

The Riddle of the Manor

by phoenix

Hermione goes to Riddle Manor to search for a Dark artifact hidden there by Voldemort. Unfortunately she's not the only one looking for it. EWE

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 3

Hermione goes to Riddle Manor to search for a Dark artifact hidden there by Voldemort. Unfortunately she's not the only one looking for it. EWE

Original Prompt from LM/HG Exchange on LJ: Hermione and Lucius are trapped inside Riddle Manor after sneaking in to find a valuable, hidden, dark object. (Why they are working together is up to you). They must find a way out or communicate with the outside world before the Ministry destroys the Manor with them inside. How long they are trapped inside, or what happens inside the Manor is entirely up to you.

Hermione shined her wand down the dark hallway and suppressed a shiver. Dark, old houses were creepy. Dark, old houses where Voldemort had lived were almost terrifying. While she had found no signs of anything Dark so far, that did not mean that there was not anything dangerous. In fact, that was exactly why she was here. Winky had indicated that Barty Crouch Jr. had hidden a dangerous artifact here, but Winky had not known exactly where.

She was starting to wish that she had brought Harry or Ron with her, but she knew that asking them to come would have put them in a very difficult position since they were training to be Aurors. If they didn't turn her in and were caught, they would be drummed out of the Auror program and she did not want them to risk their futures. "It's just an old, abandoned house," she said to reassure herself more than anything else.

Once again she heard the creak and moan of the house. She tried to tell herself that it was the normal noises of an old house, but they did not go away. Stopping in her tracks, she extinguished her wand. The sounds were very regular, sounding almost like footsteps.

Standing as far back in the shadows as she could, she held her wand at the ready. If Ron or Harry had figured out she was here, they would be calling her name trying to find her. Whoever it was obviously had no idea she was here.

A few seconds later, she saw the glow of a wand tip coming up the stairs. When she saw it was Lucius Malfoy, she almost dropped her wand before regaining her composure and shouting, "*Expelliarmus!*" His wand flew into her hand. "What are you doing here?" she demanded as she relit her own wand.

"I could ask you the same thing, Miss Granger," he replied dryly.

"You could, but since I'm the one who's armed, I'm the one who will ask the questions," she retorted.

Malfoy shifted his stance slightly, but said nothing.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded, trying to sound as menacing as possible. "Answer me or I'll..." She tried to think of what she would do, but the worst would be to tie him up after stunning him.

He smirked. "Or you'll what? Stun me? Very well, do your worst," he replied arrogantly.

At this moment she could think of no person on Earth that she hated more. He was being far too smug and condescending, clearly knowing her far too well, and she scowled at him.

He took a couple of steps towards her. "Now, it's obvious that you won't turn me in to the Ministry because then you would have to tell them what you were doing here which you obviously do not wish to do," he said smoothly.

She shook her wand at him to get him to stop his advance.

He stopped his advance and held his hands at his side in a non-threatening manner. "So why don't we each go about our business and leave the other alone."

There were several reasons she did not like his proposal. First, it was possible they could be there for the same reason. Despite the protestations that he had reformed, she still was loath to trust him. Second, he was Malfoy. Even though Narcissa had aided Harry at the end of the war and neither Lucius nor Draco had participated in the final battle, she still did not want to trust him. She debated what to do with him.

She could tie him up and turn him over to the Ministry, but then she would need a reason for having been near the manor. Finally she decided just to tie him up. She would let him go when she was done. With a swish of her wand, ropes flew out and bound him.

"Ah, well. I do hope that you will let me go before the Ministry arrives to destroy the manor," he said with no hint of fear in his voice.

"I'll think about it," she replied simply as she headed down the hall. She was somewhat surprised that he said nothing more. Heading down the stairs, she decided to get a little fresh air before resuming her search. Between Malfoy and the stuffiness of an old, closed up house, she could use some.

When she tried to open the kitchen door, it would not budge. She hurried through the house for the main entrance and found that it too would not open, not matter what magic she used on it. She then tried to open or smash any of the windows, but to no avail.

Running back up the stairs, she leveled her wand at Malfoy. "What did you do?" she demanded.

"I beg your pardon?" he asked in confusion.

"What charm did you put on this house to prevent me from leaving?" she demanded.

"My dear, I assure you I did nothing of the sort. When I arrived, I had no idea that anyone else would be here. Are you sure that there is no way out?"

"The doors are locked and nothing will open them. I tried some of the windows and they won't open either. I can't even smash them." It took all her self control to keep her fear hidden from him.

A look of concentration crossed his face as he clearly tried to determine what might be the cause. "If you release me, I can perhaps be of assistance. After all, I am, shall we say, more versed in the Dark Arts than you. I vow that I will do nothing to harm you. I merely wish to offer my assistance since I have no desire to be trapped in this wretched house any more than you do."

She considered his offer and realized she had little choice. With a flick of her wand, his bonds were released. He rubbed his hands and arms to restore full feeling.

They stood staring at each other for several long seconds. "My wand?" he asked gently.

While she did not want to give it to him, she knew that he would need it to find a way out of the house, and she reluctantly handed it to him.

"Thank you. Now, I suggest we start with the kitchen door, which is how I entered." They stared at each other again, and he finally realized that she wanted him to go first. He started towards the stairs leading to the kitchen.

Once in the kitchen he tried the door, which unsurprisingly did not open. He then went through a series of charms, but to no avail. Hermione was trying to tell what he was doing, but he was careful not to let her see.

"What are you doing?" she asked, suspiciously, half afraid that he knew how to escape and would leave her here.

"I am trying to divine what sort of spell has been placed over the house," he said before standing back from the door and looking at it in defeat. "It seems that I will have to find the location from which the spell was applied. Whatever it is, I have not seen its like." He then left the kitchen, presumably heading to the front door.

Hermione followed him, holding a glimmer of hope in her heart that he could break whatever foul spell was holding them hostage.

Lucius hurried to the front door, hoping that was where the spell had been cast. He had never seen, nor heard of, anything like this spell. Of course, he had not delved as deeply into the Dark Arts as some of his fellow Death Eaters. For now he could not say if it was one of them who had set the spell or if it had been the Dark Lord. All he knew was that they were trapped in this cursed old house not something he relished knowing there were only two days until the Ministry would come to destroy it.

He delved first the door, then the windows, but they revealed nothing to him. Without saying anything to Hermione, he started going from room to room, desperately trying to find the focal point of the spell. In the end he slumped in resignation. He could tell nothing about the spell.

"Are we stuck here?" Hermione asked quietly, unable to keep the fear completely out of her voice.

"It appears that way," he admitted reluctantly. "I can tell nothing of the spell nor find any sign of weakness in it." He started pacing the room, trying to think. Unfortunately no one knew where he was, not even Draco. He had expected this trip to be relatively quick and that he would be back in his bed by midnight. Of one thing he was sure, he had no intention of dying in this house.

While Hermione could be annoying and was Muggle-born, she was incredibly talented and knowledgeable beyond her years. Perhaps being trapped with her would not be as bad as he had first thought. "If we are going to get out of here, we are going to have to work together."

"Work together?" she asked skeptically. "You want to work together with a filthy, little Mudblood?"

He cringed at her words, knowing how much they had hurt her in the past. "I want to work together with one of the brightest and most talented witches in the wizarding world to find a solution to our mutual problem. My past attitudes towards those not born into the wizarding world were mistaken. You, and others, have proven you are just as worthy, if not more so, than those born to wizarding parents." He knew that she was scrutinizing the sincerity of his words, and they were sincere. After all, pureblood mania had nearly destroyed his family, well, in a way it had. Narcissa had never recovered from the stresses of the war and had passed not long after its end. Lucius suspected some sort of Dark spell had hastened her demise given the fact she had turned traitor by declaring Potter dead, but he had never been able to prove anything other than natural causes as the reason for her passing.

"You're serious, aren't you?" she asked in amazement.

He sighed. They did not have time to debate his change in morals or reformation, but he could tell that this was important to her and she would force the issue. "Completely. Miss Granger Hermione, time is short. I know that two days may seem like quite a lot of time, but I assure you, when dealing with Dark Magic, it is not." He hoped his words would put her at ease. "I can show you how to delve a Dark spell. Perhaps you will notice something that I have not," he offered, hoping this measure of

trust on his part would earn him some from her in return.

Her expression was one that did not convey total trust, but showed that she was carefully considering this 'new' Lucius Malfoy. "I guess there isn't much choice but for us to work together, is there?" she finally asked, not sounding entirely pleased with her decision.

"I'm afraid not, though hopefully this opportunity will show you that I am not the same man I once was." He could understand why she and her friends would not want to trust him. He only hoped that he could prove himself before it was too late.

"What changed that?" she asked curiously.

Again he held his temper in check, knowing this was all necessary to earn her trust. "A year imprisoned in Azkaban followed by a year imprisoned in your own home learning that your son had essentially been sentenced to death will cause a man to reflect on his life and the choices he has made. Many of those choices were the wrong ones, especially the ones concerning heritage. You could say that I was broken, and when I pulled myself back together, I emerged a different man. One who is more compassionate and enlightened." There was no malice or deception in his voice, only the truth.

"And what are you doing here? Why did you come to the manor in the dead of night?" she asked pointedly.

He had assumed she would not let the matter of why he was here drop. "While the Dark Lord was headquartered at my home, there were rumors of a powerful, Dark artifact concealed here. I came to find it and destroy it. While the Ministry is coming to destroy the house, it is unlikely the artifact would be destroyed. As you know Dark artifacts are not easily destroyed."

"You really came to destroy it?" she asked skeptically, clearly thinking he wanted to recover it for himself.

"Yes, Hermione. I have changed, whether you choose to believe that or not. Now, shall we begin?" he asked gently, preferring not to dwell on his past.

"Just a moment," she said. She waved her wand and her otter Patronus swam out of the end.

Lucius did not dare hold out hope the Patronus would find its way out. He watched the otter swim through the air, looking for a way out of the house before vanishing through the wall into the next room. They waited in silence for a few minutes before it came down through the ceiling, circled Hermione and vanished. Lucius had expected as much.

"Well, it was worth a chance," Hermione said. "Let's get started on finding a way out of here."

They worked through the night, with Lucius giving Hermione a crash course in the Dark Arts. She couldn't help feeling dirtied by the whole experience. As the sun rose, she collapsed against the wall and slid down it, her body language screaming defeat.

"You're not giving up, are you?" asked Lucius, clearly concerned.

"No. I just need a break. We've been up all night, working without a break or something to eat. You wouldn't happen to have brought any food, would you?" She hadn't anticipated being in the manor this long and hadn't brought any supplies.

He shook his head. "I did not plan on being stuck here. Perhaps there is something in the kitchen that we can Transfigure."

She mentally kicked herself for not having thought of that. "We can hope." It was unfortunate that not everything could be Transfigured to food, and what was tended not to taste as good or be as filling as natural food, but it would still be better than nothing.

Digging through the kitchen cupboards yielded a few stale or petrified bits of food. "Shall I or would you prefer to do the honors?" asked Lucius.

Since she did not entirely trust him, she appreciated his offer. Pointing her wand at the 'food', she said, "I'll do it."

He stood back and gave her room to try to make something of the nearly inedible scraps they had found. She concentrated on the food, deciding to just try and Transfigure it into what it had been when fresh rather than try to make it something else. When she finished it did look slightly more appetizing. "Shall we?" she asked when she was finished. Tentatively she reached down to the table and picked up something that resembled a biscuit.

She discovered that it was dry and rather tasteless, but otherwise edible. Lucius then followed suit and started eating.

"Since I don't know how long we will be trapped, I suggest we ration our supplies," he said.

"I think you might be right," she replied even though the little she had eaten had not fully satisfied her hunger. "So what do we do now?"

He rubbed his chin in thought. "Well, since it appears we are both here for the same reason, perhaps inspiration will strike while we are searching for the artifact."

She would have preferred to continue searching for a way out, but she had to admit that at the moment they were both out of ideas. It was better that they do something productive than to proverbially beat their heads against the wall. "That's probably the best thing to do." They left the kitchen and went up the stairs to the main level of the house. "Do you have any idea what we are looking for?" she asked.

"None whatsoever. Death Eaters were always quite secretive about any Dark artifacts they had in their possession."

"Right," she replied simply. She could understand why. After all, you never knew when one of your fellow Death Eaters would either try to steal it or to blackmail you with the knowledge of its existence.

They started searching in silence and Hermione found that silence quite unnerving, so she started talking to Lucius. First by asking him questions, but as they became more comfortable with each other, it turned into a real conversation. He asked her almost as many questions as she asked him. Amazingly, he did not once voice any disdain for Muggleborns.

As midday approached, she started to succumb to exhaustion. "I don't know about you, but I could use a little nap, something to recharge."

"That is an excellent idea." There was an old clock on the fireplace mantle, and he waved his wand at it. "That should chime in two hours. While I know that I would prefer to sleep longer, I believe that is all the time we can afford to give to sleep at the moment."

Not trusting the furniture to her weight, she took one of the pillows off the sofa and used a cleaning spell on it. As she tried to get comfortable on the floor, she asked, "The Ministry would cast a spell on the house to make sure there is no one in it before destroying, wouldn't they?"

There were a few seconds of silence before Lucius answered. "They would, but given the nature of this spell, there is no guarantee their spells would detect us."

She rolled over, now wishing that she had not asked that question. Despite the troubling thoughts, she was soon fast asleep.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 3

Hermione goes to Riddle Manor to search for a Dark artifact hidden there by Voldemort. Unfortunately she's not the only one looking for it. EWE

Chapter 2

Lucius slept fitfully for an hour. Realizing that he was not going to get any more sleep, he sat up. Noticing that Hermione was curled up in a tight ball, he took off his outer robe and laid it over her. Perhaps one of them could get some true rest.

All the Dark magic he had learned over the years was running through his mind as he tried to find some snippet of knowledge that would help them. For a moment he wished he had studied them further, but only for a moment. He knew that had he delved too deeply into the Dark Arts, he would have lost himself. As he thought, he found himself staring at Hermione, his mind wandering.

Despite their many differences, their forced confinement had not been terribly unpleasant. They had worked beyond the animosity of the past. She truly was a gifted witch, more so than any other he had met. She took the snippets of information he gave her about Dark Magic and postulated theory after theory.

He also realized that she had blossomed into a beautiful young witch. Not the overdone type of beauty you tended to see from the pureblood witches especially those seeking his favor but a fresh, natural beauty.

A stray strand of hair was hanging in her face, and he gently reached over to brush it out of the way. He let his hand linger a moment longer than necessary and pulled it away quickly when she stirred.

She opened her eyes and saw that he was awake. She also noticed the robe covering her. "How long has it been?" she asked groggily.

"Not quite two hours," he replied simply.

"Did you get any sleep?" she asked, a small measure of concern in her voice. After she sat up, she handed him back his robe.

Lucius made sure his hand brushed hers as he retrieved his robe. He shook his head. "Not really. My mind is too busy to sleep. And before you ask, I have not had any revelations, unfortunately."

There were a few seconds of awkward silence as they stared at each other. "That's alright. I'm sure we'll come up with something. I don't know about you, but I don't intend to be here when the house is destroyed."

After a few seconds of silence, she started asking him questions as she paced. He did his best to answer her, but she was delving into parts of his education in the Dark Arts that was lacking.

"And you call yourself a Dark wizard?" she asked playfully.

He smiled sadly, knowing that she was trying to add some levity to an otherwise dark mood, but it reminded him of a part of his life that he had had very little control over one he wished to put behind him. "Not by choice, but by expectation," he replied softly, surprised by his sudden openness.

The playfulness left her expression immediately. Quietly she said, "I'm sorry."

Trying to lighten the mood back up, he replied, "I can understand why you would say that given my history."

"So you didn't want to become a Death Eater?" she asked curiously.

"When you are born to a prominent pureblood family, there are certain expectations. As I'm sure you are aware, promoting pureblood dominance was one of those expectations. My father supported... Voldemort, and I was expected to do the same. Even though I did not support the use of violence and other methods used, I had no choice but to comply."

"Even without the use of the Imperius Curse," she said softly. She and the others had always assumed that he had lied about that, but there was no anger now that she knew the truth.

"Even without its use," he confirmed. "Given my circumstances, it was not that difficult to convince the Ministry that was why I had cooperated. But you can understand my predicament my entire social circle was in league with him. In the beginning it was rhetoric that drove people like my father to support him. Over time the rhetoric became more vitriolic, but people were already under his spell, so to speak. I was young, dependent on my father, doing what a dutiful heir would do and obeying his father. Had I spoken out, had I dissented, I would have lost not only my inheritance, but quite likely my life. It was that will to survive which compelled me to obey and become a Death Eater. And once you enter his service, there is no leaving. Even poor Severus ended up paying the ultimate price, though I do have to commend him for his success. He was a braver man than I." Lucius found himself missing his friend, the one person he had always been free to be his true self around. Both of them had become reluctant Death Eaters, though their circumstances had been different.

Lost in grief for his friend, he was startled when Hermione placed her hand on his arm, pulling him back to the present. "I didn't realize," she started, her voice tinged with pity.

He fought the urge to lash out at her. He wasn't confiding in her because he wanted her pity, he wanted her to understand that he was not the man she thought he was. "Of course not. My public image is carefully crafted. You can't tell me that you don't project a different vision of yourself to others than you do to your close friends. We all do it to different degrees it's a form of self-preservation." He had done his best to keep the anger out of his voice.

"Now that we've dwelled on the past for a while, I think we should return our efforts to solving the mystery at hand. After all, time is running out," he said after a protracted silence.

They spent the next several hours trying anything and everything, making up new spells. Hermione found herself wishing that she had thought to bring books with her. They had searched the house, but there were no magical books. In fact, they had not found anything magical at all, and she was beginning to doubt whether the Dark artifact he had come in search of even existed.

"You don't think the artifact was a lure for a trap, do you? You know, something to catch a less than loyal Death Eater who thought that perhaps it could be used to overthrow Voldemort?" she asked as they sat in the kitchen partaking of their meager rations.

"I had considered that, but I do believe it exists. He was quite fond of Dark artifacts. When he took up residence in my home that was the first thing I was questioned about. When he learned that I had disposed of many of the ones that had been in my family's possession, he was quite put out, but I had no interest in running afoul of the Ministry when the crackdowns started. Of course, he was already quite put out with me, so it was not something that made much difference. In fact, I believe my knowledge of the artifacts is the only reason he didn't leave me to rot in Azkaban. Leaving me there would have served just as powerful a message as emasculating me in my home."

She didn't reply, but became lost in thought. "What if the artifact is the key to getting out of here?" she finally said.

"It's possible. There are many spells that are linked to physical objects as I'm sure you are aware."

"I think it's time we concentrated on finding it." She tried to stifle a yawn. The couple of hours she had slept were starting to wear off.

Her stifled yawn drew a full yawn from Lucius. "I believe that's a good idea, but perhaps we should try to get some rest again. I don't know about you, but I'm finding it harder to concentrate." He rubbed the bridge of his nose.

As much as she wanted to keep looking, she knew that he was right. They had both been stumbling for spells for the last hour or so. "I hate to admit it, but you're right."

"You hate to admit that I'm right? That's shocking," he said playfully as they moved to the parlor to rest.

She slapped him playfully. "Not that, the getting rest part, but I know that a tired mind makes mistakes."

He smiled at her a few seconds before she had to turn away. Lucius was right; he was not the man she thought him to be. She found that she actually liked the real Lucius Malfoy, something she never would have thought she would say. Pity him, yes, but like him?

This time neither of them had any difficulty falling asleep. Hermione half woke and tried to roll over to find a comfortable position, but found she couldn't since something was on top of her. It took her a moment to realize it was Lucius. He was pressed against her back with his arm over her. Surprisingly, it didn't bother her. She drew comfort and warmth from his presence, especially since it had seemed like the manor was getting colder.

A part of her wanted to go back to sleep, but she knew that they had to renew their search for an escape since they had less than a day before the Ministry would destroy the manor. Reluctantly she softly said, "Lucius."

His reaction was to moan softly and hold her more tightly.

"We need to get up," she prodded gently.

"A few more minutes," he protested.

"Time is running out for us to find a way out of the manor."

"Way out?" he asked groggily.

She felt him tense up as he started to wake up and realize where he was and who he was with. Hastily he removed his arm. "My apologies. I must have rolled next to you in my sleep..." his voice trailed off.

Sitting and stretching she replied. "Don't worry about it. I think it helped both of us get some restful sleep since it seems to be getting colder in here."

Lucius was also sitting and looked out the window. "Most likely because it's getting colder outside," he observed, noticing the snow falling. "I supposed we should begin our search. I think we can cover the house more quickly if we split up," he offered.

She wasn't opposed to the idea because she did not trust him. "That's true, but we each have different talents, and it might be better for us to search together to ensure we don't overlook something."

After a few moments careful consideration, he replied. "That is an excellent point, and one I had not considered. I suggest we start down in the kitchen and work our way up."

It took them nearly six hours to finish searching the manor. Hermione was frustrated that they had found nothing. There was no sign of magical concealment. "It was just a trap!" she yelled out in exasperation.

Lucius paced as he thought. "Despite evidence to the contrary, I do not believe so. There has to be something that we have missed. Some sign..." He unconsciously rubbed his forearm.

"That's it! I can't believe I didn't think of it earlier," Hermione said victoriously.

"What's it?" he asked, clearly confused.

"Your Dark Mark. It may have faded, but it will always be there." She took hold of his arm and pushed his sleeve up. As she had expected, there was nothing there. "Have you felt anything on your arm since we've been looking around?"

"Perhaps," he admitted reluctantly. When she gave him an inquisitive look, he continued, "There are many times when I think I feel the burn, but it is nothing more than residual memory. I have come to ignore it."

"Well, let's go back through the house and have you not ignore it this time. It might be a signal for us as to where the artifact is concealed." She was feeling much more optimistic about their chances of escape now.

They worked their way down from the attic. The floor with the bedrooms yielded nothing, but Hermione wasn't nervous, yet. She had not really expected there to be anything in those rooms. She wasn't exactly sure why, but they did not strike her as the places where Voldemort would have concealed something.

On the main floor of the house she became more anxious. These rooms seemed like the type of places where he would have hidden something valuable. She kept looking to Lucius as they went from room to room, waiting for him to say he felt the Mark.

As they walked through the library, he suddenly froze and gripped his arm. She rushed to his side and could see the faint outline of the skull and serpent. Her heart started pounding in anticipation.

They searched that area of the library and suddenly a broad smile crept across Lucius' face. "It's here. I can feel it now. It's very faint, but there is something concealed here." He held his wand at a spot on a seemingly empty shelf for several minutes.

Hermione did not say anything, not wanting to disturb his concentration.

Finally he quietly chanted a spell, so quietly that she could not hear what he said. After he spoke, a small, dark stone with an intricate design carved on it slowly materialized on the shelf. "Is that it?" she asked when it was fully visible.

"It is," he replied simply.

They both stared at it in silence for a few seconds before she impulsively threw her arms around him and gave him a kiss. "You did it!" she said triumphantly.

He welcomed her affection, wrapping his arms around her and corrected, "We did it. Without your help, I never would have thought to use my Dark Mark to find it."

Finally she realized what she was doing and reluctantly released him. She had never expected to like the feeling of being held by Lucius Malfoy. "So now what do we do?" she asked as she tried to ignore her outburst of affection. Though she had to admit she was surprised that he had seemed to like it as well.

He rubbed his chin as he stared at the stone. "It should be safe to pick up, but I ask that you let me be the one to do so. I would not like for you to be injured inadvertently." Cautiously he reached his hand out and picked it up. Nothing seemed to happen.

"Do you think we should try the door?" she asked as she stood shoulder to shoulder with him staring at the stone.

"That is the obvious course of action. Hopefully merely possessing the artifact will be enough to end the spell on the doors," he replied optimistically.

The two of them walked down the hall to the main entrance, but found the way still barred. Hermione hurried to the kitchen, Lucius following behind her. She found the kitchen door magically locked as well.

"Damn it!" She kicked the door in frustration and immediately regretted it as her foot throbbed. "Now what do we do?"

"I...don't know," he admitted. "I have tried everything that I can think of. I thought this would be the answer," he said of the stone in his hand.

"And you're sure that's really the artifact?" she asked, hoping that it was some sort of decoy.

"Positive. I hold it and I can feel the power resonating through it." He held it in the palm of his hand as he examined it.

She reached out as though to touch it, but pulled back before she made contact because she could feel the menace emanating from it. "How can you hold it?"

He shrugged. "Like it or not, things like this have always been a part of my life. You grow accustomed to how they feel." After an awkward silence, he said, "I think we should go to the parlor and see if we can light a fire in the fireplace and consider our options. We can at least be warm."

Hermione found that she couldn't argue with his reasoning. And perhaps a fire... "Lucius, do you think that maybe a fire would be seen, or at least the smoke?"

"I have no idea. Your Patronus could not escape, but it's magical. Something as common as smoke from a fire might not be blocked."

Lucius put the stone in his pocket and they went upstairs to the dining room to break apart the furniture. He took an armful to the parlor while Hermione started a fire in the dining room fireplace. She then joined Lucius in the parlor. "So now we just wait?" she said as she joined him on the cushions on the floor.

"Unless you have any other ideas, yes."

She checked her watch and saw that it was less than an hour before the manor was scheduled to be destroyed. She let out an involuntary shiver and then leaned against Lucius for comfort. Right now she wanted to feel another person, that she was not alone.

He wrapped his arm around her shoulders.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 3

Hermione goes to Riddle Manor to search for a Dark artifact hidden there by Voldemort. Unfortunately she's not the only one looking for it. EWE

Chapter 3

Lucius was surprised that Hermione was leaning against him, but he welcomed her presence. It felt good to have someone in his arms again, and over the last two days, he had found himself growing more and more attracted to her. That was why he had let his guard down and let her see who he really was.

After a few minutes of holding her with his arm, he looked down at her. She seemed to sense that he was watching her, and she looked up into his eyes. He was surprised that he did not see any fear in her eyes. Personally he thought it fitting that he would die by one of Voldemort's curses if the fire did not work.

Impulsively he bent down to kiss her. Rather than push him away, she parted her lips allowing him to deepen the kiss. He reasoned that if he was going to die, he should enjoy his last moments on Earth. And it wasn't as though he found her unattractive.

The kiss was a little awkward, as first kisses often were, but he was not going to let that bother him. The kiss was also full of passion and desperation. Gently he lowered her onto the cushions until he was over her.

He was contemplating how to proceed when she made the next move by pushing his outer robe off and starting to unbutton his shirt. It seemed she felt the same way that he did. He pushed her t-shirt up so that he could slide his hands under her bra, enjoying the feel of her breasts in his hands.

As he was tending to her breasts, she wriggled out of her t-shirt. Once she was free of her shirt, he slipped his hand behind her and unhooked her bra so that he could have unfettered access to her breasts.

Lucius leaned down and teased her left nipple with his tongue until it was hard and then he sucked on it. She moaned at his ministrations, and he could feel himself growing hard. Gently he took hold of her hand and placed it on his erection, longing to feel her touch.

After a few moments of her rubbing him through his trousers, she tried to unfasten them with one hand. They were both wearing entirely too many clothes, and he sat back to divest himself of his shirt. She squirmed out from beneath him and kicked off her shoes so that she could remove her blue jeans.

Once they had both removed their clothes, she pushed him backwards and straddled him. She rubbed herself against his erection, and he longed to be inside her. He

reached to take hold of her hips and guide her where he wanted her, but she slithered down his legs so that she could take him into her mouth. He gripped the sides of the cushions as she sucked on him. He could tell that he would not last long.

"Hermione, not this way," he said gently, not wanting to ruin the mood. He wanted to feel himself inside her.

"Can't we do it both ways?" she asked playfully.

He wasn't sure that he could, though he was loath to admit it. "I'm not sure. Please, let me come inside you."

She slid back up his body until she was poised over him and carefully slid on top of him. She was surprisingly wet and felt wonderfully tight. With his hands on her hips, he guided her rhythm. Despite his best efforts, it was not long before he reached orgasm. He was about to apologize for his lack of stamina when she lay down against his chest and silenced him with a kiss.

When she broke the kiss, she softly said, "I understand."

He wrapped his arms around her and held her tightly, all thoughts of their impending doom temporarily out his mind. It was not long before he felt himself drifting off to sleep.

Lucius started awake when he heard the sound of voices and found that Hermione was asleep on top of him. Her weight was comforting, but he needed her to wake up. He nudged her gently. "Hermione!" he whispered urgently.

"Hmmm," she moaned groggily.

"Hermione, there are others in the manor," he whispered urgently.

She jerked fully awake and rolled off him. "Others!" she said as she scurried for her clothes.

"Shhh!" he urged as he tried to sort out his clothes.

A voice not too far down the hall said, "This way."

Lucius knew they had been heard and hoped to have time to get his trousers on. He could see Hermione was still sorting out her clothes, and he handed her his robe. "Put this on," he said urgently.

He was still in the process of putting on his trousers when two Aurors entered the room.

"Mr. Malfoy?" asked one of the shocked Aurors.

"It's good to see you," Lucius said smoothly. "We've been trapped in this manor for the last two days. There is some sort of enchantment that has prevented us from leaving."

The Aurors went on alert and checked around the room.

"We are unharmed. Whatever the enchantment is, it is not malicious; it has merely prevented us from leaving the manor or sending a message. But now that the Ministry knows that you are here, they can work for a solution before destroying the building."

The second Auror seemed a bit skeptical of his story. "Miss?" he said addressing Hermione who had kept her back to them.

She held Lucius' robe tightly around her and said, "It's true. We've been trying everything we can think of to get out of here."

"I'll go check the door," said the second.

"What were the two of you doing here?" the first Auror asked.

"I am willing to answer your questions, but for modesty's sake, could I trouble you for a few moments of privacy so that we can properly dress?"

The Auror blushed. "Er, right. Sorry," he said before departing the room.

"Thank you," Lucius replied to the man's retreating back. He then went about casually getting dressed.

Hermione turned her back to him and tried to do most of her dressing without removing the robe.

He chuckled softly. "I think the time for modesty has passed... Unless of course you are having regrets," he prodded. He knew that many people behaved differently from normal in desperate situations, and theirs had been the most desperate.

She shook his robe off her shoulders and put her arms around his shoulders. "I don't. When I first saw you here, it was the furthest thing from my mind, but once we spent some time together and I got to know you, well... let's just say that my opinion of you has changed for the better. Though perhaps we ought to slow our relationship down a bit."

"Of course." He couldn't have been happier to hear her say that she thought they had a future together.

From the hallway they could hear the voice of the second Auror. "Hey, Paul, I don't know what they were talking about, but I had no problem getting back out the door."

Lucius pulled the stone out of his pocket and saw that it had subtly changed color and was now a little lighter. "Very fascinating," he said. "I would like to study the color change and reason for our release, and I think it best if we don't involve the Ministry."

"I think that might be a good idea," she replied, a devious grin creeping on her face.

Lucius left the parlor with Hermione following behind him. "Gentlemen, if it's alright with you, we would prefer to conduct our interview elsewhere."

They followed the Aurors out of the manor, and Hermione reached over and gave his hand a reassuring squeeze before they walked out the door. He felt that a new and wonderful chapter of his life was about to begin.