

Dust to Dust

by Hanagasume

Sent on a reconnaissance mission to Malfoy Manor, Unspeakable Hermione Granger comes across a very curious portrait, and learns a little more about the Malfoy family history. Written for the Malfoy Manor One-Shot Weeklies: Prompt #3.

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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The dust in the enormous house was thick, covering every surface with a layer of grey, and in some places, a black, powdery substance.

Stepping through a heavy set of open oak doors, Hermione Granger squinted to see in the dark room, brushing aside cobwebs with a sweep of her arm on her way inside. The house was decidedly unkempt in every way, most of the house-elves having been farmed out to various facilities owned by the Ministry of Magic. To her, the greatest shame was that one of the oldest homes in Wizarding Britain had been left to decay and lay in ruin.

Spotting another door on the other side of the room, Hermione made her way cautiously across to it. One could never be too careful when inside the residence of any pure-blooded wizard, least of all, this one. When she finally reached the other side of the room, she cast a few charms over the door knob to ensure that there was no Dark magic lurking within the simple object, waiting silently for an unsuspecting victim. She knew in houses such as this one, there would be many anti-Muggle-born hexes cast over everything and the kitchen sink. It made her itch with annoyance that someone would go to such extreme lengths to ensure that the house would have only "pure" inhabitants.

Once she had ascertained that the door handle was safe for her to touch, she reached out and turned it, gently pushing the door open as she did. Passing through the doorway, she found herself in an even larger room, this one with a high ceiling and walls that were lined with huge, dusty portraits. Hermione felt her nose itch momentarily before a sharp sneeze emitted from her, only managing to spread the dust even further. Eyes watery, she glanced around to see if there was a window that she could open.

Finding one, she used both hands to wrench the lock open and pushed them out as wide as they could go. She sucked in a deep breath of fresh air, glad to give her nose a break from the smell of dust and mothballs.

She took a moment to breathe by the window before turning back around and scanning the room, looking for any indication that there were any hexes present. Pleased to find nothing, she pressed on, walking along the line of portraits. They all portrayed tall, blonde men some with moustaches and beards, others clean shaven. But all of the men in the paintings that she had seen had the same steely grey eyes that were typical of the Malfoy men.

When she passed by a portrait of Lucius Malfoy, she found that his eyes were closed, and the man in the painting was fast asleep. She rolled her eyes. Even in death, Malfoy was a lazy git. It was the middle of the day, and all of the other portraits had at least acknowledged her, even if it was to glare at her and make rude comments as she walked by about her Muggle heritage. It appeared that even portraits could tell whether a person was a pureblood or not.

She came to the end of the hall and stared up at the very last painting. Unlike the others, this portrait portrayed an aged wizard. His eyes were still grey, and his features were still undeniably those of a Malfoy, but the lines in his face told of his greater age, and the silver of his hair was unlike that of any of the other paintings. It seemed to Hermione that this may very well just be the least vain of the Malfoys, who all wanted to preserve an image of their younger selves.

She was about to move on when she heard a cough, and turned back to look up at the face of the man in the painting. His grey eyes were staring right at her, but they did not hold the loathing that she expected to see. Instead she saw curiosity and question. She frowned minutely and put her hands on her hips.

'Can I help you?' she asked curtly.

'You are not another one of those Auror thugs, are you?' the older man asked, although she could tell it was more of a statement than a question.

'No, I'm not an Auror actually,' she answered seriously. 'Aurors haven't been to Malfoy Manor in years.'

'I can still remember them,' he said, his voice holding a trace of weariness. 'They marched through the house like buffoons, loud and rude and practically looting the place. Now look at it my family home is practically a dusty ruin.'

Hermione's curiosity was piqued. Not one of the other portraits in the house had bothered to be polite to her, all yelling about her 'Muddy Blood' at every turn. This wizard, however, was different. He had not yet mentioned her heritage, although no doubt he already knew it, and he didn't look at her with hatred.

'The whole house has been left to fall to pieces, I'm afraid,' she told him. 'The house-elves left here a couple of years ago, and it has been a mess ever since, I've been told.'

'If you are not one of those Aurors, then pray tell, what are you, young Madam?'

'I am an Unspeakable,' she answered. 'Although, I wouldn't bother asking what it is I am doing here or searching for. I'm under oath.'

He chuckled, and it was a husky and foreign sound. 'You are an amusing little thing,' he murmured.

Hermione smiled slightly at that. 'I don't mean to be rude, but who are you exactly?' she asked, her curiosity getting the best of her.

'Forgive me for not introducing myself earlier,' he said with an inclination of his head. 'I am Abraxas Hyperion Malfoy, and that rude wastrel asleep in the portrait across the room from me is my only son.'

Hermione looked over to the portrait of Lucius Malfoy and gasped, her eyes widening at this revelation. 'He is your son?' she repeated, her mouth agape.

'I sometimes find it difficult to believe myself,' he replied. 'I thought I had raised him well, but I should have known better. My own father, Hyperion, had far more influence on the boy than I should have ever allowed.'

'Why did you decide to talk to me?' she asked.

'Believe it or not, the company of my own ancestors and descendents can be very tiresome indeed,' he answered truthfully. 'It is rather refreshing to have the opportunity to speak to someone new, particularly a pretty young thing such as yourself.'

Hermione snorted softly. 'I am hardly pretty or young,' she said with a roll of her eyes. 'But thank you, all the same.'

It was Abraxas Malfoy's turn to snort then. 'Madam, you are young,' he insisted. 'When I had this portrait of myself created, I was a ripe ninety-eight years of age, and nearing my death bed all the while. I might have died before then if it weren't for my wife and her reminder to me not to smoke before her passing.'

'Forgive me again if I seem rude for saying so, but you are very different from what I would have imagined,' she said quietly, turning her eyes to the ground in her embarrassment.

Abraxas chuckled again. 'I am certain you assumed I would be cruel, considering my son's behaviour towards you?' he asked.

Hermione nodded. 'I haven't had the best of experiences with the Malfoy family ever since I began my schooling at Hogwarts,' she answered. 'I'm afraid it was mostly due to my Muggle heritage, and partly due to the company I kept.'

'I'm afraid that it has rather been a Malfoy tradition to discriminate based on blood status,' he said, sounding rather ashamed and surprising Hermione once more.

'How is it that you are different?'

'My wife,' he said simply. 'I seem to have missed your name, earlier.'

Hermione could have slapped her palm against her head in that moment. 'I apologise,' she murmured. 'My name is Hermione Granger.'

'It is a pleasure to meet you, Miss Granger,' he said courteously, behaviour that had not been displayed towards her in a long while.

'You were telling me about your wife,' she prompted, attempting to get them back on track. Now that the topic had been brought up, she simply had to hear what the man had to say before getting back to her work.

'Ah yes,' he said, his grey eyes flashing in amusement. 'But before I begin my tale, I would be most obliged if you could cast a cleansing charm on my portrait and frame. The dust does blur things a little and is rather distracting.'

Hermione immediately pointed her wand at the portrait and was pronouncing the simple words, when she sneezed mid-spell, and instead of cleansing the dust out of sight, a giant wave of dust fell from the portrait, and over her, coating her hair, clothes and face in the grey powder. Coughing, she began to frantically brush it out of her face so that she could see. Once her eyes were clear of the powder, she looked up at Abraxas Malfoy ruefully. It really had been an awful time for her spell to turn to dust like that.

'You look at fright,' he said simply, giving in to his urge to chuckle at her misfortune.

She attempted to glare and be serious about the situation, but soon found herself joining him for a giggle. Once the dust coating her made it difficult for her to breathe, she cast a quick cleansing charm over her person. The dust disappeared, but the musky smell remained, and she knew that she would have to have a long soak in the tub that night to rid herself of it.

'Right, now you were going to tell me a story about your wife?'

Abraxas chuckled once more. 'Precocious little thing, aren't you?' he said teasingly before reclining comfortably in the frame and closing his eyes for a moment. 'It was not an arranged marriage, unlike all of my predecessors. I met my wife when I went to the University in Paris.'

'She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen in my life, and was kind to a fault. I found out shortly after our meeting that she had one-eighth Veela blood running

through her veins, which explained my sudden, inexplicable attraction to her, but later, when the initial thrill had run its course, I discovered she was still always on my mind,' he said, opening his eyes. 'I courted her for the final two years at University, and we married two months after our graduation.'

'Her name was Céleste Fortescue, from the very same family as the ice-cream maker in Diagon Alley,' he explained. 'She was actually Florean Fortescue's aunt, and the youngest sister of Pierre, his father. She had two older sisters also, Clémence and Noëlle. They were her attendants at our wedding, but neither of the two married. She was not from an extremely wealthy family, which disappointed my father, but I would not speak to him until he agreed to let me marry her.'

'It sounds like you must have loved her quite a lot to disobey your family's desires quite so readily,' Hermione commented. Her chest already felt quite heavy with emotion from what he had already imparted.

'I loved Céleste more than anything in the world,' he said seriously, his eyes bright as he spoke. 'She was a singularly gifted and kind witch, never judging others, always charitable, and always willing to help someone in need. She never coveted another life, and she gave me a son and was the best mother one could possibly ask for until the day that she passed away.'

'Was Lucius still young when she passed away?' Hermione asked quietly, sniffing slightly. She knew that any second now she might probably burst into tears.

'He was only three years of age,' he said sadly. 'My wife died of an inoperable brain tumour that we detected too late. She only lived for three months after the initial discovery, and no amount of Wizarding or Muggle medical treatments were able to slow down the tumour as it spread. To my everlasting shame, I allowed my grief to consume me for too long. I neglected Lucius, oftentimes allowing my own parents to care for him while I retreated into myself, continuing to mourn Céleste.'

By this point, the tears in Hermione's eyes had poured over onto her cheeks. She swiped at them, a tad embarrassed to be standing inside Malfoy Manor, sobbing in front of the portrait of a long-dead ancestor of her former school nemesis. She looked up at the painting and smiled ruefully at the warmth in the eyes of the older Malfoy man.

'I'm sorry for the tears,' she said with a watery chuckle. 'It's just I don't often hear such touching stories from anyone, let alone from a Malfoy.'

He inclined his head slightly in acknowledgment. 'I understand that this may be slightly overwhelming for you,' he agreed.

'Even though we never had a chance to meet in person, I am very glad I stumbled upon you today, Mr. Malfoy,' she said with a smile, blinking the last of her tears away.

'Abraxas, please,' he said in admonishment. 'I know you must be a busy lady, but I would be glad if you would visit again someday. Then you can tell me why a beautiful young woman such as yourself is unmarried and seemingly unaware of her own good looks.'

Hermione felt her cheeks warm as a blush settled across them. 'I would be glad to pay you a visit the next time I am assigned Malfoy Manor for reconnaissance. Who knows, I might even be able to convince the Ministry to move your portrait to my office in the Department of Mysteries,' she said with a smile.

Abraxas smiled at her in return. 'Until next we meet, ma chérie,' he said with a bow.

As Hermione wound her way out of the portrait gallery, she looked down at her watch and caught sight of the bright, orange sun beyond the murky windows. It was already well past five in the evening; as the sunset drew nearer, she decided to leave Malfoy Manor for the day and return come morning. After all, she had promised that she would pay another visit to Abraxas, and maybe she could convince a team from the Ministry to actually stop by the Manor and try to restore it to its former glory.

All of that, however, could wait. She needed to sit down and have a think about why she was thirty, unmarried, and living alone in her flat with Crookshanks.

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A/N I hope you enjoyed this little interlude as much as I did.