

# I Guess I'll Have to Do This the Hard Way

*by Seekerlover*

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## one shot

*Chapter 1 of 1*

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"This is outrageous!" Hermione exclaimed, furious beyond words.

Harry and Ron nodded their agreement, not knowing what to say.

"I asked this woman why, since they were, in fact, advertising the position, and I'd seen the queue of applicants outside. I knew every one of them, and none of them had my NEWT grades, my skills with a wand, or any common sense. And do you know what she said? She said, 'Miss Granger, the Ministry is looking for new, young career workers with a strong sense of The Way Things Are Done In The Wizarding World. Unfortunately, despite your excellent credentials on paper, you lack the innate experience that we are seeking.' So I asked her about you, Harry. 'What about Harry Potter, then? How do you allege that he has any better experience in that regard than I do, and you've fast tracked him to Assistant Department Head within two months of hiring him?' And she smiled that fake smile of hers and told me, 'He's Harry Potter, my dear. He might not have grown up in the wizarding world, but it's all there. I mean, his father's family goes back generations. How could he have saved all of us from You Know Who on just your basic Hogwarts education otherwise?' I took a few deep breaths, then asked her point blank, 'Are you telling me that the Ministry of Magic practices an institutionalized form of discrimination based on applicants' genealogies?' And she just stared at me as if I'd asked if grass was green. The best answer she could manage was, 'You're an outsider, dear. I don't expect you to understand.'"

"Did you hex her?" Ron asked

"Nope," Hermione answered. "I thanked her for her time and for the 'enlightening conversation' and left. I walked around Muggle London for a couple of hours, trying to decide what I'm going to do about it, then I came back here. Pass the chicken, please."

"And?" Harry asked.

Hermione held up a 'wait a minute' finger as she bit into the chicken leg. She swallowed, took a healthy drink of her tea, and finally answered. "I'm going to have to do this the hard way. I wanted to be a real part of wizarding society, make a lasting contribution by serving as if I hadn't made a lasting contribution already - and the Ministry thumbed its nose at me."

Harry nodded emphatically. "No shit. How soon they forget!"

"Exactly. I sacrificed a good part of my study time during my schooling, stood by your side with all the answers you and Ron needed to get rid of Voldemort for them, offered

up my life, for Pete's sake, and they tell me I'm an outsider."

"Idiots, the lot of them. But we know, Hermione. We know we couldn't have done anything without your help, and we've been completely pissed off at the way you've been treated," Ron averred, waving a forkful of carrots in emphasis. "How are you going to do it?"

"I'm going to get on the inside the old-fashioned way, boys."

"No way! Are you really? But that's so... that's so... underhanded and backward and old-fashioned and... sneaky!" Ron exclaimed.

Hermione shrugged eloquently. "It's either that, leaving the wizarding world which I won't do, because I don't quit, or letting them win."

"Okay, let's hear it, from beginning to end," Ron said. "Let's make sure your plans are airtight. I know they hired me because I'm Harry's mate; my family name isn't strong enough to get me the position otherwise, and Merlin knows I'm not really qualified. It's bullshit, all of it. They cater to me, and to Neville, but they ignore you. Tonks pulled all of our bacon out of the fire how many times, and yet they promote that idiot Dawlish ahead of her? Enough. Let 'em have it, Hermione. We're with you the whole way."

"We are?" Harry asked. "I mean, yeah, we are, but what are you going to do, Hermione?"

The witch in question had just taken a huge bite of treacle tart and gestured to Ron to answer for her.

"The thing is, Harry, that there's a long tradition of wizards running things, Millicent Bagnold notwithstanding. And some witches are okay with that. But almost always, there's a strong witch at the wizard's shoulder. I mean, look at my parents. Dad's in charge, but Mum makes almost all of the decisions. Then you've got witches like Neville's grandmother. I don't know how things were with his grandfather, but she's no shrinking violet. In the past generation, since Bagnold, we haven't heard much from the witches, so you might not have seen it much. But traditionally, witches not willing to forego family completely exercised their power and influence through their husbands," Ron explained.

"Yeah?" Harry said doubtfully, obviously not getting the picture yet.

"Yeah. So, Hermione is planning to marry someone through whom she can make changes and influence policy. It'll have to be someone extremely politically influential, though, since usually a pureblood who marries a Muggleborn loses a lot of clout. It can't be me aside from the obvious reason that we were terrible together as a couple because my family isn't politically powerful enough, even though Percy's doing his best to change that. Git. Neville won't do either, he's too shy. So it'll have to be someone rich, powerful, influential, and charismatic enough to withstand the scandal of marrying down," he concluded.

Comprehension dawned on Harry's face. Hermione saw his expression go from bewildered to comprehending, from outraged and disgusted to understanding and admiring.

Harry shook his head in amazement. "I can't believe it, Hermione. You're going to marry Malfoy."

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Hermione and her best friends got completely pissed after dinner with the aid of the venerable Mr. Ogden. She had quill and parchment out on the desk in the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black's drawing room, making copious notes on strategies, tactics, and methods.

"I like it!" Harry declared.

"It's sneaky!" Ron agreed.

"And it just might work," Hermione decided.

"How're you gonna do it?" Ron asked.

"I think you're going to have to escort me to the next big function, Ron," she said. "Harry can't do it, everyone knows he's with Ginny. Enough people still think we're an item that it won't cause too much notice. I just have to spike his drink and work from there."

"You're sure you can brew something strong enough? I mean, this is Malfoy we're talking about, and that potion will have to subvert his natural nastiness," Harry said.

"I'm not going to brew anything, Harry. Love Potions are illegal. You know that!" Hermione said, feigning outrage.

"You're not?" Ron said, looking both drunk and puzzled.

"No, I'm not. Love Potions are *illegal*. However, your brothers have yet to get into any trouble on account of their Chocolate Cauldrons... so I'm going to ask them to provide me a sample of the active ingredient. Retail, of course wouldn't want to impose on their good nature," she told him primly.

Harry snickered. "I think that if you tell them what you want it for, they'll refuse any attempt at payment. I mean, from their perspective, this could be the greatest prank ever!"

Harry's snickers proved contagious, and all three fell on the floor and rolled around, laughing drunkenly.

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The next morning found the friends still on the drawing room floor, sound asleep until almost noon. Hermione awoke first and staggered to the kitchen, where she set about brewing a large cauldron of Hangover Potion. As soon as it had cooled to potable temperature, she quaffed a dose and a half and made some toast for a quick breakfast. Fifteen minutes later, she stepped out of the Floo at number 93 in Diagon Alley.

"Hermione!" the twins greeted her in unison.

"What a delightful surprise," Fred went on. "To what do we owe this great honor?"

"I'm shopping today, lads. But I don't think you have what I need in stock on the shelf. Would you consider a special order?"

"How special?" Fred asked shrewdly.

Hermione smiled wickedly. "Quite special, Mr. Weasley. I think it might be best to describe the nature of the request over food. Would you care to join me for lunch?"

"Verity!" George shouted. "We're going out for lunch. Don't let anyone blow the place up until we get back, all right?"

Hermione looked flattered. "Just like that? Don't even want to know where we're going?"

"Not for you, my dear," George said gallantly. "So, where are we going?"

"Back to number twelve, I think. Too many ears elsewhere," she decided. "Shall we bring home some takeaway?"

"Yeah, how about some more of that potsa?" Fred said eagerly.

Hermione pulled a mobile phone out of her jeans pocket. "All right, let's walk out through the Leaky Cauldron so I can call it in. Damn thing is all static-y everywhere in Diagon Alley."

Some twenty minutes later, four large mushroom, pepperoni and onion pizzas (and one small vegetarian pizza) in hand, Hermione unlocked the door to Number Twelve, no longer quite as heavily protected, now that Voldemort was dead. Ron and Harry greeted her with smacking kisses on her cheeks when she entered the kitchen.

"All that just for the potsas?" Fred laughed.

"Not at all, our brothers," Harry answered. "She left us Hangover Potion and breakfast. What a woman!"

"And now she's brought us lunch and reinforcements," Ron added. "Hermione, you're amazing. He's not good enough for you, you do know that, right?"

George had put out plates while Harry poured drinks for everyone. Hermione placed a pizza box at each place and made to open her own box. Fred and George both shot her an exasperated look.

"What?" she asked innocently.

Fred glowered at her. "Miss Granger. You invited us to lunch to discuss a special order so dodgy that you thought we needed to talk about it in a Fidelius protected location. Our dear brother has made allusion to a man not good enough for you, and referred to us as reinforcements. And you want to eat potsa before talking?"

"It's pizza, Fred. And I'm hungry. All I had for breakfast was Hangover Potion and a slice of toast!"

And she refused to say another word until she'd consumed her first slice.

"All right. I suppose you're wondering why I called you all here," she said.

The twins nodded, mouths too full to reply.

Hermione told the twins the story of the Ministry's discrimination toward her, and her plan to do something about it.

"So, who's the lucky wizard, Hermione?" George asked. "Not one of us, I trust?"

Ron swallowed an obscenely large bite of his pizza and said challengingly, "Come on, don't tell me you can't figure it out yourselves?"

The twins put their heads together and started talking fast and low. The three friends heard words like 'rich' and 'influence,' followed shortly by 'tosser,' 'wanker' and 'shite'.

"All right, Hermione," George said. "You're going to marry Malfoy and use him, his money and his connections to take over the Ministry. Where do we fit in?"

Harry and Ron broke into rapturous applause, and Hermione patted each of the twins on the back in congratulations.

"I need to slip him a Love Potion, and since it's illegal to brew any of the potions I know of, I thought immediately of your Chocolate Love Cauldrons. I'd like to obtain a vial and dosing instructions for the active ingredient in that particular Wheeze," Hermione said bluntly.

The twins feigned swooning.

"Do you mean to tell us that you trust us with something this important?" Fred demanded.

"Harry told me all about what happened to Ron when he ate the cauldron Romilda Vane had tried to pass off to Harry. Whatever you're using, it's potent stuff. And since you haven't been arrested yet, it's legal enough to escape notice. So?" she concluded hopefully.

"Um, Hermione, that potion doesn't last very long, you do know that, don't you?" George asked concernedly.

"That's fine, George. It's just Step One. So will you sell me some?"

"Absolutely not. Sell it to you? No way. You're going to get Malfoy under your thumb and presumably other various body parts - and sort out the Ministry? It'd be a crime to take your Galleons when your mission is so noble!" George said.

Fred nodded his agreement enthusiastically, while attempting to jam an entire slice of pizza into his mouth at once.

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The Beltane Ball was mere hours away. Hermione had been planning and preparing for weeks. All the potions brewing, scheming and split-second timing had been exhausting, but tonight she'd either win big or lose even bigger. The timing was perfect for her purposes, though. Beltane... the ritual welcoming of the sun and the lighting of the fires to ensure fertility of the land and the people. What better, or more magical, time for her plan? She wore snowy white robes for purity, trimmed with sparkling gold for fire, and had hawthorn blossoms woven into her intricate hairstyle for fertility. She had briefly hesitated about appearing as the May Queen, but decided that as long as she was with Harry and Ron, nobody would dare say anything to her face, and by morning... well, if all went according to plan, by morning she'd be in a position where nobody would dare mock her ever again. She secreted the vial of Fred and George's potion into a special slot in the bodice of her robes along with her other essential supplies and went downstairs to join Ron, Harry and Ginny.

"Ooh, Hermione, you look fantastic!" Ginny exclaimed.

Ron smiled too. "You look the perfect May Queen, Hermione. And to think that cow at the Ministry tried to tell you that you're an outsider and didn't understand our ways. I bet she'll be there tonight. I bet she chokes on her tongue!"

"Now there's an excellent idea, Ron," Ginny said with a vicious smile. "Can I? Huh?"

"Can you what?" Harry asked, offering Ginny his arm. "You look gorgeous, by the way. The white is perfect for Hermione's coloring, and that yellowy gold is just stunning on you, Ginny. Ron and I had better watch our backs tonight so no sorry wankers try to hex us!"

"Funny you should mention hexing, Harry," Ginny beamed. "I'm hoping to get a clean shot at that Ministry witch who was so horrible to Hermione."

"Great idea. I'll help clear the path," Harry said.

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The Beltane Ball was held outdoors in the soft grass among the standing stones at Avebury. The Muggles tended to hold their imitation celebrations at Stonehenge, so the Ministry set up anti-Muggle aversion charms around the less popular, but more ancient and magical site a few miles further northwest. The guests Apparated to the site where the ancient roadway entered the circle, then joined the festivities within. Hermione wasted no time in locating the refreshment table while Ginny scouted for Malfoy's distinctive platinum hair.

"Target at your seven o'clock, Hermione," Ginny whispered. "It's just a matter of time now."

Hermione felt nervous. She knew that what she was planning to do was unethical, unfair, and bordered on illegal. She squelched her concerns with a firm vision of the Ministry witch's condescending sneer and a thousand memories of Malfoy using everyone around him for his own ends.

The blond wizard entered her field of vision, and she turned her head slightly to look him over. He, too, had dressed for the occasion, in green robes the color of new leaves. Hermione's meticulous research had described in detail the role of the Green Man in the Beltane observances. He symbolized oneness between nature and humanity, irrepressible life. The King of the May was the bringer of fertility and energy. Yes, she thought, it was truly appropriate that he should have chosen to attend in that guise.

The Beltane fires gave his blond hair a cast of gold and made the green of his robes shimmer. Since her own escort did not object to her wandering attention, Hermione found it fairly easy to keep one eye on Malfoy as he mingled. A great many people sought to talk with Harry, and almost as many with Ron, but aside from her close friends, few bothered with Hermione. Ginny caught her eye while Harry was mobbed by a huge gaggle of young witches from the Ministry secretarial pool and grimaced. Hermione smiled sympathetically. Then Ginny's eyes opened wide, and she made her way quickly to Hermione's side.

"It's time," she said simply.

Hermione took a deep breath. "Come with me," she said suddenly. "Distract him."

So the two May Queens approached the refreshment table together, sauntering as if they owned the field. Walking together they did attract a bit more attention, the white and the gold, the brunette and the fiery red. Ginny approached from Malfoy's left and bumped his shoulder gently with hers while Hermione slipped up to the table on his right.

Malfoy turned to see who had bumped him, and saw Ginny. His familiar sneer fell instantly into place. "Oh, it's you, Weasley. I almost thought it was a real May Queen when I saw the robes, but I can hardly see you as the symbol of purity, growth and renewal. Well, maybe growth, having seen your mother. Hmmm, maybe even renewal, considering the size of your family. But honestly, Weasley, purity?"

"Ah, Malfoy. And here I thought you might have bought some manners after all this time!" Ginny said, unruffled. "Just goes to show that money can't buy everything."

He turned to Ginny more fully, and Hermione slipped the vial surreptitiously out of her bosom. She tipped the contents into Malfoy's drink, then discreetly Vanished the empty container. Retrieving two glasses of wine, she came around Malfoy to Ginny, handing one to her.

"Is this nasty little boy harassing you, Ginny? Come on, let's go. King of the May, indeed. Harry looks much better in green, don't you think?"

Ginny laughed, and they strode away just as Hermione heard Malfoy's sneering voice say to whoever was standing next to him, "Imagine, the likes of her thinking she's the May Queen. Weasley at least has the breeding for the role."

"I'd ask if you were sure about this, Hermione, but I think it's already too late. There's no way to get back to that glass now," Ginny whispered ruefully.

"Trust me," Hermione said quietly. "The Black family library had some VERY useful, very old texts, and many of them dealt with how to join two people forcibly, and make it harmonious afterward. It took a bit of doing to figure out how to use them, since they were all written from the man's point of view, but I'm nothing if not creative."

Ginny goggled. She whispered, more softly than before, "Blood?"

"Yup."

"I can't believe you are going to use blood! That's... that's... Dark!"

Hermione frowned severely. "Ginny, please consider whom you're accusing of Dark practices. Did I not say I'd had to adjust them? Trust me!"

Ginny looked doubtfully at her friend, then nodded slowly. "All right, of course I trust you. But I'll want to know how you used it without it being Dark!"

"And I'll tell you, but not here and now."

And then it happened.

Ginny stiffened and gestured subtly behind Hermione and to her right. Hermione nodded her understanding, and they continued their walk back toward their escorts. She jumped a bit anyway when she felt a hand touch her elbow. Ginny melted away into the deepening dusk.

"Hermione?"

She'd never heard Malfoy use her given name before. She turned her head and regarded him coolly.

"You look so beautiful tonight, Hermione. I couldn't help myself. I had to be near you."

She cocked one eyebrow at him, letting him work himself up.

"I know I've been horrible to you for as long as I've known you, Hermione. But tonight I am seeing you with new eyes. You're beautiful and smart and clever and kind, you're everything I've ever wanted in a woman. I came tonight as the King of the May, never dreaming that I'd find my own perfect May Queen. I know I don't deserve you, but Hermione... I love you."

She really had to do something incredibly nice for the twins, she thought. Whatever their potion was (and she'd deliberately not asked), it was fantastic!

She reached out and brushed his windblown hair away from his cheek. He leaned into her hand with an expression of bliss. She moved to pull her hand back, and he captured her wrist gently to kiss her palm.

"Come with me, Hermione, back to the others, so they can meet the woman I love," Draco asked earnestly.

"Draco, darling," she murmured throatily, "now that we've found each other, I don't want to share you. Isn't there someplace more... private... we could go instead?"

He struggled to think; all he could concentrate on was the goddess in front of him.

"I'd suggest my flat, but we want to be outdoors for the Beltane celebrations, don't we?" she suggested.

"Yes, near the fires," he agreed. Then his face brightened. "There's a fire burning at the Manor, my love. We could go there... we'd be alone."

"I'd love that," she told him, her eyes never leaving his. "Will you take me there?"

"Of course, my love. Here, come closer."

Hermione moved into the circle of Draco's arms. When he was staring adoringly at her instead of sneering, he was a surprisingly handsome man. And his arms were strong, his chest firm. Things were looking up all over.

As they turned to Disapparate, Hermione caught Ginny's eye. The redheaded witch raised her own glass to Hermione and toasted her success. The next moment, they

were gone from the stones, and Hermione found herself in a lush green meadow. A blazing bonfire glowed nearby. The stars were coming out in the perfectly clear sky. It was a glorious setting.

"Oh, Draco, it's so beautiful here!" she gasped, not having to fake her joy at the surroundings.

"My love, it all pales in comparison to you. Why did I never see you properly before? How can you ever forgive me for the horrible way I've treated you?" he said despairingly.

"Draco, that's in the past. What matters is now, doesn't it? Now we're together...." she soothed.

He sighed happily and pulled her closer, so that her head rested on his broad chest. One of his hands wove gently into the tiny curls at the base of her neck that had escaped from her flowery braids, and the other rubbed small circles along her back. She was just wondering how she'd slip the next potion to him when his stomach rumbled.

"Oh, Draco, you're hungry! You poor darling. What can I do?" she gushed, looking around in a simulated frantic way.

He chuckled warmly. "Don't worry yourself. Miffy!"

A tiny elf appeared instantly in front of them.

"Yes, Master?" the elf said.

"Miffy, the lady and I are hungry and thirsty. Please bring us a picnic and a bottle of the finest vintage in the cellar." He seldom said please to the elves, but he seemed to remember that she had some strange ideas about house elves.

"Yes, Master, right away," Miffy answered, vanishing.

Hermione took the opportunity to praise him lavishly for his courtesy to his servant. "Draco, I'm so proud of you. It takes a real wizard to be gracious to his subordinates." And she kissed him gently on the cheek.

Draco's heart swelled. His witch was proud of him! He didn't ever remember feeling satisfied and happy for having done something good before.

Miffy reappeared almost immediately. She snapped a soft quilt open on the ground, then quickly and efficiently spread the picnic out on one corner. She magicked the cork out of the wine bottle, but left it for him to pour.

"Thank you, Miffy," Draco said. "Now please do not allow anyone to disturb us."

Miffy nodded silently, then disappeared with a soft pop.

Draco moved to serve Hermione, but she had already reached out for a strawberry and was holding it up to his lips. "You're hungry, love. Let me feed you?"

He opened his mouth obediently, smiling.

Hermione worked her way through the variety of foods, and was surprised to find the act of feeding this wizard arousing. She supposed it had to do with the intimacy of the star- and firelit picnic, and the ambient magic of Beltane. She enjoyed a few bites of everything as well, but had less than her usual appetite from nervousness.

She discovered after a while that Draco had put his head in her lap, and that she was running her fingers through his silky hair with the hand that wasn't feeding them. It was... nice. Comfortable. She was surprised, but happy. She knew she'd be doing this for a long time, if things worked out as she intended them to do.

After they'd consumed about half of the picnic Hermione reached for the wine. Draco moved to get up, to pour it for them, but she gently urged him back into her lap.

"There will be plenty of times for you to pour for us, Draco. Let me, this time."

He sighed again and closed his eyes. She couldn't believe her luck. She withdrew the next vial of potion from her bodice and poured almost all of it into his wineglass. She hesitated, evaluating her own nerves, then dripped the last few drops into her own glass. Again, she vanished the vial... not wanting any evidence of her scheming.

She laughed softly then, realizing that he'd have to sit up to drink. She certainly didn't want him spilling it instead of drinking it.

"Here, love. I was too quick; you do need to sit up after all."

Draco sat up, and she snuggled close to him, wrapping her arm around him. He returned the gesture, then toasted her with his glass.

"To a bright and glorious future, beginning with the Beltane dawn tomorrow," he said.

She smiled and agreed, "To the future."

And they drank.

She'd chosen a slow-acting aphrodisiac. She knew the twins' Love Potion would last for six hours, and she wanted the Lust Potion to overlap with it. Timing was important in her plan, though there was a bit of flexibility. She just needed to be finished by dawn.

She set down her wineglass and resumed feeding him. Now that he was sitting, though, he was not passive. He allowed her to lift his food to his lips, but he began to do the same for her. Her indulgent smile encouraged him, and he offered her wine as well. Hermione drank and, knowing what was in her glass, recognized the first stirrings of the potion. The gentle warm glow seemed to radiate throughout her body, increasing her sensitivity to the heat of his skin....

She offered Draco his wineglass, and he took a deep draught of the ruby liquid. After several more bites of fruit, she offered him another drink. Even by the dim glow of the fire, she could see his eyes darken as his pupils began to dilate. More fruit, more wine. Soon... it was almost time.

Draco reached for her wineglass. As she drank from it, the last droplet spilled down the side. Dipping her head quickly, she caught it on her tongue. Just as she made contact with the wine on the side of the glass, she looked up and saw the heat in her intended's gaze. Again, she marveled at her luck. Had Ginny slipped her some Felix Felicis? She just couldn't believe how successful her efforts had been thus far.

Draco set the glass aside. He turned so that he was facing her and cupped her cheek gently. Hermione looked into his eyes, captivated by the smoldering way they seemed to be devouring her. As he moved closer, apparently to kiss her, she found herself leaning in toward him as well. For a moment, or maybe for hours, their eyes met. The look he was giving her made her feel almost guilty... between the Love Potion and the Lust Potion, he was looking at her as if she were his hope of heaven. She wasn't going to back down now, though... and it was doubtful that she could have even if she'd wanted to, short of Apparating away from him.

He kissed her.

It was the most perfect and sublime meeting of two bodies that she could imagine. And it was just a kiss a first kiss! His lips were soft and warm, his hands cradling and caressing her wherever he touched her. She opened eagerly to him, and his amazing kiss became even more breathtaking. There was an urgency, yes, but there seemed to be some understanding that there was no need to rush. She could feel the potion as it thrummed through her veins, fueling the arousal she'd begun feeling as he laid

his head in her lap so trustingly.

When they broke apart, catching their breath, their eyes never left each other. Hermione reached blindly for his wineglass to offer him the last of it. He accepted it, still holding her gaze. This time it was she who kissed him. She found herself wrapping her arms around him, touching and stroking his firm body, wanting to feel the warmth and the strength of him against every inch of her own skin.

Hermione felt like they were devouring each other, that the fire in her veins was going to consume her and him along with her. She unclasped, then slipped her hands inside of his robes to feel the smooth skin of his chest. Impatiently, she pushed his robes completely off his shoulders. He wore nothing underneath.

Her breath caught in her throat. He was beautiful. He was *gorgeous*. His smooth skin was perfection, flawless, exquisite. There was very little hair on his chest, and what there was felt soft and silky to her questing fingers. He was sculpted as if from ivory, strong and sinewy and sinfully handsome. Her mouth watered at the sight of him. Suddenly her hands flew over his skin, trying to touch him all over, all at once. She pushed him gently, but firmly, onto his back and began to move onto him. She growled her frustration when she realized she still had her robes on.

She rose to her knees to rid herself of her garments. The firelight framed her, forming a golden aura around her. Draco trembled beneath her, the potions obviously affecting him as well. Finally shrugging out of the white and gold robes, Hermione was able to lay down again and feel his skin against hers. She reached down to her waist and pushed off her knickers, not having wanted to stand up to rid herself of them. Besides, she didn't really want him to see what was in her knickers, lest he figure out what she was about to do.

At last every inch of their bodies were in skin-to-skin contact. The effects of the potion, the wine, the fire, and the glorious man beneath her combined to make Hermione's head spin. She kissed him desperately and felt his arousal throb against her hip. She pushed up slightly from his lips so that she could kiss his strong jaw. His hands stroked her sides as she kissed her way to his ear. She found herself whispering to him, "Draco, I want you. Your body... you're so strong and sexy and firm... your skin feels like heaven against mine. Oh, yes, I love how you're touching me...."

She trailed off as she took his earlobe between her teeth and suckled on it gently. He trembled hard for a moment, then groaned deeply in his chest. How, why had she never noticed before how incredibly masculine and sexy Draco Malfoy was? This couldn't be just the potion, she'd only given herself a few drops. She felt like she was burning up for him.

Recalling herself to what she needed to do, she slid partway off of him, still kissing whatever she could reach. His neck glowed in the firelight where she'd sucked a love bite. She moved further down until she could trail her tongue around his nipples, teasing him until he whimpered, then taking the flat, smooth skin into her mouth and suckling it to a firm point. She wet a finger in her mouth, then traced tiny circles around his other nipple. She teased and tormented him this way for a few minutes, then reached down between her own legs, and wet her fingers. She resumed tracing on his chest with her dampened fingertips. She drew the rune for *husband*, claiming him. Then she dipped her fingers back into herself and drew the rune for *respect* next to the first. She continued, kissing him all the while, adding the runes *fortrust*, *fidelity*, *joy*, *acceptance*, *companionship*, *honor*, *success*, *power*, *family* and *fertility*, until his entire chest and stomach were covered with runes. She wet her fingers one more time, then grasped his erect, glistening cock, stroking and caressing it, as she lifted herself up high enough to admire her handiwork. He gasped as she touched his arousal, and his eyes flew open.

"Draco, my love, I want you so much. Do you want me?"

"Oh, yes, Hermione. I want you... I want to be inside you and love you," he said huskily.

She kissed him again, fervently.

"Do you want all these things with me?" she asked next.

"Yes, I want everything with you," he answered, not really understanding the question, and not caring that he didn't understand. All he knew was that he was burning for this witch.

She looked deeply into his molten eyes. "Draco, if I give myself to you now, will you accept me? Will you make me yours?"

He could hardly believe that this incredible witch was asking him these wonderful things... of course he would accept her. He wanted nothing more in the entire world than to make her his.

"Yes, Hermione. Always. Forever. I want you... I need you... please, let me make love to you," he begged.

Hermione's eyes filled with unexpected tears as she bent to kiss him again. One last time, she wet her fingers with her own fluids, and this time she drew *wife* on her own stomach, just beneath her heart, just beneath her breasts, as close as she could draw it beneath their swells. She rolled gently until she was under him, still kissing him passionately. She reached for his cock, guiding him into her slick, waiting folds. She rubbed him in her wetness until he was as slick as she.

"Now, Draco, please. Take me, my love. Make me yours," she whispered.

He groaned as he began to slip inside of her. He wanted her so desperately, yet had never felt so calm, so controlled. He was about to thrust wildly into her incredible tightness when he dimly realized that there was a barrier. He forced his eyes to focus through the haze of his desire, looking down on her in wonderment.

"Hermione, am I your first?" he asked, marveling, already knowing that he was.

"Yes, Draco, my first lover... my only lover. I saved myself, for the marriage bed. Please, I want you so much, Draco...."

He thrust slowly into his witch, penetrating her gently. She was so wet and so aroused that she barely felt a pinch. Again, she reveled in her luck. He was inside her at last, and it hadn't even hurt! But the thought escaped her quickly as her wizard began to move inside of her. The rest of the world faded quickly until all that existed was the man on top of her, his skin, his mouth, his strong back under her hands, the silken whisper of his hair as he kissed her. He was amazing, kissing and caressing and stroking and teasing... and all the while thrusting into her, pulling out of her, eliciting the most phenomenal sensations from her entire body. It was more than just her body, it seemed. She felt like he was making love to her soul, and it felt so incredibly beautiful that she wanted to laugh, or sing, or cry. But instead she gasped and whimpered and encouraged him, "Yes, Draco, oh yes. More, Draco, harder, please!" until she felt her hips rise up to meet him and almost freeze at the top of her thrust. Then the entire universe exploded in colors, white and gold and green and scarlet. She screamed his name at the top of her voice as she convulsed beneath him, the force of her orgasm squeezing his cock so strongly and rhythmically that he joined her in ecstasy. He emptied himself into her with such force that he felt his entire chest burn. "Hermione!" he shouted as he pumped his seed into her welcoming body again and again and again, longer than he had ever come in his entire life. "Mine, mine, mine," he chanted as he came, not knowing why he felt so compelled to claim this witch so vehemently. She sobbed, "Yes! Yours!" in reply, clinging to him as if she'd drown if she let go.

He collapsed on top of her, boneless. She continued to clutch him to her, crying softly, whispering, "Yes, yours. And you're mine, Draco, forever."

He could hear her as she gasped out these declarations, and found himself weeping as well, as the power of the moment overcame him. And then they fell asleep, with him still buried deep inside of her.

Hours later, just as the sky began to brighten, he awoke slowly. Draco marveled that he was not cold; it was only the first of May, and they had slept for hours on the quilt completely naked. He was still inside of her and was fully hard. Hermione woke to the exquisite sensation of him making love to her again, barely rocking his hips at first, but as she began to rock back against him, his thrusts gained in power and speed. They kissed deeply, their tongues moving in the same ancient dance as the rest of their bodies. It was a slow burn this time, not the desperate passion of their first coupling. The sky grew slowly brighter as they rejoiced in each other, soft words of passion and claiming still falling quietly from their lips. At length, Draco began to move faster, deeper, building them up to climax. Hermione wrapped her legs around his waist and

gripped his shoulders tightly, and her tongue thrust into his mouth in perfect synchronization with his cock driving into her welcoming body. Finally, just as the sun rose over the horizon, she came with a triumphant shout, "Draco!" and again he filled her with his seed, reveling in the welcoming warmth of the incredible witch beneath him.

He rolled off of her, exhausted and sated. She could barely move either. But she wasn't finished quite yet. She fumbled for her wand, finding it near the edge of the quilt. She conjured two water goblets, then whispered, "Aguamenti." A fountain of sweet water poured from her wand tip into the goblets. Then, quickly, while his eyes were still closed, she retrieved the final two vials from the bodice of her robes. One was empty, the other nearly overflowing. She took the empty vial and, breathing deeply, scooped their mixed fluids into it. Her blood, his semen... the essences of life and fertility, female and male. It had taken her weeks of potions to force her cycle so that she would be bleeding on Beltane. She conjured a third, larger vial and mixed the potion with their fluids. She stirred it with her wand tip seven times, clockwise. Then she reached for his water goblet and decanted seven drops of the potion into it.

She turned back to her wizard, pressed a kiss gently on his mouth, and said, "Here, my love. You must be thirsty."

Draco's eyes opened slowly. He rolled onto one elbow, took the goblet, and drank down the entire contents. The bloody runes on his chest glowed brightly, then faded into his skin.

There. She had done it. He was hers! He was magically bound to her now, more truly than any wedding ceremony could have done. She could now realize her ambitions without interference from empty-headed Ministry drones. She was finally in a position of power, and she would use it judiciously, for the betterment of wizarding society. Never again would anyone dare look down on her as being unworthy. She would treat him lovingly, having seen in his eyes that he was now both capable of and bound to show her tenderness and love. She would bear his children joyfully (where had that thought come from?.) and together they would shape the future for witches and wizards everywhere.

Draco's eyes fluttered shut again. Hermione took the goblet and set it aside. Then she saw her own goblet, and the completed potion next to it. Hardly realizing that her hand was moving, she found herself grasping the potion, then decanting another seven drops into her own water. She looked at Draco, looked up at the bright sunny sky of the Beltane dawn, lifted her goblet and drank.

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It had ever been thus. Mortals seldom paid enough heed to the power of the magic of Beltane in these later days. But the magic was all about renewal and fertility. The witch had been brazen enough to set about her seduction at this hallowed time. The witch thought that it was luck that had blessed her efforts. The ancient magic did not care about schemes and plots and the questionable nature of potions. The ancient magic existed to bring about matings and joinings and new life.

And the Minister and his wife, and their eleven children, lived happily ever after.

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