

A Fool-Proof Plan

by *linlawless*

What's a wizard to do when a perfectly good plot to ruin his son's perfect wedding goes perfectly awry? Originally written for Mizsphinx in the 2012 Lucius/Hermione gift exchange at LJ.

A one-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Originally written for mizsphinx in the 2012 Lucius/Hermione Exchange at LJ. Many thanks to: mizsphinx for a fun prompt; the exchange mods for offering us an excellent playground; my alpha reader, TeaOli, who read this and offered encouragement even though she doesn't like Lucius; and my beta reader, WriterMerrin, who made this flow a lot better by pointing out awkwardness and comma problems. I tinkered a little bit after I got it back, so any errors are mine alone. I apologize if any Americanisms slipped in; I didn't have a Britpicker this time.

Original Prompt: 1) Lucius and Hermione are forced to share a confined space (obviously against their wishes). Lots of badmouthing towards each other that eventually leads to a kiss/heavy petting/shagging (take your pick)... I really enjoy banter between Lucius and Hermione. It doesn't have to be filled to the brim with it if it's not your forte, but just a bit of sarcastic back-and-forth between the two really makes me glow.

"You are *not* marrying Weasley, and that's my final word!" Lucius's temper, which had been teetering on the edge for the last half hour, finally slipped completely. And all because of his rebellious, ungrateful, spoilt son.

Worse, Draco still hadn't budged from his ridiculous assertion that he planned to marry so far beneath him. He said implacably, "You seem to think you have a choice here, Father. You don't. *Ginny* and I will be just fine without your blessing."

"Oh?" Lucius asked, regaining his control as he realised he hadn't yet played his strongest card. "You think you'll be just fine, do you? How exactly do you plan to live, Draco?"

"I work. Ginny works. Ginny's parents like me."

Lucius barely restrained an inelegant snort. "Since when? Weasleys and Malfoys have never liked one another...not ever, not as long as there have *been* Weasleys and Malfoys. And even if they *did* like you, they're poor!"

"Nevertheless." Sighing, Draco stood. "I can see this is getting us nowhere. I'll talk to you after you've had a chance to calm down and think things over."

"I won't change my mind. If you marry this girl, you'll be dead to me."

"I *told* you he wouldn't like it," Ginny said the next evening at the Three Broomsticks, as though she expected someone would argue with her. "Didn't I tell you he wouldn't like it?"

Hermione rolled her eyes and ate a chip. "No one thought he was going to be thrilled, Gin."

"Yeah, well, he threatened to cut Draco off. That's a little worse than 'not thrilled,' don't you think?"

"If you say so. He'll come around."

Ginny scoffed. "No, he won't. He'll do just what he said he'd do."

"He's not going to want the Malfoy fortune to go to distant relatives."

"How do you know?"

"These old, rich families never do. Besides, he won't be able to resist once you and Draco start having children, and then you'll be fretting about whether he's a bad influence."

"Maybe you're right." Ginny fell silent, and from the look in her eye, she was imagining little red-haired girls and blond-haired boys ... or the reverse, perhaps. After a moment, she shook her head. "Anyway, I just hope he doesn't do anything completely unforgivable before that happens. If he pushes Draco too far, it won't matter if he bends later."

"Yeah. Let's hope he's learned something in the last few decades, right?"

"Right." Ginny changed the subject. "Did I mention I love what you've done with your hair?"

"You do? I'm still getting used to it, I guess. It's weird that it's so ... straight."

"How did you do it?"

"I didn't, technically. It turns out that if I'm willing to splurge a bit once a week, the hairdresser can blow it out straight and it'll hold. It doesn't even require significant charm work...my Muggle cousins do it all the time, apparently."

"Huh. I bet you wish you'd known that years ago," Ginny teased. "Maybe you and Ron would still be together."

Hermione rolled her eyes again. "Because of my hair? Not likely. Even if he *did* give that as an excuse to break up in that last fight." Which had been very public and very loud, and as it turned out, very final.

Laughing, Ginny said, "Wouldn't it be funny if you just showed up at his door one night and said, 'Hey, Ron, I've fixed the hair; now we can get married like we planned'?"

Hermione laughed in spite of herself. "As if I'd actually want him back." It had been almost six years since their ill-advised romance had ended, and Hermione found the whole thing funny by now. They were even friends again. *Thank Merlin we never got married...what a disaster that would have been!*

Especially since neither Ron nor Harry was currently speaking to Ginny. They couldn't believe she had finally given up on Harry and started dating Draco after about the fifth time in as many years that Harry had told her he wasn't ready to get married yet. Privately, Hermione thought Draco and Ginny were a better match, anyway, but she tried not to take sides openly. Life was just easier when Harry and Ron weren't mad at her.

Of course, now that she had agreed to stand up for Ginny at her wedding, she figured they'd stop speaking to her soon, too. *Oh, well, they'll have to grow up sometime. If we're lucky, it'll be before we all have grandchildren.*

Putting aside the topic of the boys, Hermione asked, "So when's the wedding?"

Six months later

Toppy was very nervous. Master had insisted he must do this, but Toppy didn't really know why. Still, Toppy must always do what Master said. Toppy was a good elf. He looked around the cabin once more, checking to see that Master's favourite foods and clothes and books were ready. He checked the anti-Apparition wards to ensure that no one, not even the Master, would be able to Apparate in or out without Toppy's assistance. Toppy didn't know why Master was so determined to be cut off from civilisation for a whole week, but it wasn't his place to question. His duty was to serve his Master, and that was exactly what he planned to do.

Satisfied at last that everything was as it should be, he popped back to the Manor.

"Well?" Master said. "Is everything ready?"

"Y-yes, sir, Master, sir," Toppy said, bowing. "Toppy has set up the cabin just as Master said. Does Master want to go there now?"

"Absolutely," Master said. "And then we'll just see about this wedding, won't we?"

Toppy wasn't sure what Master meant, but he knew better than to ask. When Master took hold of his finger (he never touched more than a finger), Toppy Disapparated.

They arrived at the cabin in no time. Toppy waited nervously while Master looked around. Master didn't say anything for a long time, and Toppy tried not to wring his hands. Had he forgotten something?

Finally, Master nodded. "It will do. Now, it's time for you to fetch my guest."

"Guest?" Toppy asked, surprised. "Master didn't say he'd have a guest. Toppy didn't bring clothes for a guest."

"My guest will do just fine without. Mistress probably left some clothes here when she left. My guest can use those."

Toppy wanted to argue. What kind of house-elf allowed guests to go without their own clothes? But Master didn't like it when Toppy argued...he always threatened to give Toppy clothes when he argued.

Toppy didn't want clothes.

"Now, I want you to fetch my guest and bring her here. You will appropriate her wand and Disapparate immediately upon getting her here, and you will not return for one full week, no matter what. Is that understood?"

"What if Master calls?" Toppy asked, worried. "What if Master needs something?"

"No matter what. Even if I call. In fact, set the wards so you won't hear me call. I don't want you to forget your instructions if I accidentally say your name."

Topsy nodded reluctantly. This was all very odd, in his opinion. How was he supposed to serve Master if he couldn't hear him call?

"All right, then. Time to fetch my guest. She'll be at the Three Broomsticks, in one of the private rooms with a party of women. She has long, straight red hair and brown eyes, and she's not very tall."

"Yes, Master, Topsy will bring the red-haired, brown-eyed woman."

"And then leave with her wand immediately."

"Yes, Master."

Meanwhile, at the Three Broomsticks, Ginny's hen party was in full swing. Hermione was thrilled with how it was going so far. Everyone was getting into the spirit of the evening and having a good time.

In fact, everything was going well...the wedding looked as though it would be everything Ginny had always wanted. Draco's behaviour over the time he and Ginny had been together had been exemplary; he spent every spare minute with her, showered her with gifts and notes, and generally endeared himself to all her friends and family with his obvious devotion. Even Ron and Harry were finally resigning themselves to the marriage; they were actually planning to attend the wedding, which was only three days away now.

On the other hand, Lucius didn't seem to be coming around at all. Other than the occasional summons to see if Draco had changed his mind yet, Lucius had ignored his son completely throughout the entire engagement. Still, Draco didn't seem all that put out about his father's attitude toward the whole thing, so no one seemed concerned.

Hermione, however, wasn't sure whether to be relieved or worried. She couldn't shake the feeling that Lucius wasn't one to give up easily, even though he had been so unusually quiet about something he clearly hated. The lack of any apparent plotting to interfere smacked of subterfuge, in Hermione's opinion. But what could Lucius do, really? Not for the first time, Hermione wished she could think more like a Slytherin.

Shaking off the worrisome thought as Ginny came over to drag her onto the dance floor, she downed her drink in one long gulp and applied herself to joining in the fun. Starting tomorrow, she would have to watch Lucius more closely until Ginny and Draco were safely married, but tonight, he wasn't here, so she might as well enjoy herself.

So it was that when a house-elf arrived twenty minutes later, Hermione was just tipsy enough that she didn't react as quickly or with as much alarm as she otherwise might have.

Topsy looked around the party rather wildly. *Master said to bring a red-haired woman with brown eyes, but they all have red hair and brown eyes ... Some of them seem to be charmed that colour, but at least half aren't ... Maybe he doesn't care which one ... Well, he did say 'not very tall' ...*

He immediately concluded he should bring the shortest of the women. That way she wouldn't be too tall for Master's liking. Fortunately, he didn't have to decide whether to include the women with hair and eye charms. Glancing around quickly, he determined that the two shortest women, who were dancing together in the middle of the room, were about the same height and weren't using charms. Since he had no other information on which to base his decision, he would simply have to take whichever one he could get to first. After all, if Master wanted a *specific* one, he'd have said so, wouldn't he?

As he stood there waiting for one of the women to come close, there was a commotion at the door. Master Draco swept in, glanced around quickly, and headed straight for the two women Topsy was watching. He reached out and grabbed one of them, swung her around, and kissed her soundly on the mouth. The other woman laughed, shook her head, and began walking toward Topsy.

Decision made, Topsy waited until she drew near before taking her by the wrist and Disapparating.

Lucius paced the cabin, waiting for the elf to return with his son's paramour. He wished Draco would have come to his senses before making all this necessary he didn't have to give the girl up completely, but why must he insist upon marrying her? It was ridiculous. *Marriage is about politics and alliances, not personal whim or fancy or lust or whatever it is that's driving Draco. Why else would I have married Narcissa? All that other is what mistresses are for.*

But Draco was such an idealistic young man...too idealistic, in Lucius's considered opinion. Insisting he was in love, insisting he could marry no other. What would he do when the bloom was off the rose? That's what Lucius wanted to know. Better to have no expectations or emotional involvement with one's spouse. That way, when she got bored and left for some young Quidditch hero, the only issues were how the property would be divided and how to keep the scandal to a minimum.

Really, he was doing his son a favour. Not that the ungrateful prat would see it that way.

Lucius was jarred from his musings when he heard a 'pop' behind him. He turned just in time to see Weasley stagger slightly as Topsy let go of her and disappeared again. Her arms windmilled slightly before she collected herself and glanced around. Her eyes quickly fastened on him, narrowing dangerously behind a black mask, and she said, "You'd better have a really good explanation for this, Lucius Malfoy."

He smiled, amused at her tone. She apparently hadn't yet realised her situation. "Take off that ridiculous mask, Miss Weasley, and get comfortable. You won't be going anywhere for a while."

She gaped at him for a moment before, to his surprise, she burst out laughing. She made no immediate effort to control herself, nor did she remove the mask. Instead, she staggered over to the sofa, flopped onto it, and laughed so hard he was surprised she could breathe.

Despite himself, he could almost see why Draco liked her. No one else he knew would ever be this undignified...this *uninhibited*.

After several long minutes, she began to get herself under control. Still, there were several more quick bursts of laughter before she said at last, "I *knew* you were too quiet. I *knew* you must be plotting something."

He didn't respond except for a raised eyebrow. She seemed to be in awfully good humour for someone who had just been kidnapped. Perhaps she hadn't yet realised that she was going to miss her own wedding?

She said, "Brace yourself, Lucius. You're about to get the surprise of your life, I think." And then, smiling almost smugly, she reached up very slowly and pulled off her mask.

And for the first time in years, Lucius found himself stunned speechless. The last time had been when he'd heard Harry Potter announce at the final battle that Severus had been Dumbledore's spy, he thought irrelevantly as he watched the smile grow wider and wider until her perfect teeth dominated her entire face.

Seeing the shock on her 'host's' face, Hermione felt her smile grow very wide, until her cheek muscles began to ache with it. When he didn't say anything, she said, "So, want to tell me why you attempted to kidnap Ginny from her hen party?"

Visibly collecting himself, Lucius said, "No, Miss Granger, I don't."

"Why not?"

"Because it's none of your business."

"I'd say it's very *much* my business, given my present location." When Lucius didn't respond, she added mildly, "You *do* realise I now hold your life in my hands, don't you?"

"I don't see that at all," Lucius replied smoothly. Hermione was reluctantly impressed by how fast he had regained his usual cool demeanour.

"No? You don't think it would be a problem for you if I reported you had kidnapped me?"

"How are you going to report anything? Besides, it was a mistake."

"I don't think saying 'my house-elf grabbed the wrong person' gets one acquitted of a kidnapping charge."

"I didn't intend to kidnap her. I just wanted to talk to her."

He sounded ever so slightly defensive, so Hermione felt certain kidnapping was exactly what he had had in mind. The real question was why, but of course, she doubted he would answer that, so she redirected the topic a bit. "Sure you did. That's why I'm Merlin-knows-where without my wand."

"You're at one of my hunting cabins."

"Where?" How many hunting cabins did he have?

"If you must know, we're in France."

"May I please have my wand back?"

He flushed. "No."

"What do you mean, 'no'?"

"What part of 'no' are you struggling with?"

She frowned, amusement fading as she began to grow irritated. "The part where you just told me I can't have my wand back."

"I don't have your wand."

"Well, then, where is it?"

"Tippy has it."

"So call Tippy and tell him to bring it."

Looking ever so slightly chagrined, he said, "I can't."

"What do you mean, you can't?"

"Again, what part of 'I can't' are you struggling with?"

Hermione resisted the urge to stamp her foot in vexation. "The part where you seemed to say you can't order your house-elf to bring me back my wand. That's ridiculous and you know it, Malfoy. It's not like he can tell you 'no'. You *own* him, as repugnant as that concept is."

"I don't see what's repugnant about it," Lucius said. "He doesn't want to be free."

"Of course not, because you've somehow brainwashed him into thinking slavery is preferable."

"I haven't brainwashed him at all. He prefers the security of knowing he has a place where he belongs."

"Right. Of course." Hermione decided to let the topic go in favour of her more pressing concern. "I want my wand, Malfoy, and I want it now."

"It's not possible."

"Of course it's possible." Seeing he was about to protest again, she said, "Never mind, I'll call him myself. Tippy!" There was no response. "Tippy!"

"You're wasting your breath," Malfoy said as she was getting ready to call again. "He can't hear you."

"Why not? Did you tell him to ignore me...I mean, Ginny?"

"No, I told him to set the wards so he wouldn't be able to hear anyone calling him."

"Why on earth would you do that?"

"So he wouldn't forget himself and show up here if his name was mentioned."

Hermione was growing tired of this game. "All right, forget calling Tippy for the moment. Just Apparate us out of here yourself. We can stop by the Manor and I'll get my wand there."

But Malfoy was shaking his head. "Can't. Sorry."

"*Why not?!*"

"Because the anti-Apparition wards have been set to prevent anyone Apparating in or out, including me."

Hermione stared for a minute. "I don't believe you. You wouldn't willingly strand yourself here with me."

"If you recall, it wasn't *you* I intended to be stranded with."

"You mean ... You planned to be stranded here with your son's fiancée?!"

"They're not getting married," he said stubbornly.

"Of course they're getting married. In three days, as a matter of fact." Glancing at her watch, she amended, "Make that two days."

Lucius kept his expression neutral, though it took significantly more effort than usual. He couldn't believe things had gone so horribly wrong. It had been a good plan. A fool-proof plan.

But apparently not elf-proof.

"Why is your hair like that, anyway?"

"Like what?" Granger frowned and touched her hair briefly.

"Red. You've never had red hair before."

She seemed to debate with herself before saying, "We all had red hair tonight."

"All of you?"

"Yes, all of us."

"Why in Merlin's name would you all have red hair?"

"Does there have to be a reason?"

"You don't seriously expect me to believe it's pure coincidence that everyone at the party had red hair? And what about the mask?" he added.

"We all had masks, too."

"But why? It's ridiculous. I've never heard of such a thing."

"If you must know, we knew Draco was planning to come and steal Ginny away from her hen party, so we all wanted to look at least superficially like her. Give him a bit of a challenge. We all had brown eyes, too," she added helpfully.

"That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. If you wanted to trick him, you should have used Polyjuice. And why would you want to trick him, anyway?"

"We didn't actually expect or even want to trick him, Malfoy. It was all in good fun. If he could recognise her before we kicked him out, he earned the right to steal her away. If not ..."

"You mean my entire well-thought-out plan went awry because you wanted to playgames with my son?"

"Obviously, your plan wasn't all that well thought out," Granger pointed out reasonably. "If it was, we wouldn't be here together."

"If not for your stupid game, my son wouldn't be about to make the biggest mistake of his life."

"Yeah? Well, I'm not the one who stranded us here, am I? And for how long are we going to be stuck here, anyway? You must have had some sort of backup plan. There must be some way out of here."

"I shouldn't have needed a backup plan. My plan would have worked just fine if not for your ridiculous disguise. And there's not a way out of here until Topy comes back."

"When's that?"

"His instructions are to return in a week."

She gaped at him. Then she snapped her jaw shut before insisting, "I can walk out. I'm not staying here with you. I need to get back for the wedding. I'm one of the attendants."

"You can't walk out. It's too far, and the wards are set to keep us here until Topy resets them."

"Oh? And what if something were to happen to Topy? Did you consider that?"

"Nothing's going to happen to Topy. We'll just have to make the best of things for the next week, that's all."

"People will be looking for me, you know. You won't get away with this."

"They won't find you. The cabin is Unplottable."

"Perhaps not. But I hope you enjoy your last week of freedom, because I'm definitely having you arrested when we get out of here."

Lucius shrugged. "I have connections. Do your worst." Nothing had ever stuck before, had it? He refused to consider that her history made her a more formidable opponent than most of the others who had wanted him incarcerated over the years.

Of course, she just had to point it out. "Yeah? Well, I have connections, too. I guess we'll see whether your money or my war record holds more sway."

"You might consider that it's not in your best interest to tell me your plans for my arrest when we leave here. What's to stop me deciding to keep you here permanently?"

To her credit, she didn't flinch. "You know as well as I do that if I go missing for very long, you're one of the first people they'll suspect. Add to that the intractable nature and the on-going popularity of my best friends, and even you have to realise it's not in your best interest to have me disappear permanently. You'd do a lot better to spend the next week either getting us out of here early or convincing me you don't deserve to rot in Azkaban for this." Standing, she added, "Now, I'm going to bed. You can either show me a reasonably comfortable place to sleep or I'll find one for myself...your choice."

He stood as well and gestured toward a hallway. "Never let it be said that I don't know how to be a courteous host."

Hermione awoke the next morning with a slight headache and a new resolve. She would spend whatever time she was forced to spend here convincing Lucius to accept that his son was marrying Ginny. She figured one of two things would happen: either she would annoy him so much he would find some way out of here, or she would convince him of the rightness of this marriage he so wanted to prevent.

She couldn't help feeling a bit smug that his whole plan had collapsed around him. If they were truly stuck here for the next week, there would be no way for Lucius to stop Draco and Ginny's wedding. He'd have been better off showing up at the ceremony and objecting...he probably could have fabricated a legally binding betrothal or something if he'd put his mind (along with enough money) to it.

She would be really disappointed if she missed the wedding herself, of course, but she tried to console herself that it would be much worse if Ginny had missed it. Now, she wondered if there had been more to the plan than just keeping Ginny physically away from the wedding. She resolved to ask, even though she didn't expect Malfoy to admit it. After all, he wasn't a Bond villain, determined to impress the world with his evil plan, was he?

She finished her morning ablutions and found some casual robes that sort of fit in the closet he had pointed out the night before. She wasn't thrilled with the selection...everything was far too long, as Narcissa was several inches taller than Hermione. But at least the robes (and the nightgown she had worn last night) weren't too narrow in the waist, and they fit pretty well in the bust. She rolled up the sleeves and went to find the kitchen, where she presumed Topsy must have left some sort of food.

She found Malfoy already eating as he perused a book. "Good morning. What are you reading?"

He glanced up and took a sip of tea before replying. "Good morning. A rather dull treatise on the healing uses of belladonna."

"If it's dull, why read it?" She sat down and helped herself to a croissant.

He shrugged. "I didn't know it was dull until after I started reading." He peered at her closely. "I suspect you might find this useful." He took a phial from his pocket and set it on the table in front of her.

She recognised the Hangover Potion instantly, and though she wasn't entirely happy that he had surmised she might need it, she wasn't about to turn it down. "Thank you."

He returned to his reading, and she watched him as she sipped her tea for a moment before she said, "They love each other, you know."

Looking up again, he considered her for a moment. "What makes you think that has any bearing on anything?"

"What makes you think it doesn't? Do you think Draco would have forgiven you if you had managed to prevent his wedding?"

"Of course he would."

Hermione considered that as she finished her croissant and he resumed reading. He didn't seem to know his own son all that well, really. Draco certainly knew how to hold grudges, in her experience. It was only last year, after he had realised he was serious about Ginny, that he had finally forgiven Hermione for punching him all those years ago...even though he must know he had certainly deserved it.

And he had only forgiven her then because Ginny had threatened to break up with him if he couldn't find a way get along with her friends and family.

Eventually, she said, "You *do* realise this is Draco we're talking about? Blond, spoilt, tends toward bratty when he doesn't get his way?"

"He knows what he wants, and he tends toward persistence in getting it. But he has a good head on his shoulders, and if I could manage to get him away from that woman for a few days, he'd get it back on straight."

"*That* was your big plan? You were going to depend on Draco to think rationally about things while you were holding Ginny hostage?" Hermione shook her head. "You really haven't seen them together, have you?"

"I don't *need* to see them together, Miss Granger. All men have the potential to get caught up by a pretty face. And they can all think straight again when the pretty face is no longer present."

"Oh, I see. You know, I think I almost feel sorry for you. Except, of course, that you're holding me hostage so I'll miss my best friend's wedding."

"I'm not holding you hostage."

"What would you call it?"

"You're my guest."

"Who can't leave...which isn't much different from a hostage, when one thinks of it."

It seemed she was getting under his skin, as his urbane manners were starting to slip a bit. He glared at her. "The *difference* is, if I were holding you hostage, I'd be able to leave."

"It's not my fault you're holding yourself hostage, too. It wasn't *my* plan that got us here, was it?" He was starting to look seriously annoyed now, so she decided to back off for a bit. "What am I supposed to do for the next six and a half days?"

"Read something."

"Not if all the books you've brought are as dull as that one," Hermione protested. Provoking Lucius was turning out to be more fun than she'd expected, she decided, when his brows lowered in annoyance. "You've hardly managed to stay focused for a minute at a time."

"That's because you won't stop nattering about nonsense."

Yes, provoking Lucius was turning out to be quite a lot of fun, indeed. At least the next several days wouldn't be dull.

"Well, let's see what you've brought with you, then," Hermione said brightly as she moved her dishes to the sink. "I assume you'll wash these, since I don't have my wand."

"I don't do dishes."

"Well, I'm certainly not doing them by hand when all you have to do is wave a wand." She left them in the sink and headed into the sitting room to see what books were available.

Lucius was fairly certain she was provoking him on purpose, but for some reason, he couldn't maintain his equanimity in the face of her constant chatter. Wasn't she supposed to be a bluestocking? Quiet and studious?

He supposed that was too much to expect from a Gryffindor.

He glared at the dishes that were already piling up in the sink. He wasn't about to admit he had no idea what spell he should use to set them to washing properly. He could always use *Scourgify*, he supposed, but that was a bit rough for the delicate china, wasn't it? He couldn't imagine why he was so embarrassed that he didn't know. Men in his position weren't meant to know household cleaning spells.

Hopefully, she would give in and wash the dishes before they ran out. He sipped his tea and pondered the odds of that. *Not very good*, he supposed.

Not for the first time, he wished he could call Topsy and put an end to this farce. Unfortunately, he was becoming all too aware that he might have let his determination to stop the wedding undermine his common sense. How could what had once seemed like a perfectly good plan have so many holes in it? And why was he forced to listen to Granger, of all people, point them out?

He thought about her comments about Draco. It was true enough that the boy was rather spoilt. Lucius should know...he'd both watched Narcissa do it and contributed his own bit himself. But surely Draco would eventually come to his senses and forgive him...*thank* him...for his assistance. Particularly if Lucius distracted him...perhaps with an

appropriate bride, or training in the management of the estates.

You can't distract him with those things if he's not speaking to you a voice in his head whispered. *What if he distracts himself by plotting revenge?*

But Draco loved him, didn't he? *He certainly always seemed to look up to me when he was growing up.*

But perhaps not so much after that debacle at the end of the last war. He'd been rather resentful, actually, that Lucius had got him involved with the Dark Lord at all. Forgiveness had been a long time coming, too. It had taken Narcissa leaving him for Krum before things got back on track between them.

Lucius glanced over to the sofa, where Granger was sprawled out reading a treatise on Arithmancy that he had recently purchased. "Why are you so sure Draco won't forgive me?"

She answered without looking up. "Because he loves Ginny, and he'll feel you betrayed him."

"It's for his own good, you know."

"Why do you get to decide that?"

"I'm his father."

She still seemed focused on her book, but she replied, "Your track record isn't exactly ideal, though, is it?"

"What does *that* mean? I think I've done pretty well, all things considered."

She finally looked at him. "*You* got him mixed up with Voldemort. I don't see how you can claim you did well at all in the face of that."

"I got him out of that, too, though, and without serious damage. And he'll inherit a large estate with prosperous business concerns."

"You let him get set up to murder Dumbledore!"

"He didn't, though."

"Only because Snape did it for him. Besides, we're talking about two different things. You're focused on the material things you've given him. I'm talking about the intangibles."

"The material things are what keep him safe from harm. Money is power, and power is immunity from a lot of the problems one might otherwise be forced to deal with."

She considered him for a long moment. "Ah," she said at last. "I see now. Never mind, then." She went back to reading her...*his*...book.

"What does that mean? What do you think you see?" How had she turned the tables? Why was he suddenly feeling defensive?

"You've never been in love."

"Of course I have."

"No, you haven't. If you had, you'd realise that all the money, power, and estates in the world would never lure Draco away from Ginny."

"You're being ridiculously naïve."

"*You're* being ridiculously unfeeling and cynical."

"I'm looking out for my son. How is that unfeeling and cynical?"

"Because you're not considering his feelings...what *he* wants. Which is Ginny, since you don't seem to have figured it out for yourself."

"I never said he couldn't have her, just that he shouldn't marry her."

Granger actually rolled her eyes. "See? Cynical and unfeeling."

"It's realistic, not cynical. What's the point of marrying her? She has nothing to offer him."

"Nothing that *you* value, obviously, but clearly Draco does."

"He's thinking with the wrong part of his anatomy."

"Yes, his heart. Which you don't recognise because you don't have one."

That wasn't the part he was thinking of, but it worked just as well for his point, so he didn't argue. "Of course I have one. It's just not practical to think with it. It causes nothing but trouble."

"It causes happiness. A concept I'm quite certain you don't understand, given your obvious lack of one."

"I love my son."

"Not enough, obviously."

"On the contrary, I love him enough to do what I can to protect him from rash mistakes."

"He's been with Ginny for two years, engaged for six months. How is that rash?"

"They haven't been together two years. He'd only been dating her for a few months when they got engaged."

"No, that's just what they told *you*. Two years, Malfoy. I know because their first date was a week after her twenty-fourth birthday."

"Why on earth would that stand out for you?"

"Because I spent the entire day after her twenty-fourth birthday mopping up her tears after Harry didn't propose *again*."

"So you mean Draco is her *rebound*?"

"Not anymore. He was supposed to be, of course, but he was determined to be her one and only, instead. It was all very romantic. She needed someone who knew what

he wanted and was willing to commit to it after all of Harry's wibbling."

"Foolish, is more like it. How does he know she wouldn't dump him if Potter came sniffing around again?"

"Sheesh, you really haven't been paying attention, have you? Harry has begged and pleaded several times, as it happens. Ginny wants no part of it, and why should she? She and Draco adore each other."

Amusing as the image of Potter on his knees was, Lucius couldn't help wishing the boy had been more persuasive. Then *he* wouldn't be stuck here with Granger, unable to prevent his son marrying someone completely unsuitable.

Hermione was surprised that Malfoy was willing to discuss this topic, but not surprised that he was unwilling to consider supporting his son's marriage. Still, she had several more days to persuade him, and he had no idea how stubborn she could be.

Her reverie was interrupted by Lucius returning to the sitting room with a tray of sandwiches hovering in front of him. He had abruptly announced he was hungry a few minutes ago and looked at her as though he expected her to get his lunch. She had pointed out that it would be much easier for him to do it himself, as she had no idea what he liked and she didn't have a wand. Not that she would ever think to use her wand to make sandwiches, of course, when it was just as easy to do it by hand, but he didn't need to know that.

He had tried glaring her into submission, which only proved he didn't know her at all. She had finally said very sweetly, "I thought I was your guest. Do you usually require your guests to get their own lunches?"

After one more glower, he had gone into the kitchen. "I hope you like Brie," he said now, putting a plate in front of her.

"Oh, I adore it," Hermione assured him before taking a healthy bite of her sandwich.

She could feel him watching her as she ate. He seemed to be brooding, so she went back to her book as soon as she finished her sandwich.

He, of course, interrupted again. "Why are you so sure he really loves her?"

"Because I've actually watched them interact. It's obvious to anyone who's paying any sort of attention."

"Show me."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't trust you."

"I don't mean Legilimency. I have a Pensieve around here somewhere."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I still don't trust you."

"What has that got to do with anything?"

"Nothing. And everything."

"Whatever that means."

"It means I'm not letting you point your wand at my head. Especially since if you really cared what they felt for each other, you'd have spent time with them already."

"So I'm not allowed to give them a chance now?"

"No, because you'll just be looking to prove me wrong. Your mind is made up, and we've already established you have no heart, so ..."

"I'll keep an open mind."

"No, you won't. You'll say you will, but you won't."

"I will."

"I'm not showing you."

"You have to."

"I think you'll find I don't."

"I have a wand; you don't."

"I'm not afraid to get physical in my own defence. Are you sure you want to risk your nose? Or other, presumably more sensitive, parts of your person?"

"There's no need to be crude, Miss Granger."

"I was talking about your hair. And will you stop with the 'Miss Granger' shite? My given name is Hermione, and if I'm to be stuck with you for the next week without killing you, you'll use it. And I shall call you Lucius," she added.

Lucius was annoyed that she hadn't allowed him to politely offer her the use of his given name, but he decided not to make an issue of it.

He was also annoyed that she refused to let him see her memories, but *he wasn't* prepared to risk the more sensitive parts of his anatomy (including but not limited to his *hair*) in an attempt to force her.

And he was annoyed that she had him waiting on her, but he couldn't argue with her assertion that he had a wand and she didn't, nor was he prepared to abandon his manners and make her get her own lunch.

So instead of spending his time as he had planned...bribing Ginevra Weasley to break off her engagement with his son...he found himself serving Hermione Granger lunch. Not to mention trying to figure out a way to leave the cabin and get to the witch he had actually *intended* to abduct...*before* the wedding, of course.

Interestingly enough, he mused, if not for the urgency of that particular problem, he might not be too unhappy with this predicament. After all, it wasn't altogether unpleasant to watch Hermione's cheeks flush and her eyes flash as she tried to argue him into submission. Certainly, she was an entertaining verbal sparring partner.

He hadn't had one of those in a long, long time. Probably not since Severus had disappeared, now that he thought about it. He hadn't realised how much he had missed the energy of trading quips with someone who actually got his meaning immediately and fired back a response without pausing to think.

Of course, he'd never enjoyed the *view* of Severus in defence of an argument quite so much as he was enjoying this. Hermione certainly was passionate in her defence of her friend's relationship with his son, and Lucius caught himself wondering whether she would be as passionate about other things...whether her eyes would flash like that when she was with a lover, for example.

He studied her from behind his book, trying to imagine what she would look like in the throes of that sort of passion.

Unfortunately, he quickly realised that the picture his mind presented him with was far too appealing. He shifted uncomfortably in his chair and forced himself to resume reading.

It was a shame, really, that she so obviously disliked him.

Hermione felt Lucius's eyes on her, but refused to give him the satisfaction of letting him know she knew. She had the feeling he was not as sanguine about their situation as he was pretending to be, so she figured she'd just let him stew for a while. Maybe that would lead him to find a way out of here for both of them.

Still, if she had to be stuck with someone, there were benefits to that someone being Lucius.

No camping, for one.

Entertaining conversation, for another.

Someone pretty to look at, for a third.

Uh oh.

I did not just have that thought, Hermione assured herself. *I couldn't possibly have thought that Lucius looks pretty.* She forced her attention back to her book.

Why not? she argued with herself a moment later. *Objectively speaking, he's nice to look at. Doesn't mean I'm attracted to him. Not at all. Of course not. How could I be? He's Lucius Malfoy. He hates me on principle.*

Shaking the thought away, she returned to her book once more.

So, she was startled moments later when he suddenly announced, "I'm bored."

"And you're mentioning that because ...?"

"Because it stands to reason that you must be bored, as well."

"I don't see that at all," Hermione said, amused despite herself that he sounded like a small child. "I'm reading."

"There must be something to do," he persisted. "I can't spend the next six days reading."

"You should have thought of that before you had me kidnapped," Hermione said as severely as she could manage while trying not to laugh.

He shrugged unapologetically. "I was expecting to spend the next six days persuading Miss Weasley to take a nice, long, all-expenses-paid trip around the world. I only brought the books to give me something to do if she fell asleep."

Hermione couldn't contain a snort. "You don't know Ginny at all, I see. She'd spend the entire six days wearing you down until you were begging her to marry Draco. And if that didn't work, she'd make your life hell."

"I'm not so easy to persuade," Lucius frowned. "You forget I've been married before. Narcissa knew every trick in the book." He sounded admiring.

"So, you're still carrying a torch for your ex, then?" Hermione asked sympathetically.

"What? No, of course I'm not. Krum is welcome to her. Let *him* deal with her constant nagging."

Hermione allowed her scepticism to show in her expression for a moment before letting the subject drop. "Anyway, Ginny is extremely determined when it suits her, and downright sneaky if necessary. Comes from having so many older brothers, I expect. You wouldn't have stood a chance. You should consider yourself lucky you got *me* instead."

He looked at her intently. "I'm beginning to think that was very fortunate, indeed."

His voice suddenly felt as though it were sliding over her skin, stimulating every nerve ending it touched. Not wanting him to realise just how flustered and uncomfortably warm she had become, she picked up her book without replying.

Before she could even find her place, he said, "There must be *something* we can do to entertain ourselves."

Was it her imagination, or did his usually smooth tones sound rather huskier than usual?

Lucius was intrigued to see the blush that suddenly stained Hermione's cheeks. He barely managed to stop himself wondering how low it went. (That would be clichéd, after all, and one thing Lucius prided himself on was never being clichéd.)

He wondered if perhaps she didn't dislike him quite so much as he had thought.

He wondered how he could find out.

A sudden inspiration had him demanding, "Let's play chess."

"I hate chess. No."

"Why?"

"If you must know, because Ron is an ungracious winner and a worse loser."

"Well, what about Exploding Snap? Surely I can find a deck around here, somewhere."

"I don't like that either, for the same reason."

Lucius imagined that eliminated basically all the games Weasley would know, but maybe ... "Teach me a Muggle game, then."

"I can't think of any." Hermione looked at him as though he had lost his mind and suggested they play some bedroom games. Which he wouldn't mind at all, if she were so inclined, now that he thought of it. In fact ...

"Severus taught me how to play poker several years ago. Do you play?"

"No, not really."

"I can probably remember it well enough to teach you," Lucius cajoled.

"All right, fine. I can see I'm not going to get any peace otherwise," Hermione said. She was frowning, but Lucius thought she didn't look as unhappy as she ought to if she really disliked the idea. Putting her book aside, she asked, "What shall we use for playing cards?"

Having obtained her agreement, Lucius didn't give her time to retract it; he Transfigured a deck of cards from a stack of parchment and began shuffling. "So, shall we play seven card stud?"

"Seven card stud?"

"It's a relatively simple game. Each player is dealt seven cards over the course of several rounds of betting, and if neither folds, the stronger hand at the end wins."

"I'll need a list of hands in order of strength, then." With a wave of his wand, Lucius produced one.

"Anything else, my lady?"

"Don't poker games usually involve stakes? You mentioned several rounds of betting."

"Hmmm ..." Lucius pretended to consider that; he already knew what he wanted to play for. After all, as he had told her, they had to do *something* for the next several days, didn't they? But he thought perhaps he ought not to start with that. Who knew how facile she was with wandless hexing? "How about money?"

"Of course. Money." Hermione's tone was drier than dust. "Naturally, I want to risk my hard-earned money against a man who could probably buy and sell my entire inventory of assets a hundred times over. And in a game of chance I've never played before, too."

"Perhaps not *all* your assets," Lucius demurred, letting his eyes roam over the ones he was particularly interested in at the moment. He pretended not to notice the heat that flared briefly in her eyes before she suppressed it. If he played his cards right (pun *certainly* intended, thank you very much), he was quite certain they would both thoroughly enjoy the next several days. With his eye on the larger prize, therefore, he said blandly, "Anyway, I wasn't suggesting Galleons. I thought more along the lines of Knuts, at least until you get the hang of it."

"And then we can ... renegotiate, I suppose?"

"Only if you want to, but of course, poker is much more fun when the stakes actually mean something."

"Right," Hermione said briskly. "Let's get this game going, and then we'll see."

Lucius barely managed to restrain a smirk. That wasn't exactly a 'no', was it?

Watching Lucius, Hermione wondered what he was up to. He seemed to be alleviating his boredom by toying with her, but she didn't mind as much as she might have expected. After all, she was toying with him, too, wasn't she?

He clearly didn't know Muggles if he really thought she had never played poker. In her experience, *all* Muggle children played for toothpicks or pennies or hairpins or whatever. Surprisingly, despite her lack of friends, Hermione had played her fair share. The other kids had probably assumed she lacked the street smarts and poker face she would need to be successful, but in fact, she had won far more often than not...she hadn't had to buy a single hairpin for an entire year after one memorable game. Which, given the natural tendencies of her hair, was really saying something.

When it came to poker, it seemed there was a lot to be said for understanding odds. *Not to mention being able to think on your feet fast enough to have survived a war.*

Now, she forced an expression of earnest attention onto her face as she looked at her cards and then the list of hands. She mumbled as though to herself, "Hmmm ... three of a kind beats two pair..." then, louder, "All right, I'll bet two Knuts."

They continued to play poker for the next half hour, during which Hermione made sure to bluff very badly several times and to win only when she had a strong enough hand to make it seem like pure luck. She observed Lucius carefully throughout, watching for signs that he was suspicious, but found none. *Excellent.* His own biases would be the means of his downfall, she was sure, even though she couldn't decide exactly which biases were in play...was it her gender? House affiliation? Blood status? She could only guess, but regardless, it would be fun to prove him wrong.

She waited for him to get around to suggesting higher stakes...it wouldn't do to give him any inkling that she wanted them raised, too, would it? He seemed to be waiting for something, himself. She hoped he wasn't actually thinking she would eventually suggest a stakes change ...

But no, it seemed he was only waiting for her to fortuitously win several hands in a row. "You're getting the hang of it, now, Hermione!" he exclaimed, all smiles and good cheer after her straight knocked out his two pair for fifteen Knuts. "Perhaps ... But no, you're probably not ready to ... It *would* be more fun, though ..."

"Lucius, I don't see how we're going to change the stakes to anything that will work for both of us. Any amount that would be 'interesting' for you would surely be panic-inducing for me. No, I think we'd better stick with Knuts. Or perhaps you'd rather stop altogether if it's boring for you?"

"No, no, my dear. Even if higher stakes would be more interesting, this is better than going back to silence and introspection."

"I wasn't involved in introspection, Lucius, and neither were you, I think. We were both reading."

"It was making my eyes tired. The light in here isn't very good, you know."

Now that was a bald-faced lie, Hermione thought, amused. The cabin was surprisingly bright and cheerful, with large windows that let in plenty of sunlight. She gave an exaggerated eye roll. "Are you suggesting you're too old to read for long periods of time?" she asked sweetly.

He didn't like that, she could see, and it was all she could do not to burst out laughing. "Certainly not! I just don't think eyestrain is good for anyone, regardless of age."

"Oh, sorry. Didn't mean to offend!" Hermione said cheerfully.

"Never mind. Are we going to play or talk?"

"Oh, is that a rule of poker? No talking allowed?"

Lucius ignored that altogether. "Anyway, we don't have to play for money. Other things can be just as good."

"Like what?"

"Household tasks, perhaps, such as making lunch or washing the dishes."

Hermione made a face. "Except you have a wand and I don't, so the stakes would hardly be fair."

"All right, then ... What about continuing to play for Knuts, and whoever has the most when we finish gets a prize?"

"That would be lovely, but how do we decide when we're done? One or the other of us will always want to keep playing."

"Well, then ..." Hermione could see the wheels turning as he seemed to decide whether to risk what he really wanted. "I've heard that Muggles sometimes play for items of clothing ... But of course you wouldn't be interested in anything like that."

Taking pity on him, Hermione said, "Well, I suppose we *could* do that ... if you'd promise to be a gentleman ... And I'd want a wand oath that you'd never show the memory to anyone." There, that should allay any suspicions her quick acquiescence might raise.

His eyes gleamed. "Certainly, my dear. I am many things, but a gentleman above all."

Two hours later, Lucius was beginning to think he had been hustled. He was down to his pants and the Malfoy ring, which he hadn't taken off since he had put it on more than thirty years ago when his father had died. Honestly, if he lost another hand, he wasn't sure which one would leave him feeling more naked when he took it off.

Meanwhile, Hermione still had several articles of clothing, enough that she hadn't even argued much when he had refused to agree that hairpins counted. An argument he was now regretting having won, come to think of it, because removal of the leather tie holding his own hair back would be much less traumatic than being stripped of his ring or his pants. It was his misfortune to have failed to adequately consider that she was wearing both more clothing and more jewellery than he was when they had started playing. Of course, the reason he hadn't considered it was because he had expected to trounce her thoroughly.

The fact that he hadn't...that she had successfully bluffed him three times in the last half-hour...suggested he might have been slightly overconfident.

Still, it wasn't all negative. He had gone into the game with the expectation that he would get to see Hermione naked, or close to it, a sight he had very much been looking forward to ever since the idea had first occurred to him. But it was nearly as gratifying to feel her eyes on his bare chest so frequently, and to see the way her pupils dilated and her nostrils flared ever so slightly as she periodically lost focus on the game (or at least, the cards).

He thought perhaps her breathing had even quickened once or twice.

As he watched her now, she chewed on her lower lip as she considered her cards. An image of himself, soothing that poor, abused lip with kisses, licks, and perhaps even nibbles of his own, flashed through his mind.

Well, there's that decision made, he thought wryly, as the image sent a bolt of heat to his groin. *Definitely the ring next.*

Fortunately, he won that hand, his Jack-high flush beating her straight. She seemed to ponder what to remove for a moment, and finally settled on the top she had been wearing under Narcissa's old robes. He couldn't believe she had been wearing a full Muggle outfit beneath the robes. Wouldn't she have been hot with all those layers on?

He was certainly hot now, despite his lack of attire, and seemingly incapable of tearing his eyes from the lacy black bra encasing her rather perfect breasts. His groin tightened further. Who could have guessed the proper, bookish Miss Granger would have such decadent taste in undergarments? He wondered if her knickers matched ...

He swallowed hard, trying to will his recalcitrant cock into submission. He wished he hadn't promised to be a gentleman.

And then, as she shifted in her seat, he wondered exactly how far he could push the definition of 'gentleman'. Surely it would include anything for which he got her consent ...

Watching Lucius watch her remove her shirt, Hermione realised suddenly that she had badly miscalculated when she had agreed to play strip poker with him. Her intention had been to have a bit of harmless fun at his expense, where he was naked and she wasn't. She had hoped to poke at his pride just a little...deflate his ego ever so slightly, perhaps.

But now, seeing the heat he was no longer making any attempt to hide as he watched her, she felt an answering heat building inside. She chewed on her lower lip, trying to decide whether she wanted to do anything about it.

And if so, what? She ought to stop playing, she knew, as tempted as she was to ... what?

Leap across the table and see what happens? her traitorous mind suggested helpfully.

Why doesn't that seem like such a bad idea? she thought, knowing it certainly must be a very, very bad idea, indeed.

She could beg off the rest of the game. It had to be nearly tea time, didn't it? Perhaps even dinnertime? And he couldn't be keen to continue, either...he only had one, possibly two, items left on his person (if you counted his ring, which she wasn't sure he would even consider removing based on the fact that it was still on his finger at this point in the game).

She considered her options silently; as the game progressed, they had spoken less and less. The silence seemed only to increase the tension snapping and arcing between them like a live wire.

He dealt the next hand. It would be churlish to stop after he had already dealt, wouldn't it? Perhaps even dishonourable...what did she know about wizarding etiquette?

She played the hand. She wasn't sure if she was disappointed or relieved when he removed his ring, after all, upon losing to her triple nines. Oddly, seeing his bare finger felt more intimate than the sight of any other part of him had seemed thus far.

Without consciously deciding to, she dealt another hand. She lost this one, and the choice to remove her skirt required no thought at all. She was left in her bra and knickers, and was flattered to see his Adam's apple bob noticeably as he stared, transfixed, at the newly-revealed knickers. She was suddenly inordinately glad she had worn a matching set.

Even if the knickers were growing moist under his intense gaze.

She resisted the urge to check if he could see it.

She resisted the urge to leap across the table.

She played the next hand.

Lucius struggled to conceal his shock as he looked at the last card he had been dealt. A second ten face-up made four of a kind...the second-best kind of hand in poker, behind only the straight flush, and certainly the best hand he'd been dealt all afternoon. And with only two of the tens face up, too...she'd never guess he had two more face down! Of course, it was theoretically possible that she also had four of a kind, and so there were actually a variety of possible combinations that could beat him. But she was only showing a five of clubs, an eight of clubs, the ace of hearts, and the five of spades. So the odds were strongly in his favour that he would get to see her bare breasts at any moment...only a straight flush or three aces in her hole cards were possible winners for her. It might be best if she had fives...she'd be overconfident, then.

Feeling like an untried schoolboy, he had to struggle not to lick his lips in anticipation of such a delicious sight.

He also had to be careful not to overdo a paradoxical reaction to his hand...surely she'd suspect something if he appeared too dejected. So, he re-focussed his attention where he wanted it to be anyway. As he let his eyes fasten on those lace-covered breasts, the nipples tightened noticeably. After a few moments, he allowed his attention to wander down the expanse of smooth skin of her abdomen until he reached the tiny, impractical, gorgeous matching knickers.

His erection was becoming almost painful. He barely managed to pay attention to the game as they went through the final rounds of betting.

She swallowed hard before she said at last, "Call."

He flipped his hole cards. "Four tens." He couldn't prevent the corners of his lips turning up ever so slightly, so he was surprised when a small smile appeared on her face.

"Straight flush," she said, turning over the six, seven, and nine of clubs to fill in the gaps he had previously noticed and dismissed as too unlikely to be concerned with.

Lucius, knowing he was beat, slowly stood and reached for the waistband of his last piece of clothing. At least he didn't have to worry that he wasn't well-endowed; he had no reason for concern on that account, he was sure. And he prided himself on keeping his physique tiptop. He watched her watch him, licking her lips.

He slowly began to lower the pants, carefully easing them around the engorged tip of his cock ...

She jumped up suddenly, stammering, "I-I need some tea ... Do you want some tea?"

He paused, tempted to laugh at how flustered she was, but he was afraid she'd be offended if he did...not at all the effect he wanted to have on her. She started to rush past him, but he caught her wrist in a gentle grip. "Are you sure it's tea you need, my dear?" She turned to look at him, swallowing hard, but didn't answer, so he continued, "This..." he brushed his thumb over the rapid pulse at her wrist "...suggests perhaps you need something else entirely, doesn't it?" Still getting no response other than a wide-eyed stare and a shuddering breath, he raised her hand to his lips. Kissing the pulse point he had just pointed out, he darted his tongue out to taste her skin.

She moaned softly and pulled free, but before he could react, she had grabbed the back of his neck and yanked his lips down to meet hers.

Several long minutes later, she pulled away to say, "This..." He stole another kiss before letting her continue. "...doesn't change..." Another, longer kiss. "...anything." One more, with hands roaming all over each other as their bodies moulded together as tightly as they could manage. "Still don't trust you."

"I know." He Apparated them into the bedroom, and proceeded to ensure that neither of them could speak coherently for the next several hours.

Two days later, Hermione woke up starving. She stretched languidly, enjoying the twinges of muscles that had perhaps been slightly overused for the past two days (after having been almost criminally underused for the past few years).

She nudged Lucius. "I'm hungry," she said, nipping at a convenient earlobe.

"You know where the kitchen is," he mumbled, sliding a hand over her arse and squeezing gently. "I haven't the energy to move. You've completely worn me out with your insatiable demands, woman. I need rest."

"You need food," Hermione said. "And I don't think I'm the insatiable one here. I don't see that at all. I was just minding my own business, reading my book, and the next thing I knew, you had corrupted me entirely."

"Oh, I'm sure that's it," Lucius replied, moving her hair aside to gain better access to the spot on her neck that never failed to make her melt.

Just then, they were startled by a crack of Apparition in the other room. "Father! Where are you, you son of a bitch? And what have you done with Hermione?" The door crashed open before either of them could form a coherent response.

There was a stunned silence as the two in the bed stared at the man in the door, and vice versa.

Draco found his voice first. "You've got to be kidding me! Really?" He shook his head, looking mildly nauseated. "Hermione, I really would have thought you'd have better taste." Lucius opened his mouth to speak, but Draco didn't pause. "Never mind. You both need to get moving. It's taken me two days, along with multiple threats of clothes, to convince Topy to tell me where you were and drop the wards, all because Ginny was worried sick and flat out refused to get married until we found you. We are *certainly* not going to tell her you snuck away for an ill-timed shagfest. And the wedding is scheduled in less than two hours.

"As for you, Father, you can either come to the wedding and welcome Ginny to the family with a smile and your best manners, or accept that you will never get to meet any grandchildren we might otherwise give you. Your choice." Lucius started to sputter, but Draco didn't stay to hear whatever he might have said. He called over his shoulder, "Get dressed! Topy brought your dress robes. If you're not ready in forty-five minutes, you're coming anyway, no matter what state you're in."

After a quick, shocked glance at each other, both Lucius and Hermione scrambled out of bed and raced for the bathroom.

They were ready with five minutes to spare.

Four hours later, the reception was in full swing. Ginny and Draco were both glowing with happiness, and Hermione was relieved and thrilled that she hadn't missed the occasion. Sipping her drink, she let her eyes wander over the well-wishers, wondering where Lucius had disappeared to.

A voice murmured in her ear, "May I have this dance, Miss Granger?"

She whirled to look at him, idly noting how debonair he looked in midnight-blue dress robes that set off his hair perfectly. She smiled, accepting his proffered hand. "This doesn't change anything, you know. I still don't trust you."

"I know," he said, whirling her into a waltz. "So, would you care to join me for dessert?"

"Dessert?"

"I never did feed you breakfast this morning. The least I can do is offer dessert."

Hermione smiled. "Dessert it is. Your place or mine?"

"I believe we have four more days reserved at my hunting cabin."

Laughing, Hermione said, "That sounds perfect."