

One Last Effort

by Southern_Witch_69

Draco has been on the run for three years, but he finally finds safety with Hermione and her friends. Can they truly help him after all that's happened?

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 4

Draco has been on the run for three years, but he finally finds safety with Hermione and her friends. Can they truly help him after all that's happened?

Disclaimer: These characters aren't mine, but I like using them for my twisted tales.

This premise was requested by my friend, Soul Bound, who also enjoys a touch of Hermione and Draco now and then.

Thanks go to CocoaChristy for beta reading!

His breathing increased steadily, and the pain in his side continued to explode and jolt through his body. He was being followed—hunted like bloody prey! He'd done nothing wrong. That wasn't exactly true, and he knew it, but it didn't warrant being followed at all times and forcing him into hiding and forgoing his birthright. Things were much simpler before his father had failed the Dark Lord and had landed himself in Azkaban.

"Halt!" shouted a shrill voice.

"You won't get away, Malfoy!" jeered another. "You can't Disapparate from these woods, mate."

"Got you cornered, we have!"

Draco paid no attention to them and continued to search for an opening or any place that he could hide. Just as he thought this, a jet of red light passed to his left, just barely missing him. *Fuck! Why didn't I take Snape up on his offer of protection? I had to be so damn proud! Malfoy pride is nothing when you're dead or locked up!* He thought, frantically running towards a clearing in the brush, jumping over fallen branches and dodging dips in the ground along the way.

Not noticing a sudden slope, he lost his footing and tumbled down a small hill, landing on his back at the bottom. He heard the sound of rushing water, and though his vision had blurred, he could just make out the face of someone hovering above him.

"Don't move," the person whispered, "if you want to live."

It was a female, and he was certain he knew the voice—had heard it before. Whoever it was, she quickly lay over him and covered their bodies with an Invisibility Cloak. The Aurors who had been chasing him were now sprinting down to see if they could find him. He held his breath as the tall female walked right past them, wand extended in front of her.

"I don't see the little bastard," a gruff voice said from their left minutes later.

"Bet the git crossed the stream. Come on then. Keep up, you two," the female demanded.

"Which way do we go now?" one of the others asked.

At that moment, there was a splashing sound further down the stream, and the Aurors immediately ran towards it, leaving Draco and his savior untouched.

He started to move and to thank her, but she pushed him down and softly whispered, "Not just yet."

It felt as though eons had passed when the girl finally moved off of him and pulled the cloak away from them. "Sorry about that," she said. "And I'm sorry about this, too."

He had only a moment to register her wand at his throat before he heard her incantation.

"*Stupefy!*"

The world went dark.

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Hermione watched the sleeping man across from her and wondered where he'd got the thin, pale scar on his pointed chin. It was interesting that he seemed so different while sleeping. He seemed pleasant almost, and for the first time, she truly realized how attractive he was. It was a pity that his attitude and horrible words made him ugly. The whitish-blond hair he'd always had was no longer greased back with gel. It hung long, just past his shoulders, and seemed as smooth as silk. Not worrying about waking him, she moved to kneel next to him and extended a hand to trace one long lock on the side of his face. It felt as soft as it looked.

The stubble on his unshaven face, however, was coarse and inviting. *This is something new*, she thought, gazing at him appreciatively. Boldly, she caressed the side of his face with the back of her hand, pausing as her knuckles reached his chapped lips. At that moment, her eyes lifted and met his icy, grey glare.

"What do you think you're doing, Granger?" he asked, voice just as hateful as she remembered.

"I'm saving your arse," she replied, rising from her knees and pulling her chair over next to his bed to sit by him.

"You've got me restrained to this bed in... Merlin knows where, and you call this saving my arse?" he asked sarcastically. "Or is it that you *want* this arse?" His lips curled up in disgust. "I'd rather go to Azkaban, thanks."

"Shut it, you, because if you don't, that can certainly be arranged." She shook her head. "Those Aurors following you were under orders to take you in no matter what condition you might be in. I expect they would have had a bit of fun with you before bringing you to the Ministry for your charges."

"What charges?" he asked, trying to sit up. "I've killed nobody!"

She held up her hand and began counting the charges he was being hunted for. "Attempted murder, two counts. Use of an Unforgivable. Endangering the lives of minors. Suspicion of being a Death Eater. Knowingly aiding Death Eaters—"

"Won't you get into trouble for doing the same thing?" he pointed out. "You're aiding me."

"But we think it's a bit unfair," Harry said from the doorway, walking towards them. "Finally up, eh, git?"

"Piss off, Potter," Draco said heatedly.

"There are a few things that we want to know," Harry began.

"And if you want to keep your skinny arse out of Azkaban a little longer," Ron added, coming to stand beside them, "then you'll answer our questions."

Hermione gave him what she hoped was a reassuring smile. "We do want to help you, Draco. We've been looking for you for three years now, and we got a tip that you'd be right where I found you tonight. Thankfully, I was able to trip you up and get you to tumble right to me."

"And Ron made a diversion to lead the Aurors off," Harry added.

"Why? Why would *you* *lot* want to help me?" he asked incredulously.

"You wouldn't have killed Dumbledore," Harry said simply. "If those other idiots hadn't showed up... if Snape hadn't done what he did, things would be different right now."

Draco nodded, and Hermione could tell that his emotions were at war—hope, defeat, defiance, and relief all surfaced on his face. Wanting to put him at ease, she asked, "Would you like something to eat first? Something to drink?"

"Where's my wand?" he asked, ignoring her and staring at Harry.

"It broke during your tumble," Harry said.

"But I've put some Spellotape on it, and, uh, I expect it'll do if you get in a bind," Ron said. "Happened to me once a few years back."

Draco glared at him. "Weasley, didn't that wand Obliviate Lockhart?"

Ron shrugged. "Served him right."

"Draco," Hermione interrupted, trying to be polite again, "would you like something to eat?"

"Maybe. First," he said, cheeks splotching, "I need to use the loo."

"Right," Harry said, flicking his wand to release Draco's bindings. "I will hex you if you try anything," he warned as Draco stood.

"I won't try anything—yet," came the reply.

Hermione sighed as her two friends guided him out of the room. It was going to be a long night, but she was glad that they'd finally found him. Now they could possibly get the breakthrough they'd been looking for. Hopefully anyway.

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**Southern's Notes:** I figure if he's been on the run for that long, he's willing to take any help given, so long as things work in his favor—even if it is from the dreaded trio.

# Chapter 2

*Chapter 2 of 4*

Draco makes a deal with Hermione and the others to help them--for a price.

**Disclaimer:** Not my characters, but I need them to make my friend, and beta for this chapter, happy. Thanks, Soul Bound (she likes this pairing and requested this prompt!).

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"I want it in writing, Potter. It's that or nothing," Draco said adamantly, using his napkin to elegantly, and exaggeratedly, wipe the crumbs of his sandwich from the corners of his mouth.

"What good's putting it in writing, you bloody berk!" Ron said heatedly. "Harry's not the Minister of Magic."

"But he's got people everywhere who look up to him, and the Ministry would be swayed if he made a statement," Draco said, hope lacing the words he was obviously trying to keep resolute.

"Great bleeding idiot," Ron said as if he hadn't heard him. "Can you believe this?" he asked in exasperation, looking at Hermione.

"Well," she began, looking towards Harry, "it might help him, and he is going to tell us what we need to know, so long as we at least try this. I don't know that he's asking for much here."

Draco sneered at Ron. "I can't believe it's Granger who's got the right of it before either of you."

Harry nodded slowly. "All right. I'll write up something...here and now...with you all as my witnesses that Draco," he nodded to the other boy, "is working with us to end this war."

"And that I never would have killed anyone had... had I not been forced," Draco admitted, though it was obvious the statement cost him his pride.

"I know," Harry said softly. "I heard you tell Dumbledore that you had no choice, as Voldemort," Draco shuddered upon hearing this name, "would have killed your family." Harry looked over to Ron. "It's what the headmaster wanted to do...help Draco and his family."

"I know that, mate," Ron said. "It's just that we've been dodging the Ministry ourselves lately, and I don't know that they'll take kindly to us throwing this at them. Might start trying to follow us around even more then...if they think he's with us."

"But we won't tell them right now," Hermione said. "We'll all make statements on a parchment about it and record what we're doing. That should at least grant some leniency for Draco. As it is, we won't be able to end this war without him."

Ron nodded in agreement. "All right. And he can use the Invisibility Cloak at all times." His eyes narrowed. "How do we know he won't take off?"

Hermione grinned. "There's charms for that."

"There's my word for that," Draco put in firmly. "I'm not...I'm not my father."

"Thank God for that," Hermione said with what she hoped was a friendly smile.

Draco immediately bristled, annoyed at her comment. "How dare you speak about things you don't understand, Granger! Our life's not been as simple as yours. There are things that you...none of you, not even Weasley...could possibly understand about the pressure the Malfoys have been under for four generations now."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to speak ill of your father," she said softly, truly feeling guilty. "It's just that... he's tried to kill us all, and that's not something one can easily get over."

Nodding, but remaining silent, Draco brought his glass to his lips to drink the rest of his pumpkin juice. He then closed his eyes and sighed dramatically. "I could use a bath," he said finally.

"Here, I'll show you the way," Hermione said.

"Ron and I are going to put some wards on this place," Harry said, rising from his chair. "After that, we'll set about writing up the statement of Malfoy's help."

"I said I wouldn't take off," Draco retorted heatedly. "I want this to be over as much as you do. Can you imagine running from the Ministry and from Death Eaters for three years? There was only so much Snape could do to help me when..." His eyes clouded over. "Where's the bath?"

"He'll get his," Harry said coldly, leaving the room with Ron following behind him.

"This way, Draco," Hermione said as kindly as she could, though still worrying about Harry's reaction and knowing that he was likely ranting to Ron about Snape. She certainly didn't envy Ron that position, having been on the receiving end of more than one of Harry's tirades in the past years. Snape's name was the one thing that set him off...even more so than Voldemort's!

"What are you smirking at, Granger? Think this is funny, do you?" Draco asked, an expression of distaste lining his features.

"I wasn't thinking about you at all if you must know," she snapped. Pushing the door open forcefully with a grunt, she entered the lav. "And I'd appreciate it if you'd quit making your little snide comments to me. If you haven't bloody well noticed, I'm trying to help you here."

"You lot are still trying to act like you're doing something noble, but the only reason you're helping me out is because you need access to my family's manor," he replied. "You've probably been talking about it for years now." He changed his voice to something deeper and purposely obtuse in imitation of Ron. "Bet we could get a reward for bringing Malfoy in or get Orders of Merlin when Harry lucks up against the Dark Lord!"

"Grow up, Malfoy. We're not in school anymore. We really do want to help you," she said angrily. "Harry's always said that while you're an arse, you're no murderer. Accept our help or not for what it truly is, will you? I don't care, but you will keep your mouth shut."

He remained silent, snapping his mouth closed, and glared at her menacingly.

Satisfied with her words and his reaction to them, she pointed out the items in the room. "It's not as big as what you're used to, I'm sure, but it's big enough to laze about in with a good book," she said, indicating the bath. "In this cabinet are fresh towels, and in that one, just there, right, you can find any toiletries you might need."

"I would like to shave," he said suddenly and smirked immediately after. "I don't expect Potter or Weasley can grow any facial hair just yet, so I doubt there are any razors about, eh?"

"You can always use my pink shaver, Malfoy," Hermione said, flashing a smirk of her own, pleased at his look of horror. "There are unused razors in this drawer, and there's likely a," she opened the drawer, "yeah, a toothbrush here."

"What will I put on? Can't go about starkers, can I?" He arched an eyebrow. "Or would you like that?"

"Please, you've got nothing I want to see." She brushed past him and pulled the door they'd entered through nearly closed and pointed to an old wardrobe. "There are some dressing gowns in there." Frowning, she moved towards it and opened the door. "We don't use them, so it might not be as fresh as you'd like. Here, let me charm the old smell off."

Just as she'd done that and hung it up on a hook nearby, she turned to see Draco leaning casually against the closed door.

"Malfoy! What did you do?"

"Sorry? What are you on about? I was watching you."

"The door, you idiot! It doesn't open from this side!" she said, pushing him aside to try to move it anyway. "Blast!"

"Use your wand then."

"I can't. The original owners of this house has it charmed so it can only be opened from the outside...manually...and you saw the push I had to give it when we came in! I expect the arse used to lock his family in here."

"Pound on the door then. I'm sure Weasley and Potter will come running," Draco said, crossing his arms over his chest nonchalantly.

"It's soundproof," Hermione said through clenched teeth.

"Well, your watchdogs will be along shortly regardless."

"Not if Harry's on another diatribe again," she said, pulling herself up to sit on the sink's counter. "You'll just have to wait until they come along."

"I'm not going to wait. You can go over to the corner and close your eyes for all I care, but it's been nearly three weeks since I've had a proper bath, and I wouldn't mind a shave." He went about setting things up to do just that. "Do you mind?"

Angry with him for closing the door, though she knew he didn't know any better, she decided to give him a hard time. "I was here first. You can shave while I sit here."

He shrugged and began pulling his jumper over his head.

"What are you doing?" she asked sharply. "I thought you were shaving!"

"I am, but I want to get out of this dirty jumper and not have to pull it over my clean face when I'm done." He sneered at her for a moment, lip curling hatefully. "I'd appreciate it if you'd mind your own business, or you can do as you told me to do...keep your mouth shut."

Saying nothing, she inched over slightly, as if being near a shirtless Malfoy would harm her. She watched him as he lathered his face with shaving foam for sensitive skin and began slowly ridding his face of his whiskers.

"It didn't look all that bad like that," she blurted without thinking. He continued on, ignoring her. Her eyes drifted down from his face to his pale shoulders. They seemed quite bony, and his chest and waist were fairly slender as well...too much so. With a sudden pang, she realized that he was probably so skinny because he hadn't been eating regular meals. How would she like it if she had to forgo meals, baths, and sleep God knows where? She slid down from the countertop and moved over to sit near the corner...exactly where he'd pointed out earlier. He deserved his privacy.

Minutes passed and the water was turned on. She heard a few splashes, and then, nearly inaudibly, she heard him speak.

"Granger?"

She turned to face him and felt her breath catch in her throat. He looked nearly like the old Malfoy she remembered. "Yes?"

"Would you be able to cut my hair?"

"Oh, Malfoy, I'm not very good with that," she said honestly. "I wouldn't want to mess it up." She smirked. "Then you'd have something other than my terrible Muggle upbringing to throw in my face." Pleased that he took her words playfully, as she'd intended, she continued, "I mean, I could try."

"I would... *appreciate* that."

Quickly going about the business of helping him wash and rinse his hair in the sink, she began to comb it out and realized that it was indeed a bit jagged in places, sometimes thinner, sometimes longer, but it was mostly in good shape. "It'd be a shame to cut too much," she mused aloud.

"Liking my stubble? Not wanting to cut off my locks? Next thing you know, you'll be asking me into your knickers, Granger," he said with a deep chuckle, not meeting her eyes in the mirror.

She felt her cheeks heat, and she chose not to answer his jibe, assuming he was just toying with her as she had toyed with him. Using the sharp pair of scissors from Ron's small pouch, she began snipping off the strands of hair that were longer than the others, hoping she wasn't making it worse as she did so. While cutting his hair, she wondered how long it had been since he'd had his hair cut. He used to keep it much shorter and brushed back against his scalp, locked into place by some stiffening gel or hex. *How long has it been since he's been in someone's knickers?* She paused as that thought occurred to her. *Where did that come from?* she wondered, surprised with herself. That wasn't any of her business...nor did she care.

Once it was mostly even, she ran her fingers through the length, enjoying the silken feel of it. "Looks like you might only need an inch or so trimmed off," she said. "I don't know if I'm comfortable doing that, but it looks all right like this. Maybe later?" He nodded, and she took that as her cue to step away, which she did so thankfully, as her hands were beginning to tremble for reasons unknown.

Her eyes lifted to look into the mirror and found his silvery-grey eyes gazing into hers with a fierce intensity. Swallowing thickly, unable to look away but wanting to break the trance, she asked, "How did you get that scar... just there... on your chin?"

The gaze softened with sadness as he whispered, "A Death Eater... Pansy, she was..."

"She's been missing for two years now," Hermione said when words failed him. "Her father reported her as having fled England, but no one's ever heard from her."

Draco shook his head and hoarsely said, "She came with *me* after I went to her for help. She left it all for me, and then... and then she was killed for it." He turned his face away so that she couldn't see his expression. "Snape was able to help me, but I couldn't help her. Neither of us could. It was too late."

"There are so many things I want to ask you," she stated quietly, feeling terribly sorry for him and how guilty he must feel about Pansy's death.

He snorted. "At least you're not sitting at the edge of your desk, waving your hand in the air like an idiot."

Closing her mouth, she turned away from him, annoyed that he'd reverted back to his childish ways. She'd thought that for a moment he'd appreciated her company and truly wanted to confide in her. She was simply mistaken.

Luckily, the door opened forcefully with Ron tumbling inside. "Hate this door," he groused, looking at them suspiciously from the floor before getting up. "All right?"

Hermione nodded. "Draco didn't know about the hex on the door and closed it while I was getting a dressing gown out."

"Why's he undressed?"

"I'm missing my *shirt* because I shaved and washed my hair. Didn't know how long it would be before one of you came round," Draco said with a shrug.

Appreciating that he'd mentioned nothing else, Hermione hurriedly left the room, wanting to distance herself from Draco and the compassion she felt for him and his situation. Pansy's impish face flitted through her mind, and she even felt sorry for the girl, though they'd never been friends. Nobody deserved to be murdered... or to have the one they loved murdered.

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**Southern's Notes:** Another chapter here, and I hoped my "few" followers have read and enjoyed it. There are only a few more. Thank you so much for reading. Cheers.

## Chapter 3

*Chapter 3 of 4*

Hermione and Draco have a late night chat, something more, and a misunderstanding.

**Disclaimer:** Not mine, but it's fun to use these characters, huh?

This was written for my friend, Soul\_Bound. She adores this ship, so I thought I'd have a bit of fun with it for her.

*Thanks go to CocoaChristy for the quick beta.*

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"What are you doing up?" Hermione asked when she saw Draco passing by the open doorway of the library.

"I couldn't sleep and thought maybe I could see what's in the kitchen," he replied, not stopping very long, obviously not wanting to converse with her.

She lifted her lit lantern and followed him into the kitchen, placing it on the table and extinguishing it. "Sit. I'll fix sandwiches. I wouldn't mind a snack either."

He sat but looked at her in annoyance. "I am capable of finding my own food. I don't need someone waiting on me."

"Aren't you used to it, someone or something at your beck and call?"

"Not any longer," he said, voice lowering to a whisper.

When she straightened to gaze at him, he looked away. "I didn't mean for it to sound like that. I'm sorry." She went back to making sandwiches, cutting them in wedges and putting them on a single plate. As she faced him again, she saw that he was watching her, face pinched in thought. "What's wrong?"

"I never did like you," he blurted.

Her face reddened, but she chose not to say anything, having a feeling he'd be saying more. It wasn't as if she'd ever liked him either. Placing the plate in the middle of the table, she sat down and Summoned a pitcher of pumpkin juice and two glasses.

"So many things that I thought were important aren't now. In fact, they seem downright ridiculous," he said softly as he began eating.

"I know what you mean," she said absently, reaching towards the plate.

"How could you?" he asked incredulously.

"Well, maybe I don't know what it's like for you, Malfoy, but things that I cared about, such as my goals, have been pushed aside...N.E.W.T.s for one. It just seems so trivial to worry about something like that when there's something so much more important taking place."

"You're right," he said with a sneer. "You don't know what it's like for me. It's so much more than bloody test scores that I'm talking about here."

She paused mid bite to glare at him before chewing vehemently.

"Doesn't pay to look at me like that," he said, curling his lip slightly before taking a large bite from his sandwich. Chewing with his mouth full, he added, "And why are you still up? Is it your turn to stand watch to make certain I don't slip off? Scared I won't lead you lot into my family home, eh?"

Slowly sipping her pumpkin juice and swallowing it completely, she tried to calm her anger. His words stung, and she truly wanted to lash out at him, but part of what he'd said was true. They didn't exactly want to alienate him when he was possibly the only person who could get them into Malfoy Manor and enable them to get the next Horcrux they needed, which was likely in Lucius' dungeons, hidden and waiting for its master.

Before she could speak, he commented again. "What's wrong? Kneazle got your tongue? Oh, hey, that's right. You do have a bloody cat. Where's it at?"

"He..." She looked away. "Crookshanks was killed...pure accident."

"You're not going to cry, are you, Granger?" He snorted. "The fat beast is probably better off. What did he do? Commit suicide to be rid of you? Run out in front of the

Knight Bus, eh? Take a poisonous potion?"

Hot tears stung her eyes. She knew he was just being a git, but he'd gone completely too far. "I won't even justify that with a response, Malfoy. Why don't you just leave off? I've done nothing but try to be your friend..."

"Heh... friend my arse!" he interrupted.

Suddenly, Hermione stood and knocked her half-full glass of juice over so that it splashed him. "You're despicable! I don't know what I ever saw in you!"

"What you ever saw in me? What's that supposed to mean?" he asked, wiping at the wet spots on his tatty dressing gown.

"Nothing." She turned and fled the room, not wanting to spend another second in his presence. He was a complete arsehole. She'd always hoped that some part of him was good, that he'd somehow change his hateful ways, and finally, he was in a position where he was certainly humbled, yet he dared to still act like he was superior. It just bothered her that he had such potential to do something good with his life, and even now, he was too bitter to even really try to start anew.

Just as she tossed her dressing gown aside, leaving her clad in her short, cotton nightgown, she heard her door open. Turning around in shock, she saw Draco standing there, gazing at her legs first and then slowly moving his eyes up her body towards her face.

"G-Granger, I just..."

She crossed her arms and arched one eyebrow. "Yes?"

He entered completely and closed the door behind him softly, slowly walking towards her. "Back there in the kitchen. I'm sorry. I don't know why I'm taking things out on you. I know you're just trying to help me. It's just so hard."

Hearing the slight tremor in his voice softened her resolve to appear angry and indignant about his entering her room uninvited. "You may have had a point. I don't truly know what it's like to be in your shoes, but I can try to imagine what it might be like."

"What did you mean when you said what you said?" His words lowered to a whisper. "It's not often people try to see anything other than what I show them. You're the second person to say that to me."

"Oh, Draco," she began, but her words were cut short by his lips pressing against her mouth. *What in the world?*

Hungrily, he devoured her lips, nibbling and licking, prying her closed lips open with his tongue, tangling it with hers. His hands roamed over her body, one moved around her and slid down to grip her arse tightly while the other found one of her breasts through the low collar of her nightgown, eliciting a small moan from her. His hands felt like warm, rough magic against her flesh, and his kiss was intoxicating.

But what the bloody hell was going on? How'd they get from having a row to snogging? And, dear Merlin, he moved her towards her bed and pushed her down, moving over her, his mouth leaving hers to become familiar with her neck and shoulder. She wriggled beneath him, trying to find purchase on the bed to slide away, but he pressed against her more firmly, holding her in place.

As she opened her mouth to tell him that things were moving too quickly, he whispered her name as she'd never heard it uttered before. "Hermione..." It was only a word, but the syllables were drawn out in a long, sighing breath.... It was as if she was his savior or everything he needed at the moment. How could she deny him this moment? He obviously needed release. He'd watched his girlfriend be murdered, had been on the run for many months, needed someone...her...to let him know that things could be all right again.

When she felt him frantically shifting to pull up his dressing gown, she tugged at her nightgown to lift it up, granting him a view of her knickers. When he realized that this would indeed be happening, he gazed at her for an instant, gray eyes smoldering, and then quickly pulled the fabric down and away from her body, easing back between her thighs smoothly. As he positioned himself against her, he lowered his head to rest against her heaving chest, his soft locks tickling her face.

"Fuck," he said while exhaling as he pushed into her tight, hot body.

"Unh..."

"Mmmm. Yeah." His thrusts were quick, nearly frantic, and he hadn't much rhythm, simply trying to plunge as deeply as he could into her while hurriedly pulling back to slam in again, creating that hot friction that lured one into orgasmic bliss.

Wide-eyed, she stared at the bouncing blond hair on his head as it shook in time with his thrusts. She didn't dare try to match his pace and simply allowed him to have his way, though she did enjoy the way he filled her. She'd had sex before, but it hadn't been something so intense, so rushed, and so needy. Part of her wished that she had been aroused and just as needy as he so that she might give over to abandon. As it was, things had just happened so quickly that she hadn't had time to think about what would happen after. She'd only meant to soothe him.

"You... on the... potion... for... contraception?" he asked breathlessly.

"Yesssss," she said, sounding more like a hiss at that moment, as he began to grind his pelvis bone against her when he pushed all the way in, stimulating her. "Don't stop," she moaned, but she needn't have wasted her breath. He hit climax just at that moment, his thrusts becoming slower and jerky.

Finally, he collapsed on top of her, simply breathing heavily. When he spoke, he said, "It was Pansy. She said that to me. Said that I turned out to be nothing like she'd dreamed of and that she had no idea what she'd seen in me. So..."

Hermione frowned. "So, you came here to me because my words reminded you of Pansy." She felt completely offended suddenly, even though the sex had only been sex to her...and not exactly good sex either.

"Didn't mean it to sound that way," he said, rolling off of her and lying on his back, staring up at her ceiling. When she said nothing, he quietly asked, "All this time, I thought you hated me. How long has it been then?"

"How long has what been?" she asked in confusion as she reached down to grab her knickers and pull them on.

"That you've fancied me."

"Sorry?"

"You said that you didn't know what you'd seen in me." He sat up and gazed at her, brow furrowed. "I thought, you know..."

She sat up as well. "So," she began angrily, "you thought you could come in here and exploit my feelings for you, though you don't return them!"

"No, I mean, yes. I don't..."

"How dare you!" she said, getting out of her bed. "For your information, I have not ever, do not, and will not ever fancy you! That's not what I meant at all! I just meant that you have the potential to be such a good person if you'd just let your prejudices go. Furthermore, I..."

"What?" he yelled, jumping out of bed. "If you don't fancy me, why did you let me fuck you? What sort of game are you playing? Is that part of your plan? 'Oh, let me fuck

poor pitiful Draco Malfoy, and he'll not go back on his word about helping us." He sneered hatefully.

"It wasn't like that! You just looked like you needed me, and..."

"A pity shag then!" he said sarcastically. "Hermione Granger, the girl who gives a fuck when she thinks you're down. Pun intended." He angrily stormed towards the door before spitting, "Don't do me any more favors in the future, Granger. It really wasn't anything I couldn't have felt with my hand and some lube."

When the door slammed shut behind him, Hermione slid to the ground and sobbed, full of regret, shame, confusion, and disappointment. What had she done?

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**Southern's Notes:** Misunderstandings suck!

## Chapter 4

*Chapter 4 of 4*

Before going into the manor, Draco decides to speak with Hermione.

**Disclaimer:** Not my characters. Not making any money.

This is the conclusion to the short tale that I started for my friend, Soul Bound, well over a year ago. Hahaha. Sorry it took so long to finish, mate!

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"Everyone ready?" Harry asked quietly.

"Yes," Hermione whispered in return.

Ron nodded and pushed Draco on the shoulder. "Are you?" he asked.

"I am," Draco replied, shifting his eyes from Potter to Granger.

She'd not looked at him since the night of their misunderstanding, and he'd gone over what had happened a million times in his mind. He was about to show them how to get what they needed from his family home, but something could still go wrong.

"I need a word with Granger," he said suddenly.

"What for?" Ron asked incredulously.

"None of your business, Weasel."

"Oi, what's crawled up your arse?" Ron asked, stepping forward.

"Granger?" Draco asked.

Finally, her soft brown eyes met his, and she nodded. "If it will get things going," she said, huffing slightly. "What is it?"

"In private, please."

"We'll be right over there, Harry," she said, beckoning for Draco to follow her. When they were alone, she rounded on him, though her eyes didn't quite meet his. "Well? What is it?"

"I just want you to be careful in there."

"You've got to be kidding!"

"Look, wait!" He reached out to grab her arm and pull her back when she started to walk away from him. He noticed that Potter and Weasley were watching them with interest. "I just wanted to say..."

"Say what?" she prompted when his voice trailed off.

"I just wanted to apologize about the other night. I think we both misunderstood what—"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"If something happens to you... or to me, I will have wanted this said. Could you just hear me out?"

"Fine." She crossed her arms over her chest in a defensive stance and waited for him to speak.

"I'm sorry. You were right."

"About?"

"I did need you."

"Great. Glad that's settled," she said snidely. "Now can we get on with it?"

"No." He reached out to touch her arm, caressing it lightly. "I'm not sorry it happened, and no matter what you might think, I wasn't... I wasn't imagining that you were Pansy or even thinking about her. Your words just touched me, and I thought that someone cared about me—really cared. It just felt so good."

"I do care about you, Malfoy. Why do you think we saved your arse?"

"Because you need my help. That's why."

"All right," she said in frustration. "That is part of the reason, but we know that you're a good person. Harry was there that night. Don't forget that. His opinion counts for me more than you realize. If he says you wouldn't have done it, then I believe him."

Her eyes lifted and met his. She flashed a small smile and maneuvered her hand to flip over and grasp his. "I believe in you."

"Maybe after this is over..."

"Maybe we can start over as well?" she asked hopefully.

"Yeah," he agreed. "I'd like that."

"So would I."

"Let's do this then," he said, tightening his grip.

Together they walked forward, hands still clasped, ignoring the incredulous expressions on the boys' faces. For the first time in a long time, Draco felt as though there was hope for his future, and he had Granger to thank for that.

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AN: I wanted to leave the story on a hopeful note, as requested by Soul Bound. I hope this works. Cheers.