

English Suite

by Savva

A fickle heart is the only constant in this world.(Diana Wynne Jones)
Hermione Granger/Anthony Goldstein

Part 1

Chapter 1 of 3

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Was written for GE fic exchange

Prompt: Marrying would have been an easy step in their relationship had she not found her heart stolen by another. (Best friend/Brother/Son) I'd love something different like Hermione is marrying Theo's Father or even Anthony's for an über rare pair and falls in love with Anthony or Theo.

Recipient: MistressMalfoy

Author's Notes: Huge thank you to my beta RussianDestruction and alpha Quilter. Also, hugs to MistressMalfoy for the brilliant prompt.

Disclaimer: Everything belongs to JK Wb and Scholastic...I humbly thank JK Rowling for allowing me the sincere pleasure of playing in her wonderous playground.



Part 1

I. Prélude

I'm sorry that I didn't get to see you before the concert! I loathe those Apparition centres and their backlogs.

The concert starts at seven, darling. Don't be late. I need to feel your lips hands eyes on me!

Scrap that, I just need to feel you, Hermione! Merlin, I missed you so much, my dear, dear girl.

Need you. Want you. Love you.

Amad

Hermione thoughtfully traced Amadeus' spidery cursive with the tip of her finger and sighed. Yes, she missed and needed him too, and fuzzy butterflies of anticipation in her stomach were already very much alive and fluttering. God, she wanted him! She hadn't seen him for seven weeks, and it was, indeed, too bloody long. She sighed again. At moments like this, she thought that maybe Amadeus was right. Maybe she really needed to leave that blasted Ministry and marry him. She chuckled and shook her head; the man had already proposed so many times that she had honestly lost count. The wizard's relentless persistence surprised her to no end. Yet, rather uncharacteristically, she still couldn't make up her mind and give him a straight answer.

Frankly, Hermione herself couldn't explain her hesitation. She did love and absolutely adore him. They had been together for five years, and she didn't regret a single minute, even though their encounters were sporadic at best. She had known exactly what she was getting into from the very beginning. As a classical pianist, and a quite brilliant classical pianist at that, Amadeus Goldstein was a busy man, performing in every corner of the world. She, on the other hand, being the Minister's favourite and most trusted employee, was needed in London. They truly were an odd couple. Both were driven by their careers, both possessed quite strong personalities. He was religiously devoted to his music and she... Well, it was a known fact that for Hermione Granger, her work at the Ministry was definitely on the top of her list.

They had met at one of the Ministry's galas. Amadeus had made a cameo appearance, and the moment his fingers had touched the piano, she'd been done for, utterly lost. She had wanted him so damn much that she had even forced Kingsley to introduce them to each other after the concert. They had hit it off tremendously right from the start. It had been an instant mutual attraction on every level: physical, sexual, intellectual. Not wasting time on useless courting, he had taken her to his bed that very night, and on every possible night afterward.

It wasn't easy on either of them. Amadeus was constantly on the go, with one lengthy tour after another. Hermione, burdened with her responsibilities at the Ministry, wasn't able to join him for long, if at all, and they missed each other terribly. Hence, he kept asking her to abandon her job, marry him and travel with him, only to receive her typical reply that she would think about it.

Perhaps, she thought, still tracing his cursive on the parchment, it was time to seriously consider his proposal.

The clock chimed the half-hour, reminding Hermione that she needed to run. Carefully folding the parchment, she placed it in her purse right beside the ticket, stood up, straightened her black velvet dress and stepped into the Floo. When she walked into the concert hall, it was already almost full, and she made her way to her seat, nodding to the familiar faces she saw along the way. From there, she smiled and waved to Kingsley, who was frowning at her from his private loge. He waved back, though not without giving her the eye. The Minister didn't quite approve of her relationship with Amad, occasionally muttering in his stern bass that she needed someone who doted on her rather than on Bach. She, however, was used to his grumbles, and simply brushed them off, reminding him, with all due respect, of course, that as an eternal bachelor he hardly had any say in matters of the heart.

Settling comfortably in her chair, Hermione gazed around the hall, noticing stone-faced Malfoys with permanently-attached-to-them Greengrasses and solemn looking patrons and habitués. And, of course, shifty-eyed Rita Skeeter in her magenta outfit, which had become brighter, tighter and even more obnoxious over the years. The flickering of the light interrupted Hermione's perusal of the hall, and the wave of her usual nervous anticipation engulfed her. She started to twist the program in her fingers feverishly, eagerly waiting for the light to go out altogether, and for Amadeus to appear. At last, after a few long minutes, the candles on the chandelier were put out. The audience gave a round of polite applause, and Amad's tall, slightly hunched silhouette appeared at the narrow entryway.

The world around ceased to exist for Hermione. With baited breath, just like a ridiculously infatuated fangirl, she watched as Amadeus walked to the piano. He bowed curtly, smiled directly at her, sat down, and began to play. The crystal clear sound of his music flowed down from the stage, working its magic over the barely breathing members of the audience, sinking into every pore, reaching the most sacred places in their hearts, and instigating their reaction, forcing them to feel it, to live through it.

Hermione could never stifle her reaction to the sight of Amadeus on stage. His masterful, powerful performance caught her by surprise every damn time, and she pathetically fell in love with him all over again. There was something utterly fascinating about his hair curling around his passion-stricken face, in the sensual movements of his hands, and his long, strong fingers stroking the ivory keys of the piano. The domineering, manly assertiveness with which Amadeus handled the piano always made her knickers wet, literally. And, frankly, she didn't mind in the slightest. On the contrary, she always readily embraced the maelstrom of emotions he awakened in her. She even foolishly envied that black Steinway, which was singing, moaning, and crying under his masterful fingers.

Or, maybe, it wasn't foolish at all, because perhaps, somewhere deep in her heart, Hermione Granger knew that for this particular wizard, she would always come second.

II. Allemande

The concert was over before she knew it. To her, it seemed that the music had just started a moment ago, and now here he was, already bowing to the standing ovation of the roaring crowd. His sweaty and exhausted face was lit by the bright, elated smile, which made him breathtakingly beautiful. Hermione shouted, "Bravo!" and his eyes immediately found her. Amadeus pulled one of the blood-red roses from the bouquet in his hands, strode to the edge of the stage, and sent it flying toward her.

The rose landed right on Hermione's lap, and his voice whispered in her ear, "To my Muse!" causing Hermione to jump from the unexpectedness of it. She had no idea how he had managed to charm the rose in a matter of milliseconds, but his soft, seductive murmur forced her breathing to quicken all the same. The suffocating wave of desire rushed over her, pebbling her skin with goose bumps. *Damn*, she thought, stifling a shudder. *Why on Earth does he have to be so unbearably sexy?*

Trying to calm her racing heart and trembling fingers, she watched as Amadeus accepted congratulations, shook hands, and received flowers. It was the usual post-concert fuss, which repeated itself with more or less identical scenarios after every performance. Hermione didn't rush from her seat...she preferred to wait until they were alone. Eventually only Amadeus, Kingsley and Anthony remained, and the three wizards had a quiet conversation on the stage. Soon, however, the Minister shook hands with Amad and Anthony, waved to Hermione, and went home.

Not wishing to interrupt the father and son moment, Hermione sat silently, watching them from her seat and thinking how very alike they looked. Both wizards had dark blond, wavy hair; both were tall and lanky, though Anthony looked a bit more muscular; both had very prominent noses and full lips. The only striking difference was in their eyes: Anthony's were bright blue, and Amadeus' hazel. Of course, there was that tiny little detail that the father was a true genius, whereas the son was just a quiet, nerdy, and maybe somewhat mysterious young wizard. The mysterious bit, however, came from the fact that Anthony worked at the Ministry as an Unspeakable. To be fair, Hermione didn't know much about him, even though they had been introduced to each other. All three of them had had a few awkward dinners together, during which Anthony had been extremely reserved, probably due to Hermione's rather unconventional Wizarding community status. Nevertheless, Anthony had been an invariable guest at every one of Amad's concerts, which Hermione assumed indicated a certain level of closeness between the father and the son. *Hopefully*, she thought, *he'll warm up to me if I decide to marry Amadeus.*

Finally, to Hermione's delight, the two Goldsteins embraced, and Anthony exited from the hall, giving her a curt half-nod of acknowledgment. Perhaps, on any other day or occasion, this lack of common courtesy would've irked her. Luckily, her mind was very much otherwise occupied, and she was unable to dwell on Anthony's behaviour. In fact, she didn't even have a chance to blink, before almost all the lights in the hall suddenly darkened, leaving illuminated only the man and the grand piano on the stage.

For a moment, the two lovers just silently looked at each other, masochistically prolonging the torture of their separation. At last, when the anticipation heightened to a painful, almost unbearable level, Amadeus sank onto the bench, closed the piano, lightly patted its black, glossy surface, and said, "Come here, little one." Eager and delirious from the overwhelming want, Hermione leaped from her seat and hurried to the stage. Her stupid knees threatened to buckle, trembling more and more with each step she took. She bit her bottom lip, cursed her traitorous body, and willed it to obey. *Just a few more steps*, she encouraged herself, and made a final push toward

Amadeus' strong arms.

"You made it," he murmured into her ear as she literally fell onto his lap.

"Bastard," she breathed out and leaned on Amad's chest, sighing from the pleasure when his open mouth slid over her neck, leaving a warm, wet trail on her suddenly overheated skin. His hands smoothed their way up to her breasts and lightly squeezed them, forcing Hermione to moan and arch her back. Looking for more contact, she pressed her bum deeper into his lap and hissed, "Yes," when her rear met his steely hardness.

Amadeus let out a low chuckle and whispered, "Naughty girl." One of his hands abandoned her breast and ventured lower, skimming over her stomach and cupping her through the dress. "Need more of you," he muttered, and quickly gathered up the velvet material, bunching the fabric around her thighs. A second later, she felt his finger parting her through the wet silk of her knickers and tapping lightly over her clitoris.

Frantically clasp his hips for purchase, she snarled, "Don't tease!" and spread her legs wider, seeking the much needed friction.

"Why not?" he asked laughingly.

"Because it's been too bloody long, that's wh Oh!" she didn't get to finish her sentence, because her knickers suddenly disappeared, and two long digits plunged into her.

"Better?" the wizard had the audacity to ask as he began to pump in and out of her in a steady rhythm, simultaneously thumbing her throbbing nub with methodical persistence.

Shuddering, Hermione mustered all her strength, groaned, "The doors," and weakly flailed her hand in the direction of the hall's many entrances. She truly didn't want someone to catch her knickerless in the concert hall. However, the resonant sound of the doors being shut one after the other with a wave of magic didn't register in her hazy mind, as she was too busy pulsating around those wicked pianist's finger. Amadeus drove her to the brink with the same unrelenting precision he had played Bach a short while ago, and, helpless against his diligence, she soon climaxed around his hand with a long moan. He let her ride the hot and blissful wave of her orgasm, gently caressing her breast and lightly grazing his teeth over her earlobe.

The moment Hermione came back to her senses, she drew his wet fingers into her mouth and sucked on them. *Oh yes*, she smiled at his almost inaudible groan. *Yes!* Fully intending to repay Amadeus for his earlier teasing, she pushed herself off of him and, turning around, sank onto her knees. He watched her intently, his hazel eyes darkened with desire. She made quick work of his fly, and with a breathy "My turn, Mister" dipped her head to his fully erect cock. Alas, she only had an opportunity to give him one long lick from the base to the tip, before the wizard groaned, sharply jerked her chin up, and attacked her lips with unexpected ferocity.

"No," he muttered against her mouth and lightly bit her bottom lip.

"But I want to," Hermione tried to protest.

"Shush," he hushed her and rose from the bench, tugging her with him. In a matter of seconds, she was lifted and placed onto the cool, smooth surface of the piano with her rear on the lid. "It's been indeed too bloody long, little one. You'll get your wish later tonight, I promise." With that Amadeus pulled her dress over her head and hurled it aside. He muttered, "I need to be inside you, girl," positioned himself between her spread legs, and with one precise, hard thrust, entered her. They moaned together, and he halted, letting out a faint string of expletives. His eyes roamed her naked form, and he reached for her breasts once again, flicking his thumbs over her pebbled nipples and humming, "So beautiful."

The sight of him, still fully clothed in his concert attire and hovering over her as she lay bare and splayed on the black Steinway, made Hermione clench around him. "Fuck me, Amadeus! Fuck me like there is no tomorrow," she ordered, and then added sweetly, "Please."

He replied, "Happy to oblige, madam," and began his measured, demanding strokes. And here it was...the domineering assertiveness she loved so much. He took her with the same masculine confidence with which he played the piano. With his attention solely focused on her, she felt that for the moment she was his musical instrument, his centre of the universe, and she wanted nothing more. The moment was perfect. He was perfect. Fuck, they were perfect!

That thought was Hermione's last coherent one for the rest of the night. Amadeus did Apparate them to his house at some point, though not before he flipped her over and took her from behind, biting her shoulder while he was climaxing. And, of course, he didn't forget to cast the Scouring Charm over the Steinway before they left.

III. Courante

The sound of light steps and soft rustling awakened Hermione, and she pried her eyes open. The room was filled with subdued sunlight that streamed through the heavy, sage-coloured draperies. The suspended dust particles caught up in the morning rays sparkled subtly, robbing the air of its transparency, and making everything a bit blurry and impressionistic. Already half-dressed, Amadeus stood between the bed and the window. His freshly shaved face bore that focused and slightly detached expression Hermione knew only too well: he was leaving again.

She drew herself up, and leaning on the headboard, watched him in silence as he fiddled with his tie. Probably feeling her gaze on him, Amad turned to her and smiled. "Ah, my girl has awoken," he said, and the little wrinkles around his eyes made Hermione's throat tighten.

"Must you go? It's Saturday," she whispered and cringed inwardly at how pathetic she sounded.

He strode toward her, reached her in two wide steps and urgently attacked her lips with a demanding kiss. Raking his fingers through her hair, he held her in place, invading her mouth and kissing her thoroughly, and then moving onto her chin, jaw, and neck. Nibbling his way to her shoulder, his lips tickling against her skin, he whispered, "You know that I must. Come with me, little one. Please."

Hermione sighed; she wasn't ready for this conversation. Sensing her hesitation, Amadeus drew back, cradled her face between his hands and spoke passionately, "We can get married today, tomorrow, whenever you want. Be with me, Hermione. Be mine. Travel the world with me, be my Muse. You don't need that bloody Ministry; it will survive without you. I need you, little one. I need you more than Kingsley! I love you, girl."

"And I love *you*, Amadeus, I really do, and you know it. It's just, I have projects, responsibilities, people rely on me." The wizard smiled wistfully, nodded and rose from the bed. Seeing his wounded expression, Hermione hurriedly added, "I'll think about it, I promise. I'll talk to Kingsley and let him know."

Amadeus returned to the bed, tilted his head to her, and asked, "Will you?"

"Yes." Hermione pushed herself off the headboard and rolled forward onto her knees, pressing a gentle kiss to his lips. He cupped her face again and traced her lips with his thumb.

"Good girl," he whispered, dipping his thumb into her mouth. Hermione swirled her tongue around it and reached for the wizard's fly. With a grunt, he pressed her little palm to his strained crotch, and moaned when she began to stroke his hardness through his trousers. Alas, a minute later, he halted her movement and drew her hand to his lips.

"Hey," she protested with a pout. "I wasn't done yet."

"I need to run; I'm late," Amadeus muttered apologetically, giving her one last kiss, and standing up with a regretful sigh. "I'll be back in eight weeks. Promise me that you'll have an answer for me by then," he said as he grabbed his travel satchel.

"I promise," replied Hermione and forced a smile, despite the fact that her mood was far from cheerful.

"I love you," he whispered, though his eyes weren't on her, and she could tell that his mind was already miles away from her.

"Love you, too," intoned Hermione readily.

"Oh, I almost forgot." Amadeus paused by the door. "Anthony is temporarily staying here. He ran into some kind of trouble at his flat. So, don't be surprised if you stumble upon him in the kitchen. Be nice to my brilliant boy, will you? And wear knickers, please," he added, and chuckled.

"I'm always nice," answered Hermione automatically, and then, as understanding dawned on her, hurled a pillow toward the wizard. Amadeus, however, had already disappeared behind the door. Hermione huffed, plopped back onto the bed, drew the covers over her head, and decided that she needed more sleep. Alas, she couldn't stop thinking as Amadeus' words played in her head over and over again.

She knew that he had never been married before, and it flattered her that he wanted her as his wife and *this Muse*, as he put it. He had had lovers and affairs of course, and she suspected quite a few. She herself hadn't been a saint either, so it didn't bother her. Plus, as far as Hermione was concerned, she was the only woman he had asked to marry him after Anthony's mother, and that had happened about twenty-eight years ago. Ignoring Hermione's natural curiosity, Amadeus didn't like to talk about that other woman, and the few titbits Hermione had managed to learn about her over the years were that she had been a Muggle and a very promising violin player. They had met when they were both eighteen, and it had been a whirlwind romance of two young musicians, which had ended with a pregnancy. Amadeus had tried to marry the girl, but she had chosen her musical career over him and Anthony. Ultimately, it had been Amadeus' parents who had raised the baby, whilst their son pursued his musical dreams.

The muffled sound of music tore Hermione from her ponderings, and her silly heart nearly flew from her chest. *Amadeus! He came back* was her first, and completely illogical, reaction. She jumped off the bed and almost ran from the room in all her naked glory. When she was already by the door, she suddenly realised that the music she was hearing wasn't being played on the piano. Hermione opened the door just an inch and listened carefully. Indeed, someone was playing the violin. Disappointed, but curious nonetheless, she wrapped herself into Amadeus' silk robe and ventured out to investigate.

Barefoot, she moved through the corridors of the Goldstein family house toward the sound. Walking past the empty kitchen and crossing the dining room, Hermione kept going until she ended up at the entrance to the enclosed veranda. Hesitating at the arched entrance, she peeked inside and froze at the sight. Anthony, clad only in lounge trousers and a white tee, stood in the centre of the sun-drenched room with his eyes closed and the violin on his shoulder. The piece he played sounded absolutely lovely, but that wasn't what stunned Hermione the most. It was the serene, gentle expression on his face that had her utterly flabbergasted. It was just so unlike his father's forceful, almost violent expression mid-concert.

Entranced, she stood on the threshold, holding her breath and watching the wizard in front of her. She missed the moment he noticed her, but when the music abruptly stopped, she found herself staring directly into Anthony's blue eyes. She blushed, all of a sudden very aware of her state of undress, as an uncomfortable silence settled in the room.

Anthony, clearly not in a hurry to start a conversation, was just silently gazing at her. Hermione drew a breath. Unconsciously drawing the silky folds of Amadeus' robe tighter around her naked body, she muttered, "Um, sorry, I didn't mean to intrude."

Anthony gave her a tight smile and replied, diplomatically keeping his eyes on her face, "No, no, it's all right. It's my fault; I should've waited with the noise. Did I wake you?"

Hermione shook her head. "Oh no, I couldn't sleep anyway. Not since Amadeus," she faltered, "I mean, your father, left." Feeling awkward and trying to somehow remedy it, she smiled and continued, "And it wasn't a noise. It was beautiful. I didn't know that you played, by the way."

At this, the wizard arched his brow and smirked. "Of course I play. In the Goldstein family, it was never a question of 'if', only 'when'. Apparently, I was lucky...I started at four. My poor father started when he was three, I think."

"Oh." Hermione blinked in surprise; Amadeus had never told her that. "Why didn't you pursue a career in music, then? I'm not an expert, but you sound very good, and it seems logical, especially if it runs in the family."

Anthony threw a strange gaze at her and shrugged. "I hate to travel." He put the violin and the bow in the case, walked closer to her, and, bowing slightly, said, "Well, I'll leave you in peace, then. See you later, at the concert or here. Though I hope I'll find a new place soon."

"What happened to your flat?" she blurted, as her curiosity once again got the better of her.

"Water damage," he explained. "The neighbour above me fell asleep in the bath."

"Oh my, is he all right?"

"Yes, he's fine." He chuckled, probably at her horrified expression, and she noted that he had the same smile as his father. Only, he hadn't yet acquired those little wrinkles around the eyes that she loved so much. "My flat, however, is as far from fine as it possibly can be," continued the wizard. "Completely ruined is more like it. Thank Merlin, the water didn't damage my books. The kitchen and the bedroom are gone, though." Their eyes met, and Anthony, probably noticing Hermione's intense scrutiny, curtly ended his story, stepped around her, muttered, "See you later," and briskly strode down the corridor.

Hermione blinked, contemplated her next step for a full sixty second, shouted, "Anthony, wait!" and rushed after him. He had already reached the dining room when she caught up with him. "There is a flat for rent right across from mine. Do you want me to give you the address?" she breathed out between puffs.

He looked conflicted for a few moments, but then nodded and said, "Sure."

Hermione turned around, looking for something suitable for writing down the address. Anthony knowingly waved his hand, and a small, square piece of parchment along with a pencil landed on the dining table. Awkwardly holding the robe with her left hand, she quickly wrote the address and gave it to him. "Here."

"Thank you. I truly appreciate it," he said very formally. "Well, bye for now." He bade his good-bye for the third time in the last five minutes, and hurriedly disappeared down the corridor. Hermione gazed after him for a short while, and then shuffled back to the bedroom. She suddenly wasn't sure that she had done the right thing by giving Anthony that address. *Oh well*, she sighed. *What's done is done*.

* *Intermission* *

Part 2

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Prompt: Marrying would have been an easy step in their relationship had she not found her heart stolen by another. (Best friend/Brother/Son) I'd love something different like Hermione is marrying Theo's Father or even Anthony's for an über rare pair and falls in love with Anthony or Theo.

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Part 2

IV. Sarabande

Hermione Apparated home in a cranky mood. Somehow, Anthony's excessive formality and almost palpable uneasiness around her had really gotten under her skin this time. Or maybe her state of mind wasn't Anthony's fault at all. Perhaps it was the fact that Amadeus was gone again, and she wasn't looking forward to another eight weeks alone. She missed him already, damn it!

In any case, the rest of Saturday was spent in petulant musings, which nonetheless failed to bring her even an iota closer to the answer she was seeking. Very predictably, her feministic side waged war on her intuitive yearning to say 'yes' to the marriage proposal, leaving her hopelessly conflicted.

'It's a simple decision, Hermione. You love the wizard - you marry him. What is there to think about?' Ginny's words popped up in Hermione's head for the umpteenth time. Alas, for her this decision was anything but simple. She wasn't certain that being just *the Muse* would be ever enough for her. While that prospect sounded very flattering and alluring coming from Amadeus, it always seemed rather shallow when she thought about it later. And no matter how she missed her brilliant wizard, she still couldn't bring herself to become his mere shadow.

Annoyed with her inability to reach a decision, Hermione eventually gave up and went to sleep early, hoping that a new day would bring the clarity she needed. Sunday met her with grey clouds and rain, so she decided that a change of scenery was in order and went to the Potter's for the day.

It was already dark when she came back, and as always after visiting Harry, Ginny, and little James, she was in a much better mood. Humming the tune that had been stuck in her head since the morning, she put the kettle on and was about to make herself a proper cuppa when she heard a vaguely familiar sound coming from the hallway. With a sudden sense of déjà vu, she opened her door and peeked outside. The door to the flat across from hers was ajar, and the clear sound of a violin reached her ears.

Startled by the realisation that she had been humming the same melody for the last ten hours or so, Hermione crossed the hallway and, breaching the Muggle repellent charm, stepped inside the flat, knowing exactly whom she would see. Anthony, with his back to her, stood in the middle of the living room. His untied, dark blond curls drew Hermione's attention - they were much longer than Amadeus' and looked so silky. Her fingers twitched with a sudden and completely unexpected urge to touch them. Berating herself for such an inappropriate thought, she hesitated on the threshold and belatedly knocked.

The wizard stopped playing and turned to her. "Hi," she said smiling as Anthony once again simply watched her with that annoyingly inscrutable expression on his face. "The door was open, and I heard the music," she continued, feeling that she just ought to fill the unnerving silence in the room. "So, you rented the flat. Well, obviously," she added, inwardly kicking herself.

"Yes," he replied at last. "I mean, hi and yes, I moved in this morning. Thank you again for tipping me off about it." His blue eyes didn't move from her face as he spoke.

Feeling uncharacteristically self-conscious, and frantically trying to remember if there was a possibility that something had stuck in her teeth since lunch, Hermione began to fiddle with one of her ringlets. "Yes, sure, no problem. Let me know if you need any help with unpacking," she muttered and glanced around. "Oh," she breathed out when she noticed that everything already looked very much in place and tidy. However, the true shock came when her gaze fell upon the three huge bookshelves tightly packed with books. Even from her standing point, she could decipher just how unique was the collection in front of her. Forgetting the proprieties, forgetting everything actually, she darted to the bookshelves, exclaiming, "Wow!" and greedily reading the titles as her trembling fingers hovered over the century-old spines.

When she eventually whirled around to face Anthony, she was a bit surprised to find him standing right behind her. Unable to contain herself, she exclaimed, "Oh my God, I can't believe it! You have to let me read them, Anthony! Besides, you owe me, you know!"

Apparently, her unhinged enthusiasm was contagious, because the wizard's face lit up with a genuine smile, and he replied, "Certainly!" Chuckling softly at her delighted squeal, he added, "It's only fair. We are neighbours, after all."

"May I borrow this one right now, please?" she blurted out, daringly taking his warm hand and yanking him closer to the bookshelf.

"Sure, sure, here." He pulled from the shelf the book at which Hermione was pointing. Bending slightly, he put the leather-clad tome in her waiting hands, peering into her eyes from under the curtain of his curls and letting his fingertips brush over hers.

Pressing the book to her chest and once again feeling a bit uneasy under the intensity of his gaze, Hermione whispered, "Thank you. I'm so happy that we're neighbours now."

"Yes, I'm glad as well, Hermione. You're welcome to explore my library at your convenience." Anthony straightened up, stepped back, and with a nod, added, "Well, see you later." Even in her new books-induced euphoria, Hermione found the sudden seriousness of Anthony's eyes and his abrupt dismissal unsettling. Frowning, she glanced searchingly into his face, but alas, the unreadable expression was back, and his earlier open smile was completely gone. He was back to his detached, broody self.

Mystified, she nodded, muttered, "Bye," and hurried back to her own flat, thinking that Anthony was indeed a mysterious wizard with very puzzling behaviour. Fortunately,

she had always liked puzzles.

V. Bourrée

She ran into him the next morning, which wasn't unexpected considering that they both worked at the Ministry, and thus started at the same time. They awkwardly greeted each other and hastened to the Apparition point behind the building. On the same day, she came home very late. Anthony's door was once again ajar, and the enticing scent of home-cooked food permeated the whole floor. Hermione stopped by the entrance to his flat, breathing in the tantalizing smell and wrestling with herself. She wanted to come in quite badly, but unfortunately, she didn't have a legitimate reason to do so. And she really couldn't simply barge in for the third time in a span of a few days. She had her standards, after all. Thus, after a heavy sigh, she continued to her lonely flat where she made herself beans on toast and a cup of tea.

Of course, they stumbled upon each other the next morning as well, and then the next and the next. Eventually, on the following Monday, when Hermione rushed over her threshold with her hair still wet after her shower, she found Anthony waiting for her in the hallway. To her delight, he did the same on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. She didn't know why that simple act pleased her so much, but it did, and she refused to analyse or dwell on the reason. It just felt nice, nothing more, nothing less.

Her evenings, on the other hand, didn't change that significantly. Constantly working after hours, she always returned home later than Anthony. She did stop by once to get another book, but they didn't talk that time, because Anthony was busy working on one of his secret projects, and she couldn't stay. On Friday night, when Hermione made it up the stairs, tired and irritated as hell, she once again found herself in front of Anthony's open door. Something smelled delicious again, and on top of that, the wizard inside was playing the violin.

Hermione cursed. Deciding that it was his own fault - and really, he most certainly deliberately taunted her with those yummy scents and that soothing music - she walked into his flat. Anthony stopped playing the moment she set foot in the living room, watching her with a soft smile on his lips. Or maybe the smile was just a figment of Hermione's overactive imagination. It didn't matter though. Too tired for pleasantries, Hermione leaned on the doorframe and asked, "Why do you never close your door?"

The wizard shrugged. "I don't like it closed." And then, gesturing to the armchair in the corner, he added, "Would you like to sit down?"

Hermione shook her head. "Nah, I've been sitting for the whole damned day. I'd rather stand for a while, thank you. Why don't you like it closed?" she asked again, now even more curious.

"My father always kept the door closed while he was practising," said Anthony. Hermione gazed at him with interest. To her surprise, there wasn't any bitterness in his voice. "He needed to practise quite a lot during my childhood," he explained.

"Oh," muttered Hermione, suddenly feeling unbecomingly nosy. It felt strange to listen to the facts about Amadeus from a completely different perspective, and she wasn't sure that she liked it.

"Wine?" asked Anthony and smiled again.

"Yes, please," she said enthusiastically and sank into the armchair he had offered her earlier.

Anthony darted to the kitchen and called, "White or red?"

"Red," she replied and settled across the chair, with her legs dangling from the side of it. "What is this mouth-watering smell, Anthony? Do you cook?!"

Anthony walked in with two glasses of red wine and held one out to her. "It's a stew, and yes, I cook."

"Well," muttered Hermione resignedly between sips of wine. "Why do I feel so inadequate all of a sudden? Oh, I know, 'cause I don't cook. At all! Chinese takeout is as far as my cooking goes."

Anthony chuckled and sat down on the low leather ottoman near her. "One cannot be brilliant in everything, Hermione," he said, looking at her seriously. "For instance, my father cannot cook as well. It doesn't make him any less of a genius. I know for a fact that you're quite remarkable in many aspects. So, I think it's all right to let others cook for you."

Hermione felt heat rising to her cheek. Ugh, she was blushing, damn it! And she couldn't even decide what was making her react this way: wine, the compliment, or Anthony's blue eyes focused on her lips. She truly hadn't a clue. Perhaps it was a combination of all three.

"Would you like to join me for dinner?" he asked as he rose from the chair, suddenly very ceremonial again.

"Sure, I would love to," she replied, as formally as her already slightly tipsy mind allowed. The wizard helped her stand up and, keeping her hand in his, led her to the dining room where to Hermione's surprise the dinner for two was already served.

After dinner, they ended up talking until three in the morning. Although, naturally, Hermione did most of it, she still managed to find out many interesting details about Anthony in particular and the Goldsteins in general.

She was terrified to learn that Anthony's mother, Maya, had been Obliviated right after she had given birth to him. Apparently, the Ministry had insisted, since Maya hadn't intended to leave the Muggle world. That piece of information pierced Hermione's heart, and she told Anthony about her parents. How she had modified their memories to keep them safe, and how she had never succeeded in restoring those memories after the war.

The wizard listened quietly, his eyes locked on her face. When Hermione's voice began to shake, he covered her hand with his and squeezed it lightly. She could see that his eyes turned watery too, and to her amazement, he didn't try to hide it, still looking directly at her. At the end of her story, he grunted, cleared his throat, silently poured her and himself another glass of wine, and drank it in one go. The subtle masculinity of his reaction made her throat tighten and insides clench. She almost kissed him then! Thank goodness, she wasn't that drunk.

After that Friday, they fell into their special kind of routine. They met in the hallway every morning and walked together to the Apparition point. Their evening encounters, however, were still sporadic because of Hermione's crazy schedule. And, of course, she still did most of the talking, but it didn't bother her. She had been the voice of Kingsley Shacklebolt for the last six years or so, after all, and the Minister wasn't the most talkative wizard in the world.

Hence, despite Anthony's taciturnity, Hermione learned a lot just by staying around him. She now knew that he played violin when he needed to think or relax, and that it was his grandmother who had taught him how to cook. Remarkably, Anthony was a nocturnal soul and frequently worked through the night, catching just a few hours of sleep in the early morning. Also, his cursive was much more fluid than Amadeus'; his curls dried much quicker than hers even though they were almost as thick; his eyes looked their bluest in the rainy, foggy morning, and, once home, he preferred to walk barefoot. Hermione never had had an opportunity to learn all those little things about Anthony's father. There simply hadn't been enough time for that, as Amadeus always was just about to go.

Every new bit of information, every smile, and even a mere light brush of Anthony's fingers against hers during their morning stroll gave Hermione a thrill, and, addicted, she kept coming back for more. By the end of the sixth week, their *random* evenings together turned into *most* evenings, and by the end of the seventh week, they spent almost all their free time with each other.

On one morning, she caught herself referring to Amadeus as Anthony's father in her mind. At first she panicked, and even promised herself to write a letter to him, but then she met Anthony in the hallway and forgot about it. She had never thought of herself as fickle, but apparently she was.

Day after day, she sank deeper and deeper into his blue eyes, forgetting his father and wanting him. He was just so refreshingly constant and subtle and odd in a very attractive, geeky kind of way. He readily talked with her about books, which singlehandedly put him above many wizards she knew. He fed her a home-cooked meal almost every evening. He never commented on her workaholic tendencies, and he didn't try to compete with her. On the contrary, he never mentioned his achievements, though she knew that there were quite a few. Most importantly, he didn't *demand* anything; he just enjoyed their time together.

Although she never put it in words, it was clear that Anthony had become her new obsession. *We're just friends*, she kept telling herself, knowing quite well that it wasn't true. Nothing intimate happened, of course, but the fleeting gazes, brief, supposedly unintentional touches, soft smiles and chuckles were there, and Hermione knew exactly what they meant. So did Anthony, but they both tried their best to ignore the elephant in the room. They did succeed in that particular quest right until reality came banging on their door.

VI. Gavotte

This time around, reality came in the form of a little piece of parchment that landed on Hermione's desk on Wednesday. It was the eighth week of Amadeus' tour, and usually by that point Hermione was already counting the days and hours. That wasn't the case this time, though. To say that the letter from Amadeus caught her by surprise would be a lie as she had known that it was coming, but she had foolishly been hiding her head in the sand.

Now, when it lay in front of her, she couldn't hide any longer. Yet she waited until the end of the day, and only when she was the only one left, as Hermione suspected, on the whole floor, she drew a sigh and opened the note. A little smile still made its way to her lips as she read it - she still loved Amadeus' spidery, elaborate cursive, even though, it wasn't her favourite cursive any longer. In his short missive, the wizard informed her that he would be returning home a day early, and that he had already let Kingsley know that she would be unavailable tomorrow after lunch. The message was signed with Amad's customary,

Need you. Want you. Love you.

Hermione drew another sigh, muttered, "Damn," and opted for a quick visit to Grimmauld Place, hoping that her friends would take the edge off her anxiety. Alas, her plan didn't work. The always loud and chaotic atmosphere at the Potter's was even louder and more chaotic that evening. Apparently, Ginny had just found out that she was pregnant again, and they were going to celebrate with all the Weasleys, who were already there, of course. Harry had actually just been about to Floo-call her. Even though Hermione truly loved Harry and Ginny, and was genuinely glad for them, the combination of Ginny's news and her own state of mind just didn't mix. Thus, she slipped away at the first opportunity and took a short walk to clear her head. Deciding that she needed to talk to Anthony, Hermione Apparated home.

Anthony's door was opened just as usual, and Hermione took it as a good sign. She walked inside and found him seated at his desk. His face bore the same detached, unreadable expression he had worn around her what now seemed like ages ago, and she immediately knew that something was very wrong.

"Hey," she said, watching him warily.

"Hello," answered Anthony, not looking at her.

Frowning, Hermione contemplated her next words for a few seconds and, choosing Gryffindor directness, stated, "Your father is coming back tomorrow."

"I know," muttered the wizard quietly and gazed at her searchingly. A minute later, he turned back to his book with a barely audible, annoyed huff.

Hermione stepped closer, and leaning on his desk, lightly touched Anthony's shoulder. "What are we going to do?" she asked in a soft whisper, desperately hoping that the true Anthony she had come to know and love would shine through the inscrutable façade she was observing at the moment.

Anthony threw a quick glance at her, and keeping his eyes on the book he was clasping in his tense fingers, slowly answered, carefully enunciating each word. "I think it is obvious. You shall go to your flat, and I shall work on my research." He stood up and briefly strode to the door, opening it wide for her. "See you at the next concert," he added with finality.

As a sudden fury engulfed Hermione in its hot, suffocating wave, she stubbornly jerked her chin up, snapped, "Fine," and stomped toward the door. At the threshold, she pointed her trembling finger at his chest and said, "You are a bloody coward, Anthony Goldstein! I could've loved you! Well, you know what? You can stay in your comfortable, quiet shell forever now, because, frankly, I don't fucking care! Have a nice evening!" She shut his door with all her strength, truly hoping that she had injured the bloody fool.

Unable to look for the keys in her distraught condition, Hermione hurled her door open with *Alohomora*, stumbled inside, and kicked it closed with her foot. She had taken only two steps toward her living room, when her door was thrown open again. Startled, she whirled around and found herself chest to chest with an utterly mad-looking Anthony.

She had never seen his eyes that blue, or his lips that red, or his blond curls that wild. He didn't hesitate even for a moment. The door was slammed shut, and in a matter of milliseconds, she was pressed against the wall with Anthony's enraged and demanding lips on her. Still under the influence of the adrenaline rush, she answered him with the same ferocity. There was nothing gentle or subtle about their heated fusion. Hair was pulled, fingers bruised and teeth nipped, tingeing everything with the coppery taste of blood. Soon their clothes were violently destroyed, and Hermione was hitched up and impaled on his hard and furious cock. She couldn't believe just how wet and turned on she was. And even more so, she couldn't believe that it was Anthony Goldstein, who was fucking her hard and fast against the wall, in complete silence, sans a few groans and moans. It seemed surreal, but felt so bloody fantastic that she wasn't going to complain.

It was over pretty quick, which really was expected with their position and the feverish rhythm he kept. When Hermione was about to shout her release in the air, he put his palm over her mouth and growled, "Quiet!" She sank her teeth into his hand instead of yelling, and her bite triggered his orgasm. Anthony threw his head back and moaned, still thrusting into her with uneven, jerky movements.

He pulled out of her the minute he stopped shuddering. Making sure that her feet reached the floor, he steadied her, stepped back, and Apparated away without so much as a single word. Too tired and too confused to think or analyse, Hermione literally crawled to her bed and immediately fell asleep.

* intermission *

Finale

Huge thank you to my beta RussianDestruction and alpha Quilter. Also, hugs to MistressMalfoy for the brilliant prompt.

Disclaimer: Everything belongs to JK Wb and Scholastic- we humbly thank JK Rowling for allowing us the sincere pleasure of playing in her wondrous playground.

Finale

VII. Gigue

Someone was watching her. She was asleep, and still, even in her slumber, she could feel that someone was watching her. Groaning, she turned on her back and slowly opened her eyes. The sun was too bright, and she immediately shut them again.

"Good morning, my dear girl," said a familiar voice near her. Hermione abruptly sat up, and, blinking, focused her blurry gaze on Amadeus, who was seated on her bed.

"Amadeus! You are here!" she squealed, looking at him through her suddenly watery eyes. "Oh." She sniffled. "I need to tell you so much. I'm so sorry, so, so sorry!"

"Shush," he hushed her just like he always did, tilted his face closer to her and kissed her forehead. "Calm down, my dear, you don't need to tell me anything. I already know," he said, and smiled sadly.

"You do? How?" asked Hermione through the sniffles, wiping her face with her boring white bed sheet.

"Anthony found me yesterday, and we had a long, serious, father-son talk," explained Amadeus.

"He did? Where did he find you?" Hermione just couldn't wrap her mind around what the wizard was telling her.

"Well, he found me in Japan, actually," said Amadeus with a chuckle.

"In Japan? But how?"

Amadeus shrugged. "Unspeakable."

"Oh." Hermione nodded. "Is he all right?"

Amadeus laughed softly. "He is fine, darling. And extremely concerned about you, by the way. Are *you* all right, my dear? As I understood, you had some kind of an intense encounter with Anthony yesterday."

Hermione blushed, drew the bed sheet up to her chin, and muttered, "I am fine, Amadeus. And I am truly sorry."

"Shush, my dear girl, shush. I know that you are sorry, and so am I. After my talk with Anthony, I'm just—I'm disgusted with myself. The boy loves you, Hermione. Always did, even before I met you."

"He did?" Hermione couldn't contain her surprise. "But, how, when, why?"

"That, my dear, you'll have to ask him." Amadeus smiled. "I'm sure, eventually, he'll explain everything to you."

"But, I thought—I mean, in the beginning, it looked like he couldn't stand me."

Amadeus nodded. "Yes, yes, my brilliant boy had us both tricked. Still, I should've known, I should've recognised the signs. He is my only child, and I've been such a self-centred fool about the whole thing. Unforgivable, it's just unforgivable."

His sad face was breaking Hermione's heart, and she whispered feverishly, "Amad, please, stop. You couldn't have known."

"Well, maybe I could, maybe I couldn't, darling. That's not the point. I've been selfish and haven't listened. If you think that Kingsley only bothered you with his opinion about us, you couldn't be more mistaken. I've known our Minister since Hogwarts, Hermione. Over the last five years, he's given me so many speeches about how wrong I am for you that I've lost count. But he got me thinking, that stubborn old bastard," he chuckled. "He was right, you know. Always was right. I *am* wrong for you, and I probably have known it all along. I was just too selfish to act upon that knowledge."

He drew a soft sigh and focused his hazel eyes on her. "I won't stand between you and Anthony. I know when it's time to step aside, my darling. And with time, I can learn to love you as a daughter. As perverted as it sounds right now, I truly believe that I can. I will need to disappear for a year or so. I hope you both won't miss me too much."

By the end of this monologue Hermione was openly crying. "I am sorry, Amadeus. I feel horrible, guilty and horrible."

Amadeus once again moved closer to her, clasped her face between his palms, and whispered, "Stop it, my dear. It's not forever; it's just for a little while. Just be a good girl and don't hurt my wonderful boy. You both are too important to me. I expect you to marry him and, eventually, honour us with a few little Goldsteins." With that, he once again kissed her forehead and rose from the bed. "Oh, and Anthony asked me to tell you that he has gone to Spain for three months."

"To Spain?! For three months?! Why?!"

The wizard shrugged his shoulders and replied, "Some kind of research, I suppose. He is truly brilliant at what he does. Too bad he cannot talk about it." Amadeus walked to the door.

"Amadeus, wait," called Hermione. She was about to jump from the bed.

The wizard turned to her, lifted his arm forbiddingly, and said, "Stay where you are, girl! I'm only human after all," and Apparated away with a pop.

Three months later

Hermione had been wrestling with the seafood paella for the last two hours, and by the tortured appearance of the ingredients in the pan, it was obvious that she was helplessly losing. "Bugger," she cursed and turned to pour herself more wine. That's when she noticed him standing on the threshold, watching her with a smile. His skin was so tanned that his eyes seemed azure on his sun-kissed face.

"Your door was open," he said.

"I don't like it closed," she replied, very self-importantly stirring the rice in the pan.

"I thought you didn't cook." He walked closer and peeked into the pan over her shoulder.

"I thought you hated to travel." She pressed her back to his chest and twined her arms around his neck.

He pressed his lips to her pulse point and sucked lightly. Moving his lips upward, he placed soft kisses on her neck, jaw, and cheek. Stopping at her ear, he whispered, "I still absolutely loathe travelling." He unhooked her arms from around his neck and turned her to him.

"And I still don't cook," she managed to reply, just before he captured her lips.