replied Severus, trying to maintain an air of innocence.

"I think you do, old friend. You left that door unlocked so I'd catch the two of you together...*Lucius, as I'm sure you can clearly see, we're a bit busy right now. So, unless you want to join us, I suggest you close the door on your way out.*' You were hoping I'd accept the offer and join you, then and there. And knowing Hermione's background and your belief that she is attracted to me, you hoped she would agree."

"Well, it would have simplified things greatly," agreed Severus quietly. "Now, if you are interested in pursuing a connection between the three of us, you are going to have to

seduce her yourself; then perhaps convince her to invite me to join in as well. Unless of course, you are put off by the idea that she's been with Draco before and don't want to pursue this. In which case I really may have to Obliviate you of everything that happened here this evening."

Lucius considered everything Severus had revealed. Hermione was a very powerful and attractive witch. Lucius had always been attracted to power; the thought of the three of them together was intoxicating. "No, she and Draco have clearly moved on. You have suggested that she is attracted to me, and I would be lying to you if I told you I didn't reciprocate. And quite honestly, this whole polyamory issue has me quite curious. Tell me more, Severus, tell me more," Lucius said silkily.

tbc

Chapter Four

Chapter 4 of 6

There have been two murder attempts against Lucius Malfoy. Harry, Ron and Draco are all Aurors and partners, and have been assigned with the task of protecting Lucius. What better place to hide him than in a Muggle neighborhood, where no one will think to look for him: hidden in plain sight. This story was written for pokeystar for the 2010 Im_hgfixchange on LJ.



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Hermione did indeed have a hard time looking Lucius in the eye for the next few days. She tried to avoid being alone in a room with him, which was extremely difficult, as he seemed to show up wherever she was. He was everywhere.

When she got up early and slipped down to make the coffee, he was sliding in behind her, brushing against her backside while reaching for the bread to make the toast.

When she thought he'd gone down to the basement to practice his dueling, she went into her study to work, only to find Lucius ensconced at her desk watching internet porn. Looking over his shoulder, Hermione couldn't help but notice that it was a threesome flick involving two men and a woman. Without meaning to, she moaned softly, feeling a blush creeping up her cheeks as she saw what was happening on the screen. Lucius turned in the chair, and upon seeing her there quickly closed the laptop, apologizing for taking up her space.

When she went upstairs late at night, thinking Lucius would already be in bed, she still managed to run into him coming out of the bathroom. The towel was slung low across his hips, his hair still damp from his shower. Merlin! He smelled delicious. Goddamn it, the man was everywhere!

After several days, when Lucius didn't bring up that night with Severus, Hermione's awkwardness began to fade, and she was at least able to function normally around him. She really wanted another get-together with Severus to relieve the sexual tension she was feeling, but he seemed to be avoiding her calls. *The bastard!*

~~*

Two weeks of having Lucius living in her house had passed quickly. They seemed no closer to finding his stalker now than when they started. Every tip had led to a dead end thus far.

After much complaining on Lucius' part about being held prisoner, the Auror team had agreed to allow him to go out into Diagon Alley. He was under close guard, of course, flanked by Harry and Draco with Ron following some distance back. Things had gone fine at first.

Hermione had entered the Alley with them but then separated herself from the group and gone about her own business with plans to meet up later for lunch at a new French restaurant, *Les Sorcières Brassent*. After spending a pleasurable hour in Flourish and Blotts and another thirty minutes perusing the wares at Quality Quill and Parchment, she was making her way toward the meeting point when she was overcome by a strange feeling of being watched.

Hermione was looking over her shoulder, trying to determine the source of her unease, when she heard Ron shout her name. Spinning around, she was hit by a slicing hex. Had she not turned, it would have hit her square in the chest. As it was, it barely caught her shoulder. Seconds later she was knocked to the ground by Ron as he fired Stunners down a dark alleyway.

While Ron quickly examined Hermione for injury, they heard a commotion from down the street.

"Ron," she gasped. "I was the distraction. It's Lucius they're after. I'm fine, really. Go help them."

Ron tore off down the street as Hermione pulled herself to her feet. She hurried after him and sprinted forward in a panic when she saw Lucius lying on the ground with Draco crouching over him like a mother dragon guarding her pup. He turned his wand on Hermione until he realized it was her and then pulled her behind him as he scanned the street for danger.

Hermione dropped to her knees next to Lucius and quickly began casting diagnostic spells over him. The spells revealed he'd caught a Stunner, but there appeared to be no other damage. She told Draco that his father was fine and that she was going to Side Along with him through her wards and back to her house.

Before she could gather Lucius in her arms, Draco's wand was pointed directly at her heart. "Before I let you Disapparate out of here with my father, tell me something to

convince me you really are Hermione Granger."

Hermione huffed, but in reality she knew Draco was doing the smart thing. "You, Blaise and I spent a weekend in Venice. I brought a beautiful green evening dress but never got a chance to wear it because we didn't set foot outside the hotel room all weekend."

Draco grinned. "Thanks, Granger, I had to be sure."

"It's all right, Draco. I understand the necessity. I don't think he needs to go to Mungo's. It looks like just a strong stunner. I'll take him home; you and Ron and Harry get there as soon as you can."

Hermione held Lucius close to her and Apparated into her living room. Levitating him onto the sofa, she knelt next to him and gently brushed his hair out of his face. She stroked his cheek before she cast *Rennervate*. As he came to, opening his eyes and looking up at her, Hermione finally lost it. She burst into tears.

Lucius wrapped his arms around the sobbing witch. "Shhhh... don't cry. It's all right. Tell me what happened. I remember hearing shouting. Potter and Draco shoved me behind them. I think I actually heard someone cast an *Avada Kedavra*. But I'm not sure. There were spells flying everywhere. Was anyone hurt? Is Draco all right?"

"Just you. You were hit by a strong Stunner. But when I saw you lying there... I thought... I thought they'd finally succeeded. Oh, Lucius, I thought you were dead."

"And would that have bothered you? At least then you would have got me out of your house," he teased.

Hermione drew back and thumped him hard on the chest. "Oh you... you... you infuriating man!"

As she struggled to get to her feet and escape, he wrapped his hands around her elbows and pulled her forward onto his chest again. "Oh, no, witch, you aren't getting away from me that easily," he declared as his lips closed over hers. He kissed her lightly at first, then deepened the kiss. As his hands slid up her arms, she winced, and when he pulled away he saw blood on his hand. "Hermione, you're bleeding."

"Oh, it's just a scratch, really," Hermione explained. "They used me as a diversion. I think attacking me was supposed to pull them all away from you, leaving you alone like a sitting duck. But Ron shouted to warn me. Good thing, too, or that slicing hex would have hit me square on instead of just glancing off my shoulder."

Lucius shoved her back, looking from the blood on his hand to her shoulder. He looked absolutely furious. He pulled off her jacket to reveal her shirt beneath soaked with blood from shoulder to wrist. Taking the material of her shirt in his hands, he ripped it away to expose her wound. The very fact that he didn't use magic was very telling to Hermione as to how upset he actually was.

It was a bit more than the scratch she had called it: a clean cut through the meaty part of her upper arm about three inches below the shoulder. It was deeper than she'd thought at first, but still, it could have been so much worse if she hadn't turned away. When she explained that to Lucius again, instead of reassuring him, it only seemed to make him more livid.

"You could have died. Died! And it would have been my fault."

"Your fault? What on earth are you on about? You didn't throw this hex at me. Some maniac did."

"Because of me, you stupid, stupid girl, because of me!"

"Don't call me stupid! And I'm not a girl either. I'm a full grown witch, and I can take care of myself, thank you very much."

"I can no longer stay here. I am putting you in danger."

"Listen you stubborn man, that's why you were in the first place because you were in danger. Did you just realize that? You're safer here than just about anywhere."

That was how Harry, Ron and Draco found them standing nose to nose, shouting at each other, Hermione's blood dripping down her arm and soaking into the carpet when they Portkeyed into the room. Turning to look at the three Aurors, Hermione suddenly felt the whole room begin to spin. Clutching at Lucius with her good hand, she crumpled, but he managed to catch her before she could hit the floor.

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Hermione woke up in her own bed. The room was dim and she was thirsty. She was trying to sit up when she noticed a dark shape in the chair next to her bed.

"Severus?"

He gently pushed her back down onto her pillows. "Lie down, witch. You aren't going anywhere for awhile."

"I'm thirsty," she rasped.

Severus poured her a glass from the pitcher beside the bed and held it to her lips as he supported her shoulders.

"Thanks. But why are you here? Not that I'm not happy to see you, you understand."

"Lucius insisted I come and bring some Blood-Replenishing Potion from my personal stores. It seems for some reason he didn't trust the Auror department to supply adequate potions." Severus gently slid his hand over hers and twined their fingers together. "You gave everyone quite a scare there, love."

"Sorry, I guess I'd lost more blood than I'd realized. I was more worried about Lucius at the time. He was lying there on the street in Diagon Alley with Draco hovering over him. I thought that maniac had succeeded at last. Oh, Severus, I was so scared."

"I know, but he's fine and so are you."

"He was talking about leaving, insisting he'd put me in danger by being here. That's so stupid. No one even knows he's here. He's safer here than anywhere else."

"Yes, I think they have managed to coerce him into staying. I believe Harry may have convinced him that you need someone to keep an eye on you, and Lucius has been volunteered. So, for the time being it appears that you are more or less confined to the house. But it will keep Lucius here as well."

"If that's what it takes, I'm fine with that," Hermione replied, her eyes drifting shut, suddenly too heavy to hold open. "Severus, you bastard, did you slip a Sleeping Draught into my glass of water?" she mumbled.

Bending down, he brushed a thumb across her lips as he dropped a kiss onto her forehead and whispered, "Perhaps I did, love. You really must beware of us Slytherins. We're a tricky lot, you know."

Damn you, she thought as she drifted off.

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When Hermione awoke again it was the very early morning, not even dawn yet. Severus was gone, and Lucius was dozing in the chair at her bedside. He had on his silky dressing gown, and she had the absurd urge to reach out and tug on the belt. He smiled at her when he opened his eyes and saw her watching him. She smiled back.

"Feeling better this morning?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm fine really. It was just a cut. It was worse than I thought at first, but I'm fine, honest."

"I shudder to think what could have happened if you'd been struck full on with that hex..."

"Lucius, I'm fine. Don't dwell on it. Okay?" Reaching out, she took his hand in hers. "Will you do something for me?"

"Anything. What do you need?"

"I just need... I... Will you hold me? Please, just hold me."

Slipping off his slippers as Hermione pulled back the covers, Lucius slid in beside her and gathered her close. She rested her head on his shoulder as he enfolded her in his embrace, and she knew beyond any doubt that things had changed between them.

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When she woke again it was eight o'clock, and she was alone in the bed. Lucius had held her until she'd fallen back asleep, and nothing else had happened. Hermione wasn't sure if she was relieved or disappointed.

Feeling refreshed, she dressed and headed downstairs to find a fresh pot of coffee brewed and Lucius sitting at the table reading the *Daily Prophet*. Seeing her pouring coffee, he popped two slices of bread into the toaster and pushed the lever.

Hermione sat at the table, and they looked at each other awkwardly for a few seconds before they each tried to speak at the same time.

"Hermione..."

"Lucius..."

"I'm sorry, ladies first," said Lucius.

Hermione wished he weren't so damned polite. "Very well then. Yesterday, seeing you there lying in the street, thinking you'd been killed, I realized that somehow, Lucius, I've come to care for you. Three weeks ago, if someone had told me that this would be the case, I would have laughed in their face and told them they belonged in the Janus Thickey Ward at Mungo's."

Lucius smiled and replied, "I concur, my dear. I'm attracted to you, although I would not have admitted it myself. But when I saw your blood on my hand and realized that had you not turned away when you did, you could easily have died..." He reached across the table, laying his hand over hers. "Hermione, I do not want to hide my feelings for you any longer. I feared rejection because of my age, my background, and who I am. But after yesterday, I feel we must speak plainly to one another."

Hermione turned her hand over and clasped Lucius' hand in her own. "Very well then, we have much to discuss. There are certain things you must be aware of before we can even think of proceeding."

Hermione swallowed, finding the discussion difficult. "Embarrassingly enough, you saw me with Severus, so you are obviously aware of our relationship. And I know he talked to you afterward, so you know of our history. I'm twenty-nine, not a blushing virgin. Obviously, I've been with other men."

"Hermione, your past does not concern me. I'm sure we both have a history, so to speak."

"You're right Lucius, but this is important, and I want to be up front with you. You do need to know at least this part of my past. Draco and I had an affair that lasted for several months. I know that he never told you about us. His reasons are his own. But I couldn't even think of pursuing any kind of relationship without revealing that to you. I wouldn't want you to find out later and think I was hiding it from you. We chose to break up, but have managed to remain friends. However, not friends in the same sense that Severus and I have remained friends. Just so you know, I haven't been with Draco since last autumn, nearly a year ago. If this changes your feelings about me, I will, of course, understand."

Lucius was silent for several minutes, and assuming the worst, Hermione tried to pull her hand away from his. Lucius tightened his hold and looked into her eyes. "I was not aware of your relationship with my son at the time. However, Severus inadvertently revealed it to me the other night. I will tell you what I told him: you and Draco both seem to have moved on. I am fine with it." He smiled softly. "In my opinion it shows what good taste my son has. Nevertheless, it is his loss that he did not work harder to keep you when he had you, my dear. Draco's loss is my gain."

"The break up was mutual. In our romantic relationship... there were issues... things we couldn't seem to overcome," Hermione said as she walked over to the pot to refill her coffee cup.

"These... issues... Did they involve Mr. Zabini?"

She whirled to face him. Unsure of his reaction, she leaned back against the counter and studied him closely. "Damnation, just how much did Severus tell you?"

He stepped closer to her. "Everything," he answered.

Her throat tightened and she swallowed hard before asking, "And are you appalled by my past, my preferences? Scandalized? Disgusted?"

Suddenly, he was encroaching on her personal space, so close she could feel the heat of him. It made her heart pound, her breath coming in short, desperate pants. His hand came up to cup her cheek. His gaze traveled over her face, dropping down to her mouth. The tip of his tongue moistened his lips. Then his eyes rose and locked with hers. Just before his lips claimed hers, he breathed, "Intrigued."

tbc

Chapter Five

Chapter 5 of 6

There have been two murder attempts against Lucius Malfoy. Harry, Ron and Draco are all Aurors and partners, and have been assigned with the task of protecting Lucius. What better place to hide him than in a Muggle neighborhood,

where no one will think to look for him: hidden in plain sight. This story was written for pokestar for the 2010 Im_hgfixchange on LJ.



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Her fingers threaded through his silky hair as she pulled him down to deepen the kiss. His tongue traced the seam of her lips, and she allowed him entrance. Her tongue dueled with his, touching, tasting, tantalizing. Before withdrawing, her teeth scraped over his bottom lip and she nipped him lightly.

He responded by sucking on her lip just before lifting her up to set her on the counter, putting her at a more convenient height for his ministrations. Pushing her knees wide, he stepped close to her body, his hands running up her thighs, skimming her torso and grazing lightly over her breasts before pulling her tightly to him, renewing the kiss. Lucius conquered, holding her head as he took his fill of her mouth, leaving Hermione breathless. As her head fell back against the cupboard door with a thunk, he nibbled his way down her neck, nipping and licking and sucking. He paused as he reached her collarbone to unbutton the top buttons of her shirt while she squirmed against him.

"Hermione," Harry's voice called as he pushed through the doorway. "Whoa..." Seeing Hermione perched on the counter with Lucius' face buried in her cleavage, he immediately spun around, pushing Draco back out through the doorway.

Neither of them had heard the sound of others arriving via Portkey into her front hallway. "Oooops," said Lucius softly, a smirk on his lips. "Perhaps I forgot to mention they were coming over. Something about escorting you to a business appointment you had scheduled."

Suddenly Hermione snapped to attention. "Shit! I completely forgot. I'm supposed to present the proposals to my clients today. I need to get ready." She hopped down from the counter and started for the door to go upstairs and change. She took two steps, turned back and, grasping Lucius by the front of his shirt, pulled him close for a quick hard kiss. "We *will* finish this later," she stated bluntly. Before leaving the kitchen, she paused by the door, as if she'd had another thought. Turning back again, she added, "Lucius, I know you say you're okay about my past with Draco, and honestly, I am too. But I think before we get in too deep, you should see how he feels. I have no intention of causing a rift between the two of you; I couldn't live with myself if that happened."

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Hermione rushed through the doorway and down the hall, headed for the stairs to go up and get dressed for her appointment. Harry said nothing, but looked pointedly at her shirt and wagged his eyebrows. Looking down, she realized her buttons were undone clear down to her bra. Clasp the front of her shirt together, she pushed past the two, calling down that Harry could accompany her and Draco could stay with his father.

After what had happened in Diagon Alley the previous afternoon, it had been decided that neither Lucius nor Hermione would leave the house unaccompanied. So, Harry went with her to her business meetings. She had two proposals to present to potential clients and spent a bit of time with each answering questions. Then she wanted to stop at Grasn's offices so she could talk to Severus. Harry left her there, trusting Snape to make sure she got home safely.

Hermione waited patiently while Severus took an important international Floo call. After finishing the call, he turned his attention to her. "I take it there's something you want to say to me."

"Exactly what did you tell Lucius the other night?" she asked straightforwardly.

"The truth."

"And why did you feel it necessary to inform him of my past liaisons?" Hermione asked, trying to stay calm and keep her anger in check. She didn't want to say something she might have regretted later.

"You are attracted to him, and it is obvious that he is attracted to you, as well. I knew something was bound to come of that eventually, no matter what I said. I just didn't want you to get hurt in the process, so I thought it best to tell him the truth. I threatened to Oblivate him if he couldn't deal with things. Plus, if he is accepting of your choices... Well, there may yet be hope for me... for us."

"Oh, Severus," Hermione sighed. She had come here planning to rake him over the coals and put him in his place for interfering in her life. Instead, she learned that he'd been protecting her, in his own twisted way, while looking out for his own interests at the same time. Typical Severus. She walked behind his chair, bent down, and wrapped her arms around him, laying her cheek aside his. "You impossible Slytherin. I never stopped loving you, you know?"

"And I you, sweet. But I've never known if that would be enough. I honestly don't think you would be content for the long run in a monogamous relationship. And there are very few who would willingly put up with me..." He turned to look into her eyes with a flash of hope. "But Lucius might."

"Well, don't start picking out the china patterns just yet, darling," she replied with a little chuckle. "I'm not entirely sure how things will turn out between Lucius and me. You were right; I am very attracted to him, and he does seem to return the feeling. But whether it will last or burn bright and die a quick death is yet to be seen."

She kissed his cheek and informed him that since she was going to Portkey directly home from her office, there was no need for him to accompany her.

~~*

When she got home, Hermione was at first concerned as she found no one in the living room, the study, or the kitchen. Just when she was about to allow herself a bit of panic, she heard someone pounding up the basement stairs, and Draco burst into the kitchen, sweaty and disheveled from dueling.

"Oh, Granger, good. You're back. I just got a call from Harry. I have to leave right away. We have a promising lead on the suspects in the incident yesterday. Let my dad know what's up, will you? We've been dueling all afternoon; he's upstairs taking a shower now."

Hermione stopped him with a hand on his arm. "Draco, is everything all right? Between you and Lucius?" She hesitated before adding, "Between us?"

"Everything's fine, Hermione. We were dueling for practice, for fun, not because we were trying to kill each other." He laid his hand over hers. "Things didn't work out between us and Blaise, but I'm glad we're all still friends. I honestly hope things do work out for you and father. He could use some happy times in his life."

"I don't know if they will or they won't, Draco, but I'd like to have the chance to try."

After Draco left, Hermione went upstairs. The shower was still running. She stepped into her own room and removed her clothes. She kicked her favorite but raggedy old terrycloth robe into the corner and donned her sexy, silky robe instead.

She would have liked to have just slipped into the shower to surprise him, but she figured that probably wasn't a wise plan with a wizard who'd recently had three attempts on his life. She knocked softly and then opened the door a crack to ask, "Lucius, may I join you in there?"

~~*

Lucius lay in bed, his arm flung behind his head, his other arm holding the warm woman snuggled close to his side. He was completely relaxed. He usually wasn't one for cuddling; he was more likely to fuck a woman and then send her home. But this felt different for some reason that he couldn't quite put his finger on. Having Hermione lying so close, so trusting, he felt protective and tender. Instead of pushing her out of his bed, he wanted to bind her to him and never let her leave. This was totally unlike him. Sex was sex. Where were these odd feelings coming from?

The activities of the night before ran through his mind, bringing a satisfied smile to his face. He hadn't been expecting her to join him in the shower, but her hesitant taps and request to join him had made little Lu jump up faster than a niffler after a goblin's gold.

Hermione had then surprised him by aggressively taking the lead, stepping into the shower, taking the soap to wash him all over, her hands sliding sensuously over his entire body. When she had dropped gracefully to her knees before him, all breath had left his body, and he'd been sure he was going to lose it before she'd even touched him. She'd taken her time with him then, touching him with her hands, stroking up and down over his legs, caressing his calves, tickling behind his knees, sliding up to squeeze his arse before grasping his cock and pumping. She had drawn it out, taking his balls in her hot sweet mouth, first one and then the other, rolling her tongue around them, sucking them gently, then not so gently. She'd taken him to the edge of rapture with her mouth on his cock: kissing, licking, sucking before withdrawing and holding off his orgasm until he was begging her to finish it. Then she had. She'd nearly swallowed him whole and taken him over the edge. He'd shouted her name as he came so hard he'd thought he was going to pass out.

Once he'd been sure that his knees weren't going to collapse, he'd repeated her actions by washing her all over with the bar of soap that smelled like Hermione. Then he'd rinsed her off, dried her carefully and carried her to his bedroom because he hadn't wanted to take her in the bed she'd shared with Severus. He'd wanted the night to be just about them.

He'd laid her on her stomach with pillows placed strategically for her comfort. Then he'd produced some warm, scented massage oil and proceeded to massage every bit of her, from the tips of her toes all the way to her neck. Pushing her wildly curly, sexy hair to the side, he'd dropped kisses to the back of her neck and all the way down her spine, over the taut globes of her arse, down her thighs, and finishing at her feet. Then he'd flipped her over and started all over on the front side, massaging his way from bottom to top. He'd taken so long that by the time he'd worked his way back to her intimate bits, she'd been a quivering mass. She was moaning and pleading at first, and then finally snarling and swearing at him, "Circe's tits! Get the fuck on with it, you sadistic bloody bastard."

It seemed that Miss Hermione Granger could dish out the teasing but didn't take it well in return. And she had quite the dirty mouth when antagonized. He was rather turned on by it. By the time he'd lowered his mouth to taste her sweet quim, she was so close to the edge that it was only a matter of minutes before she came wildly for him. While she was still in the throes of her orgasm, he'd plunged into her tight, hot body and ridden her to another peak. But not satisfied with that, feeling he somehow had to prove his prowess, he held himself back and rode out her second orgasm. Then he'd draped her knees over his forearms, practically folding her in half, positioning her so he could penetrate her so deeply he felt like he was stroking her very core. He'd thrust over and over until they had both ignited in a blaze of ecstasy. Then they'd slept like the dead.

Feeling her gaze on him, he looked down to see deep chocolate brown eyes staring up at him. "Good morning *ma chérie*."

"Good morning to you, Lucius," she replied. "You were smiling just now. What were you thinking about?"

"I was thinking of you, my dear, of last night, of how well suited we seem to be for each other, and of how perfect it all was. Don't you agree?"

She blushed as agreed, "Oh, yes, I do."

The remainder of the morning passed rather pleasantly as the two were engaged in discovering just how *well suited* they actually were.

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It was several hours later when there came a frantic pounding on the bedroom door. They were in Hermione's room, having availed themselves earlier of her much larger and more comfortable bathtub.

"Mione... 'Mione?" Ron called worriedly. "Oh, buggar it," he muttered before turning the doorknob to find the door unlocked and pushing it wide with his wand drawn and ready. "There's been a break in the case, but I can't find Lucius anywhere in the house. His bed's been slept in, but he's nowhere arou... Whoa..." His eyes bugged out at the sight of an intimately entwined Lucius and Hermione, obviously naked but for the thin sheet that Hermione clutched to her chest. "Errr... Ahhh... Ummm... Sorry. Ahh... Sorry, sorry, sorry. Hermione, please don't hex me. I'm sorry."

Lucius smirked and found it a bit amusing that while Weasley was not at all concerned about incurring the wrath of Lucius Malfoy, he seemed terrified of Hermione's reaction. "Close your mouth and the door on your way out, Weasley. Go back downstairs; we'll be there in a few moments," ordered Lucius.

"I don't care if they are the Aurors in charge of your case. That's twice in two days they've shown up unannounced," grumbled Hermione. "It may have been a big mistake to give them Portkeys to pop in here whenever they please."

"Well, yes. It does seem that men have a strange habit of bursting into your bedroom without warning. Perhaps I should be worried, my dear," he teased, but ducked quickly with a laugh as she threw a pillow at him.

By the time the two had dressed and gone downstairs, Harry and Draco had arrived. Draco had made a pot of coffee and handed her a mug fixed just as she liked it with cream and no sugar. She took it gratefully with a quick kiss on his cheek and a mumbled, "Oh, sweet Nimue! You're my hero."

Ron had made tea for the rest, but Lucius poured himself coffee and put bread in the toaster.

Harry explained what they had learned. "We've captured one of the blokes involved in the ambush in Diagon Alley. It appears whoever hired him paid him a large sum of money, enough that he was willing to submit to an Unbreakable Vow not to reveal any information that might lead back to her. We've had to be very careful in our questioning in order that the vow not kill him. Veritaserum is definitely out."

"I really don't care if the bastard dies. Hell, I would gladly kill him myself for what he did to Hermione!" growled Lucius.

"Father, be reasonable. Calm down," soothed Draco. "We need him alive, or else we won't have any way of finding out who hired him."

"You said *she* required an Unbreakable Vow," questioned Hermione. "So, you're sure that it's a woman?"

"Yes, that's fairly certain. From things we asked and the way he phrased his answers, that seems the most likely scenario," explained Ron.

"So, Lucius," said Hermione. Turning to him, she asked teasingly, "Who in your past would be angry enough with you to want you dead? A jilted lover perhaps?"

He answered with a sly smile as he reached for the toast to butter it. "Why, I am sure I have no idea. Honestly, there has never been anyone in my love life since my divorce that I have really cared to be with for more than a night or two."

Hermione's smile faded and her face paled. She leapt to her feet and without a word made a hasty exit.

There was dead silence in the room and three sets of eyes turned to glare at Lucius in angry accusation.

Looking bewildered for an instant before realizing that Hermione had completely misinterpreted his meaning, he jumped to his feet, swearing, "Oh, fuck it all! That's not what I meant." He hurried out to find Hermione. "Hold that thought, gentlemen. We shall be back shortly, as soon as we sort this out."

Lucius looked into the living room and, not finding her there, rushed down the hall to her study. She was there, arms wrapped around herself, staring blankly out of the window. "Hermione..."

"It's perfectly all right, Lucius. I understand completely. We made no promises to each other."

"Hermione..."

"It was just a sexual attraction, nothing more."

"Hermione..."

"I don't expect anything from you."

"Hermione! Will you stop and listen to me for a minute, you stubborn little witch?" he said, grasping her upper arms and pulling her back against him. "I was speaking of *past dalliances*. I meant *until recently* there has been no one I cared to remain with, but that was before you." He wrapped his arms around her.

"You needn't say things you don't mean, Lucius. It was just one night. There need not be anything else, if you so wish it. We are both adults. No promises were made..."

"Stop. Talking. Right. Now." He spun her in his arms and sealed his lips to hers, kissing her deeply. Lucius the conqueror was back. Finally drawing back to look into her eyes, he said, "You are the exception, *ma chérie*. If I had my wish, I would keep you with me always."

"You don't have to say that, Lucius."

"I must say it because you need to understand. It is the truth. This is how I feel," Lucius said, nuzzling at her neck, his hands roaming up and down her back.

She seemed to accept him at his word, melting into his embrace, holding him tightly to her. "I'm sorry I reacted so badly. I totally misunderstood, but let's not rush into anything."

"All right. But I meant what I said. You won't get rid of me very easily."

~~

They returned to the kitchen to finish the debriefing.

"We got the idea that the whole plot might hinge on a marriage contract. Some kind of plan to get to the Malfoy fortune somehow," explained Harry, trying to get the conversation back on track.

Lucius considered this for a moment and then replied, "The only marriage contract I can think of that might be applicable is Draco's to Pansy Parkinson. But that seems far-fetched."

Hermione gasped. "Draco's engaged to Pansy?"

"Was, Granger, was, past tense. The contract was canceled after the war." Turning to Lucius, he added, "It was canceled. Right, father?"

"Yes, son. It was, but not without hard feelings on the part of Nastie Parkinson."

Harry and Ron both spat out their tea and Hermione snorted. "Nasty?"

"N-a-s-t-i-e, short for Nasturtium," explained Lucius.

Hermione giggled. "What is with all the unusual names in the Wizarding world? Strange flowers and stars and constellations *Draco*?" she drawled Draco's name for emphasis, giving him a jab in the ribs.

"Oh, right," defended Draco with a grin, "because *Hermione* is so very common. Pot,

kettle, black."

Oh... Yes, well... uhh..." Hermione was at a loss for a response. "Point taken," she finally replied softly.

Harry nudged her with his elbow and muttered, "Hey, my mum was named for a flower and her sister, too."

"Sorry," mouthed Hermione, rolling her eyes.

"Well, to continue," said Lucius in an irritated tone, "after the war, Pansy's father was sent to Azkaban. He sickened and died there. Mrs. Parkinson came to me. They were short on funds and she was desperate. She wanted to try to validate the contract we'd agreed upon when our children were little more than babies. I argued that times had changed, and the old arranged marriages were a thing of the past. She was quite adamant that we should honor the agreement, but in the end she was willing to accept a cash settlement in return for tearing up the contract."

"Whatever you paid her, no matter how generous, it wouldn't come anywhere close to what marrying into the Malfoy fortunes would have brought though," pondered Ron.

"No, but in all honesty, I cannot picture Nastie involved in a murder plot. She just is not the type. She's a very mild-mannered woman," argued Lucius.

"Still, money does strange things to people, Lucius," said Harry. "Perhaps she's spent years stewing about it and now is out for revenge."

"I think we need to locate and question Mrs. Parkinson, maybe Pansy, too, while we're at it," concluded Ron.

Hermione had been thinking. "You said you couldn't use Veritaserum on your suspect without triggering the Unbreakable Vow, but what about Legilimency?"

"We thought of that, but with him conscious he fought revealing anything that would go against the vow," said Draco. "That's actually how we got what we did, but our Legilimens didn't dare go any deeper for fear of pushing him into insanity or death."

"What if you had someone strong enough to use Legilimency on him while he was unconscious? He wouldn't be revealing the information willingly. Would it still trigger the

vow?" asked Hermione.

"Good question," replied Ron. "I'm not sure, but we don't have anyone with that kind of power."

"I do," stated Hermione.

"Severus," said Draco and Lucius simultaneously.

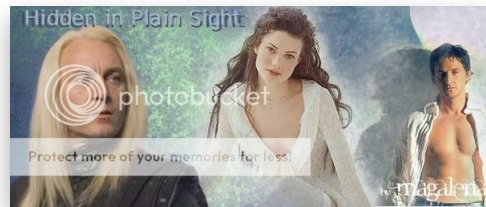
"Let's check out Parkinson first," interrupted Harry. "At this point, she seems like our most likely suspect. If we hit a dead end there, then we'll consider asking Snape for help."

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Chapter Six

Chapter 6 of 6

There have been two murder attempts against Lucius Malfoy. Harry, Ron and Draco are all Aurors and partners, and have been assigned with the task of protecting Lucius. What better place to hide him than in a Muggle neighborhood, where no one will think to look for him: hidden in plain sight. This story was written for pokestar for the 2010 Im_hgfixchange on LJ.



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For the next several days, Hermione and Lucius remained in seclusion at her house. Neither seemed to mind the inconvenience, as it afforded them both time to get to know each other better in all manner of ways, not just in bed. Although, of course, they didn't ignore that aspect of their relationship either.

They spoke frankly to each other of their pasts: what their childhoods were like, having lived in completely different worlds, and their time spent at Hogwarts a generation apart. They even talked about the war and of having fought on opposing sides. It was a difficult conversation as Lucius revealed how he had, in the beginning, honestly believed the pureblood propaganda, having been raised by a man who was one of Voldemort's staunchest followers. But he also revealed how, as time passed, he had begun to doubt all the things he'd been taught to believe. By that point, however, he and his family had been caught in the mad wizard's web, unable to escape under penalty of torture and death for all those he held dear.

They shared what they both had been doing in the ten years since the end of the war. Hermione was surprised to learn that Lucius, in addition to managing the Malfoy holdings, had been running a variety of foundations designed to help those on both sides who were damaged by the war; in addition to the all of the harm done to Muggles and their families, there were many pureblood families left devastated by the aftermath as well. Families had lost fathers and sons to Azkaban, and many had lost family fortunes and ancestral estates; some widows and heirs found themselves ill equipped to deal with things like finances and legalities. He helped out on a voluntary basis and anonymously. He told her he did it for his own peace of mind, not to receive accolades.

Tonight, they were sitting in the hot tub which was housed in a screened gazebo in the back garden. Since discovering it, Lucius had enjoyed it so much he swore when this was all over he was going to have one installed at the Manor. They had taken to unwinding in the tub at night with a long soak and a glass of wine or two before going to bed.

Hermione had just finished telling him of her time working at the Ministry and how she'd felt herself at a dead end there, not able to enact the kinds of changes she'd always dreamed of. Instead, she'd been stuck in a job where she was more of a figurehead than anything else. "When I ran into Severus and he suggested that we start a business together, I thought he'd gone round the bend. I'd never in my wildest dreams imagined that I would end up being business partners with Severus Snape. But the more he talked, the better it sounded."

"Hmmm... Yes, Severus can be quite persuasive when he puts forth the effort," replied Lucius, slipping his hand behind her neck to trace his fingers teasingly over her nape.

"Yes, he can. As time went by and we worked closely together, it became easier to see him for the man he truly is, and not just the image he projects."

Hermione hesitated, unsure whether to reveal her thoughts, but she decided to be truthful about her feelings. "Lucius, I feel I should be honest with you here. You already know, of course, of my former romantic relationship with Severus. And although we ended our affair, we somehow managed to remain friends and partners. In all honesty, I do still have feelings for him, feelings of more than friendship. He insisted that I couldn't be happy with just him, that I needed to experience more of life. So I tried to move on. I have been with other men, in other relationships. But those feelings for him are still there, tucked away in a hidden corner of my heart. I would be lying, however, if I said I hadn't begun to develop strong feelings for you, as well."

Hermione paused, unsure how Lucius would react to this revelation. He said nothing for several minutes, just continued to stroke her neck, occasionally sipping his glass of wine. *Have I ruined everything?* she wondered. *Will he be angry with me? Will he leave me?* Just when she thought she could not take the suspense for one more second, he reached across for her, pulled her over to sit in front of him, and leaned her back against his chest. He wrapped his arms around her and spoke softly in her ear, "Have you ever fantasized about the three of us together, *ma chérie*?"

His words sent a shiver through her body as her mind pictured wanton visions of the three of them together. He whispered, "I know I have."

She moaned, arching into him as his hands slipped beneath her bikini top to tweak her nipples, and he nipped sharply at her earlobe. He described how he had watched her and Severus that night, how he had wanted to be there in that bed with them, how he had gone downstairs and wanked off to mental images of the two of them. He told her that he'd even entertained a fantasy of tying her to the bed as she'd been that night, then making Severus watch as he took her, pounding into her until she came, screaming *his* name, just as she had for Severus.

His words in her ear and his hands and mouth on her body drove her wild. "Oh, my sweet Merlin! Lucius, I want you to fuck me. I need you now, please," she begged.

He Apparated them directly to her bed, neither of them caring at all that they were still soaking wet. They were on each other in an instant: hands, mouths, fingers, lips, tongues, everywhere at once, touching, tasting, devouring voraciously. It was so intense, and they just couldn't seem to get enough, driving each other to the edge and over. Again and again until, finally, exhausted, they slept, wrapped securely in each other's arms.

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The next morning, the boys showed up to give them an update on the case. They had been sending brief messages daily, but this was the first time they had stopped by since the night they'd decided to interrogate Pansy Parkinson and her mother. Things were not going well.

"The problem, so far, is that the plan was easier said than done," explained Harry. "The Parkinsons seem to have left the country several weeks ago. They've disappeared without a trace."

"And it looks as if they've not had contact with anyone at all. No word left with old friends or family, no forwarding address, no nothing. They just seemed to have vanished," added Ron.

"I didn't want to believe it of Pansy or her mother, but it's starting to look rather suspicious," admitted Draco glumly. "Their disappearance coincides with the timing of the first attempt on father's life."

"I still say that Nasturtium Parkinson does not have it in her to try to murder me, or anyone else, for that matter," insisted Lucius. "I have known her since I was a boy. I just can't believe it. I refuse to believe it."

Hermione could see how convinced Lucius was of Mrs. Parkinson's innocence. So she again brought up her idea. "Why don't we ask Severus to attempt Legilimency on that thug? Perhaps he could get some more specific information that would yield other suspects in the case."

"No, at this point I think that finding the Parkinson women is the key," Harry insisted. "I don't want to pursue the other option unless we absolutely have to. Unbreakable Vows are very tricky. I'm not sure even Snape could circumvent it."

Ron had come up with a lead, and he and Draco were heading to Morocco to check it out. They hoped to have new information within a few days. Harry had some ideas of his own that he wanted to pursue in London. But they all promised to let Lucius and Hermione know as soon as they knew anything themselves.

After they'd left, Lucius finished his second cup of coffee and lamented, "Well, that was certainly useless. Nothing really to report at all. I do believe that they came here simply to placate us."

"They are doing their best, my love. They want to get to the bottom of this and find out whoever is responsible as much as we want them to," said Hermione, trying to soothe Lucius' ruffled feathers.

Lucius grabbed her hand and pulled her down to his lap. "Hmm... I like the sound of that, sweet."

"What?" she asked, clueless.

"You called me your love. I like it."

"Well, I must have meant it. It just came out naturally," she teased, running her fingers through his hair. Then standing[,] she took his hand, pulling him to his feet. "It's still early, my love, let's go back to bed." With a grin she added, "I could get used to saying that."

"I could get used to hearing it," replied Lucius with a tender smile.

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Their time spent together that morning was totally different from their wildly intense mating of the night before. They took their time together, prolonging the pleasure, enjoying each other.

Hermione led Lucius upstairs and then slowly undressed him as she touched, kissed, and admired him. She then pressed him down onto the bed as she stepped back to remove her own garments.

As he watched her, Lucius couldn't help but think how lucky he was to have found her. If someone had asked him a month ago to describe Hermione Granger, he would have said she was a brilliant but rather plain Muggle-born witch with no great beauty...wholesome, perhaps, with her untamed honey-brown hair, a dusting of freckles, and plain brown eyes.

Now... he just couldn't conceive how anyone could see her as average. He'd been surrounded by beauty all of his life, only the best for a Malfoy. The women he'd been with brought to mind words like elegant, graceful, refined, ethereal, classic. And yet, now, he knew they couldn't hold a candle to the woman before him. She was everything he wanted and more.

His marriage to Narcissa had been an arranged one; that's how things were done in their world then and they'd accepted it. And while he'd never been in love with her, he had cared for her. But after the war, when she'd left him after more than twenty years of marriage, it hadn't broken his heart; in fact, he'd felt a vague sense of relief. Just a month in Hermione's company, and little more than a week in her bed, and he knew if he lost her now, he would be devastated. He vowed to himself that come what may, he wouldn't lose her.

She finished undressing. He watched through hooded eyes as she made her way to the foot of the bed and crawled over the end. He wondered what she was up to as she conjured a warm, damp flannel and gently washed his feet. She gave him the most amazing foot massage he'd ever had, working at them until he was groaning with pleasure. Then she began at the bottom of his feet, licking and kissing and sucking and nibbling her way up, stopping to bend his legs so she could nuzzle behind his knees then move on up his thighs. She had just reached the *good stuff* when he leaned down and grasped her by the arms, pulling her up next to him. He rolled over her to pin her down while holding both her wrists together in one hand secured above her head.

"Hey," she said with a pout. "I was just getting started."

"Yes, and it was wonderful, more than wonderful, but at the rate you were going, it was all going to be over in the next minute and a half." Lucius chuckled, kissing her and sucking lightly at her neck. "Keep your hands here," he commanded, wrapping her fingers around the spindles of the bed. "If you move them, I may have to tie you up."

"Ooooh... That sounds kinky. I just may let you," Hermione whispered in reply, a sexy grin on her face.

"Later...we'll try that later, love. For now just keep them there." He kissed her deeply, taking his time to enjoy and savor her. "You are a goddess, my sweet Hermione"

goddess. And I intend to worship you, every single beautiful, delicious inch of you."

Lucius was true to his word. He spent the next hour worshipping his goddess, before he finally relented to her pleas, and they made tender love together.

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All was quiet for the next couple of days. Hermione was beginning to go stir crazy. She wanted nothing more than to hop in the Ferrari and take it for a fast spin to burn off her annoyance with the lack of progress. She complained that she was not the target, Lucius was; therefore, it would do no harm for her to leave for a bit. Lucius, however, was adamant that Harry had insisted they both remain hidden since the Diagon Alley incident. This quickly escalated into their first real argument and ended in a bout of hot, sweaty, satisfying make-up sex.

Afterward, they decided to go down to the basement for dueling practice to fight the boredom. They'd barely begun when Draco popped in to deliver an update. He and Ron had discovered more information and were following a lead supplied by none other than Blaise Zabini. Draco wouldn't go into detail on Blaise's tip, but felt fairly confident that the whole thing would be over soon, probably in a matter of days.

Hermione and Lucius were in high spirits upon coming upstairs to begin preparations for dinner. Planning to celebrate the impending end to their exile, they were pleased to find a bottle of Merlot on the counter.

"Oh, look, a gift from Draco. Merlot, he knows it's my favorite," explained Hermione.

Lucius took the bottle from her and examined the label. "Yes, a very nice vintage. He must have nicked it from my cellars, the scamp."

Hermione gathered ingredients from the fridge for a salad. "Open it up, Lucius. Let's have some now before dinner."

Lucius opened the bottle and poured two glasses. Something about the wine bothered him, although he couldn't quite put his finger on what it was. Picking up the bottle, he perused the label again before sniffing the cork. He still didn't know what it was, but something seemed off somehow.

His back was turned, and he didn't notice Hermione reaching for her glass. She took a healthy gulp of wine. He was examining the cork closely for signs of tampering when he realized that she was drinking.

"Hermione. No!" he cried.

"What?" she asked, bewildered by his reaction. She had just taken another swallow of wine when Lucius reached across and knocked the glass out of her hand. "Lucius! What are you doing?"

"The wine," he gasped. "I think the wine has been tampered with."

"Lucius, have you gone mad? The wine is fine, there's nothing wr..."

The pain hit her like a bolt from the blue, doubling her over with its intensity. She clutched her gut as she fell to her knees. She moaned in agony, gritting her teeth to keep from screaming.

Lucius practically vaulted over the table to get to her. "Hermione!" he cried, clasping her to him. "Hermione! Dear Merlin!"

Her only response was a guttural groan as she leaned into Lucius, rocking against him with the pain, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"St. Mungo's! I must get you to St. Mungo's!" he cried as he prepared to Apparate. He then remembered that he was unable to Apparate through her wards. "Fuck!" he screamed in frustration as he realized that he couldn't make a Portkey either because it would require her magical signature.

"What can I do? What?" he asked himself, speaking out loud. "Think, Lucius, think!" He remembered Severus had told him once if someone had ingested poison and he didn't have a bezoar handy, he should induce vomiting if he was sure that the poison wasn't a strong acid or alkali. That could cause burning and possible scarring to the esophagus. He didn't think the wine would cause burning, although he couldn't be sure what the poison itself was. At this point he felt he had no choice. If he did nothing, she could die.

Scooping her up he carried her to the downstairs loo, hoping to find a bezoar in her medicine cabinet there. No such luck. He explained what he was going to do, although she was in such distress he wasn't sure she understood. He raised his wand and cast, "*Vomitare.*"

The result was nearly instantaneous. He helped her lean over the toilet as she began to vomit, and he pulled her hair back out of the way. He kept talking to her, crooning nonsense words, trying to comfort her as best he could. It seemed to go on forever, although it was probably not more than a couple of minutes. Reaching up to the sink, he wet a flannel and gently wiped her face and her mouth. She was limp in his arms and felt cold and clammy; she was still conscious, but barely.

He carried her to the living room and wrapped her in an afghan off the back of the couch and lit the fireplace with his wand to warm up the room as he held her on his lap. He knew she was not out of danger, and he needed to get help quickly.

"Hermione, sweetheart. Stay with me now, darling. I need your help." He tried to project an aura of calmness and control when in actuality, inside his head, he was screaming in terror.

She mumbled something, but he couldn't understand. "I can't dismantle your wards or break through them. Perhaps I could Floo out."

"No," she muttered. "Floo's blocked, needs me to open." She was shivering now, her teeth chattering. "Too weak... Can't manage... Don't leave me, Lucius. Please," she begged.

"Sweetheart, you need help. Time is of the essence. I must do something, get help from somewhere... somehow."

"P'tronus, Lu... Send your P'tronus to Sev'rus." Her head lolled to the side as she lost consciousness.

"Hermione... Hermione, don't leave me. Fuck it all! Don't you dare leave me, you stubborn witch." Lucius practically wept in frustration. "Gods be damned!"

Send your Patronus, Lucius, as if it were the simplest thing in the world to do. And for her, it probably was. But for him, someone whose entire life had been influenced by the Dark, it seemed an impossible task. He'd never been able to cast a Patronus before...ever. Oh, he knew the words, knew the theory behind the spell: think of your most 'positive' thoughts. The problem was throughout his whole life he couldn't conjure one purely happy thought. Even the best of times had been tainted. The birth of his beloved son, something he'd believed to be the best thing that had ever happened to him, had been overshadowed by his own father's proclamation at Draco's birth: *Here at last was proof of the Malfoy family's loyalty, the beginning of a new generation to serve the Dark Lord's ideals.*

He'd tried in the past to cast the blasted Patronus, but it had always been beyond his reach... always. Gazing down at Hermione, he knew he had to try. He pulled his wand and tried to reach deep inside himself to find something to concentrate on. His eyes dropped again to Hermione's sweet face, and in that instant he knew. Thinking of the last weeks with her, he focused all his energy and cried, "*Expecto Patronum!*"

To his astonishment a Patronus formed. He'd always wondered what form his would take if he ever succeeded in producing one... perhaps a snake, the symbol of his Hogwarts House, or a dragon, or maybe a sly, clever fox, or a beautiful peacock like one of his pets. He'd never in his wildest dreams have imagined his Patronus being the creature hovering in front of him. There before him was a ghostly shaped, pure white phoenix, the symbol of rebirth and new life. Looking down at the woman in his arms,

he realized that was everything she represented to him, a chance at a new beginning, a new life.

Looking up with tears in his eyes, he commanded, "Take this message to Severus Snape. Severus, come immediately to Hermione's house. She's been poisoned. We need your help. Please, hurry, Severus... hurry!"

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The first time that Hermione woke up in her bed at St. Mungo's, there were just too many worried faces and the clamor of too many voices talking all at once. After tolerating this for all of thirty seconds, she promptly closed her eyes and went directly back to sleep.

The second time she awoke, there were less noises and fewer faces, which was more to her liking, but still not enough to entice her to stay awake for more than a few minutes. Lucius was the only one to notice, but he said nothing to the others as he sat in a chair next to the bed, holding her hand. When he saw she was awake, he lifted her hand to his cheek before pressing his lips into her palm. Severus was arguing with Harry about something, but she couldn't stay awake long enough to figure out what. She fell back asleep with Lucius' kiss clutched in her fist.

When next she roused, the room was empty except for Harry dozing in the chair beside her bed. His hand lay on the sheet next to her, and she reached to place her hand in his.

"Harry?" she asked tentatively.

Harry drank her in with his eyes before practically falling on her to hug her and to snuffle against her neck. "Hermione, I'm so glad you're okay. We thought... it was... I just..." Harry choked back a half sob.

The Boy Who Lived seemed to be at a loss for words. "Thanks, Harry. I'm glad I'm okay, too," Hermione responded with a weak smile.

Harry stood and turned to brush away a tear before he turned back and spoke. "We damn near lost you! Don't you *ever* scare me like that again, Hermione Granger," he demanded.

"I'll try not to, Harry," she replied meekly. Then she asked, "I saw Lucius here earlier, the last time I woke up for a bit. Is it safe for him to be here, so out in the open?"

"Oh, yeah. It's fine. It's over, we've caught the person who was trying to kill him, and you'll never believe the story behind it all."

"Well, I've nowhere to go. Tell me a story, Harry. I'm more than curious to see how it ended."

"All right, but it's a long and very twisted tale...rather hard to believe, but apparently true. Don't interrupt me, or I'll forget where I am and have to start over," he teased.

"It seems our villain, or villainess in this case is a woman named Seraphine Grimaldi. She's had a lot of different last names before that one, but the only one you need remember is Zabini."

"Blaise's mum?"

"The one and only, but you're not supposed to interrupt, remember?"

Hermione nodded, so Harry continued with his tale. "Well, when you asked Lucius if the woman after him was a jealous ex-lover, you weren't far wrong. It seems that a while back he had spent a weekend in the glorious Mrs. Grimaldi's bed, and by doing so, she figured that made her a shoe in for the role of the next Mrs. Malfoy. Lucius disagreed and sent her on her way, thinking that was the end of that.

"That only ticked her off, though. She'd already envisioned how she was going to spend all that lovely money, and she wasn't happy to learn that Lucius wasn't interested. So, she started scheming as to how she could get her hands on the Malfoy fortunes by some other means if she couldn't do it by marriage.

"She'd learned, after the fact, of the relationship between Blaise and you and Draco. And even though you three had already gone your separate ways, it wouldn't be unlikely that you might get back together. So, she figured if she could get rid of Lucius, that would leave Draco as the sole heir to the Malfoy fortunes. And of course, if Draco were grieving over the loss of his father, what would be more natural than for him to turn to his friends and former lovers for support in his time of need? In fact, she was furious that you were injured in the Diagon Alley incident, as it would have ruined her entire plan if you'd been killed."

"You can't be serious?"

"Oh, wait," explained Harry. "It gets better, much better."

"So, Lucius would have died, and Draco would have inherited the Malfoy fortune, and the three of you would have reunited, whether by your own choice or by means of a subtle Imperius, and you would have all agreed to a permanent bonding ceremony, which would have made you and Blaise both Draco's sole heirs. Originally, she thought that after a suitable amount of time she'd just get rid of you and Draco and the fortunes would come to Blaise, whom she assumed she could manipulate to get what she wanted."

"I don't like this bedtime story, Harry. It's much too dark for me," said Hermione.

"Oh, but that's not all. It gets even more twisted," Harry continued. "She found out, we think possibly through Mrs. Parkinson, that the Malfoy estate could only be passed on through a direct line. Therefore, Blaise could never inherit on his own. So, she would have to wait until you produced an heir.

"She planned to make sure that happened, either through natural means, or use of conception potions combined with Imperius, or whatever she deemed necessary. Once Draco's heir was born, she would murder both you and Draco. Her plan was to make it look like some kind of accident. Then, Blaise would be the child's legal guardian... This next part is even worse."

"How could it possibly get worse than that?" demanded Hermione. "Draco and I are both dead."

"Wait. Just listen. She knew Blaise well enough to realize that if he loved you and Draco, he would love and protect your child. He would have been next on the list so that she could ultimately become guardian of the next Malfoy heir."

"Sweet mother of Merlin, she was going to murder her own son?" asked Hermione in disbelief.

Harry nodded. "Hermione, this is a woman who managed to go through seven husbands by the time Blaise was seventeen... and two more after the war. Lucius would have been husband number ten if she'd bagged him. There have been rumors aplenty that she killed them all off, but it's never been proven. I guess after all that, she just figured she could get away with anything. We learned all this by interrogating her under Veritaserum. She's one scary witch, Hermione, on a scale of Bellatrix Lestranger scary, in my opinion."

"Why on earth would she agree to Veritaserum?" questioned Hermione.

"It seems that she believed herself immune to it," explained Harry. "That's how she evaded being charged in any of her husbands' suspicious deaths. She was always willing to participate in questioning under Veritaserum."

"I don't understand, if she was immune..."

"Ahhh, well, it appears she *was* able to build an immunity to regular Veritaserum. However, she wasn't aware that she had screwed over someone very near and dear to the heart of a certain Potions master. We now have access to a new and improved formula. Unfortunately for Mrs. Grimaldi, and fortunately for us, she was not immune to the new formula, so we now know the truth about all of it," concluded Harry with a smile.

"Poor Blaise. To face the fact that not only is his mother a murderer but she was willing to sacrifice him as well to get what she wanted. How sad."

"Yes, well, if it hadn't been for Blaise coming to Draco and revealing his suspicions, she might have actually got away with it."

Hermione was quiet for a bit, mulling it all over, before asking, "But Harry, wait. What about the wine? How did she manage to get that into my house?"

"She knew we were hiding Lucius, but had no idea where. In fact, if she'd realized he was hidden in your house, she would have never sent the poisoned wine, as she needed you alive for her plan to work. Anyway, she ordered a house-elf to remain unseen and to shadow Draco wherever he went until he found Lucius. When the elf left the wine in the kitchen, it had already been poisoned by Seraphine."

"I thought my wards were tight enough to keep out anything, even house-elves, without my permission," muttered Hermione.

"Severus already checked out your wards. You're right. Under normal circumstances a house-elf could not have gotten in. But I guess since he'd ridden in and out as a stowaway on Draco's coat tails when he used his Portkey; he managed to circumvent your wards," explained Harry.

"A loophole I'll definitely take care of as soon as I get home," stated Hermione. "Speaking of going home, Harry, when can I get out of here?"

"Immediately," said a voice from the doorway. Lucius breezed into the room as if he owned the place. "I'm taking you home right now." Turning to the aide that he'd brought with him, he ordered, "Pack up all of her things, we're leaving."

Harry protested, "I thought the Healers wanted to keep her here another day or two?"

"They are doing nothing that I can't do for her myself," said Severus, entering the room. "They are still giving her a purifying potion to make sure all of the poison is out of her system as well as a strengthening potion, and a healing potion. I can make all of those fresh every day and take care of her myself."

"Ourselves," protested Lucius. "Take care of her *ourselves*."

Severus ignored him and continued to convince Harry. "Besides, people heal much better in the comfort of their own homes. She'll be more relaxed there."

"Well, all right, if you've got the Healer's okay, I guess there's not much I could do to stop you. She's anxious to get out of here anyway," conceded Harry. Bending down, he brushed a kiss across her cheek and ordered, "You owl me if you need anything, anything at all."

"I will, Harry. Don't worry about me," she assured him.

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Later that evening she lay in her own bed, and it felt good to be home. Lucius had tried to convince her to go to the Manor now that the danger was over. But she'd declined, saying she just wanted to go home, to her own bed. Of course, although he grumbled a bit, Lucius had acquiesced to her desires and accompanied her home with Severus.

She'd had all of her potions and a light meal of soup and bread. She was now tucked snugly into bed with a blond bombshell settled in comfortably next to her. They were both reading in bed when the door opened. In strode Severus in a Slytherin green dressing gown.

He laid his book on Hermione's nightstand and, taking his wand, enlarged the bed from a queen-sized to a super king-sized bed. Then, peeling back the corner of the covers, he demanded, "Well, budge over then."

"Severus?" questioned Hermoine.

"What?"

"Ummm... Lucius is here already."

Lucius smiled and waggled his fingers at Severus.

Severus scowled and rolled his eyes. "Yes, I can see that. I've already enlarged the bed so there's plenty of room for all of us. I'm tired of waiting for you two to be done playing house and ask me to join you. So, here I am. I'm joining, unless, of course, you don't want me to."

"Oh, no, I definitely want you to. Lucius, you want Severus to join us, too, don't you?"

"Of course, it's fine with me," replied Lucius nonchalantly, trying to hide a smile behind his hand.

"Good, because I'm staying. I'm beginning to think you need a keeper, woman. Remember that fiasco in Borneo..."

"*That* was not my fault. I was only trying to help the boys..." she protested weakly.

"It was *all* because of those meddlesome boys," agreed Lucius

"I didn't ask you," snapped Severus, sending Lucius a glare that during his teaching days would have frozen any dunderhead dead in their tracks.

Turning back to Hermione, he continued, "And after this last month... well, someone needs to make sure you stay out of trouble, and Lucius doesn't seem able to manage the task on his own. It's obviously going to take both of us to handle the job. Between nearly being sliced in half..."

"Severus, it was just a little cut..."

"And poisoned."

"Well, yes that part was bad. I'll admit that. But *it really* wasn't my fault there was a madwoman out to get Lucius and I was caught in the crossfire."

"Yes, it *really* wasn't her fault, Severus," agreed Lucius.

"Shut it, you," he barked at Lucius.

Lucius merely smiled as he turned a page in his book, pretending he was actually reading it.

"And you," he continued, pointing his finger at Hermione.

"Yes, dearest?"

"Budge!"

"Budging now, dear," she replied, scooting over to make room.

Severus dropped his robe to reveal black boxers; he usually slept in the nude. After standing there for a minute, unsure of himself, he slid the boxers off and climbed in to settle down next to her. Plumping his pillow, he settled in with his book in his hand.

After a few minutes of trying to read, Hermione sniffled softly and rubbed at her eye.

"What's wrong, now?" demanded Severus, trying to sound gruff, but failing, as he was a bit worried by Hermione's tears.

"I'm just so happy. The three of us here... together... this is everything I've ever dreamed of." Hermione turned into him, sobbing against his chest.

Severus sighed, wrapping her in his arms. Lucius rolled close and cuddled against her back.

"Women," declared Severus, "I swear I'll never understand them."

"I don't think it's necessary to understand," replied Lucius seriously. "As long as we love her and she loves us back. That's all that really matters, isn't it? We're together now, the three of us. Forever."

"Forever," mumbled Hermione through her tears.

"Forever," agreed Severus. "The three of us. Together, forever."

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AN This story was written for pokeystar for the 2010 lm_hgfixchange on LJ.

Original Prompt: Someone is trying to kill Lucius Malfoy. The MLE assigns Hermione Granger to protect him in a Muggle safe house. Please to include (somehow): dueling, internet, Ron Weasley.