The Time To Choose

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The Time to Choose

Hermione lifted the rose-coloured satin skirts of her ball gown as she stepped up the marble steps of Malfoy Manor. The soft material swished around her ankles as she held her head high. The air was full of anticipation it was a Malfoy affair after all.

The doors opened before her and revealed the foyer of the Manor. She walked with the practiced ease of familiarity as she headed directly towards the ballroom. Entering it, her eyes quickly scanned the room. The orchestra was playing a soft tune. Both the chandeliers and floor glistened in the bright light. There were refreshments along a table, with two small house-elves standing by for service. She began to make her way towards the velvet draperies.

Hermione spotted Lucius in the corner, speaking with the orchestra director. Pulling her lace, cream-coloured fan from her gown's hidden pocket, Hermione watched him for a few moments. Lucius Malfoy was always dressed to impress, gaining the attention of the ladies surrounding him. A small smile appeared on her face as their eyes met. Her pulse quickened as he inclined his head to her in welcome.

As Hermione was about to cross the floor to Lucius, Draco appeared in front of her. His eyes softened immediately upon seeing her. He bowed low, a sincere smile gracing his angelic features. He was wearing dark blue silk dress robes that accentuated his grey eyes. The once-common arrogance that Draco had so often carried about him had disappeared, leaving only genuineness and caring in its place.

Hermione raised her fan to cover her face, only her eyes now visible. She fluttered her lashes coyly at Draco before turning. She walked a few steps before Draco caught her, his arm reaching out and grasping her wrist.

His eyes burned with desire as he pulled her into his arms. Placing one hand on her waist while the other held her hand, Draco began to waltz with her. Her fan pressed against his arm as Hermione had been unable to put it away.

The music swept her up as they twirled around and around. Hermione's breathing began to grow heavy as she tried to keep up with his dancing while looking for Lucius. She missed a step, accidentally stepping on Draco's toes. She flushed, embarrassed.

Hearing her labouring for air, Draco slowed and danced them to the fringe of whirling dancers. Taking her hand, he began to pull her out of the ballroom. Lucius watched with narrowed eyes as his son escorted Miss Granger from the room. His hands clenched into fists at his sides as he pursed his lips, feeling a hollow ache in his chest.

Hermione followed but frowned, the ache of her conflicted heart growing stronger. She slowed her steps, an expression of uncertainty on her face.

Draco led her towards the quiet library, her favourite place in the whole Manor. It was the place that Hermione often spent most of her time with either Lucius or Draco keeping her company.

She took her usual seat on the sofa, fanning herself. The crackle of the fire was the only thing to be heard. Hermione looked to Draco, who had begun to pace back and forth in front of her. She watched him with a concerned expression.

Draco abruptly stopped, reaching up and running his hand through his long, silvery-blond hair, messing his usually perfect locks. He turned to face her, and Hermione could see small beads of sweat on his neck.

Draco turned and took a deep breath, rubbing his hands together before he stared directly into her eyes.

Without a sound, Draco dropped down to one knee and pulled out a small black box. His cheeks were flushed with nervousness as he opened the box.

Hermione gasped, a torn expression on her face. Her tongue darted out to wet her lips as her hands tightly gripped her fan.

Half of her wanted to say yes, but the other half did not. A part of her cared for Draco, but Hermione knew that he was not the one for her. He was not the Malfoy for her, despite her feelings. Accepting would be the wrong choice.

Slowly, Hermione shook her head, tears welling in her eyes as her heart clenched painfully inside her chest.

A pained look twisted Draco's face. He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out.

Hermione stood, unable to bear the look of hurt in Draco's eyes. She wanted to apologise, but refrained. It would do Draco no good. Tears now streaming down her face, Hermione turned and exited the library.

Lucius had been dancing with an old friend, going through the motions of being a gracious host, when he saw Miss Granger re-enter the ballroom. Her eyes were red and puffy, a sure sign that the young witch had been crying. Moments later, Draco re-entered as well, with a befuddled expression.

Lucius excused himself from his dance partner with a gracious bow and began to move towards Hermione. The young witch had seated herself near the refreshment table, her face hiding behind the lace cream-coloured fan that she held. Miss Granger looked a vision, having caught the eye of many men that evening.

He paused in front of her, observing the witch. Lucius cleared his throat and she looked up at him. He offered her his hand, which she immediately took.

With a gentle hand he led her towards the back gardens, weaving in and out of the dancers as they crossed the dance floor. The couple gathered a few strange looks, but neither paid any attention.

Hermione watched Lucius, her heart beating wildly in her chest at his beloved aristocratic profile. Her skirts swished around her ankles as she hurriedly tried to keep up with his fast pace. A smile graced her features when Lucius guided her out of the manor and into the rose garden, his stride slowing.

The sweet scents of roses bombarded Hermione as they walked into the garden. The music from the ballroom drifted outside, a faint sound in the distance.

Lucius lightly squeezed her hand reassuringly. He guided her towards a stone bench, gesturing for Hermione to take a seat. She did so, patting the spot next to her. Lucius chuckled as he took a seat next to her. He wrapped his arm around her, pulling her into his warm side.

Closing her eyes, Hermione rested her head on him. She sniffed, the tears threatening to spill over once more.

Lucius did his best to soothe her, the hand on her shoulder making small circular motions in an attempt to comfort her. He smiled when Miss Granger snuggled deeper into his side.

The two of them sat like that for quite some time. Neither moved. Neither spoke. It was a peaceful quiet as the strains of a waltz floated out to them.

Eventually, Lucius glanced down at the sweet witch by his side. His heart thrummed nervously in his chest as he reached down and lightly touched her cheek. A soft sigh escaped her lips, spurring on Lucius's movements. He tilted her face with his warm, faintly calloused fingers so that she was facing him. Her brown eyes were large as they stared into his own grey eyes. Her breathing slowed and her pupils dilated. She placed her fan on the bench as she closed the gap between them, moving closer towards him. Her hands reached up, grasping the front of his shirt. She tugged in an attempt to bring him closer, a smile playing on her lips.

Lucius got the hint and lowered his lips, covering hers with his own. It was a gentle kiss, tentative in the way their lips met.

When Lucius pulled back, he smirked slightly. Hermione let out a small, awkward-sounding laugh as she continued to stare at him, hopeful.

His thumb brushed against her cheek and she trembled. Lucius lowered his lips to hers, kissing her more passionately this time. He moved his hands to her hips, gripping them tightly as he pulled her onto his lap.

Hermione made a small noise of surprise as she straddled Lucius. She tangled her hands into his long blond hair, perfectly content with their new position. She let out a sigh as Lucius moved his lips to her neck, gently kissing and nipping at her collarbone.

The two of them spent the evening entwined in each other's arms, their hearts beating in sync. Hermione had made her choice, and it was one that she would never bring herself to regret.