

# Heart and Soul

by sshg316

Sequel to my SSHG story, Enraptured. A prophecy says Luna and Draco will one day fall in love. That was six years ago, and Luna is tired of waiting around. It's time to take matters into her own hands. Unfortunately, Draco has a plan of his own. First Place in Draconian Measures at the 2007 OWL Awards; Runner Up for Best Fluff in Round Three of the Quill to Parchment Awards.

## That Magic Night ... erm ... Morning

Chapter 1 of 10

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Chapter One

That Magic Night ... erm ... Morning

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Protect more of your memories for less

*"The Malfoy heir will be tempted by the Darkness, but will turn to the Light. The Moon of Ravenclaw will fall in love with the Dragon of the Malfoys, and he with her. She will become his mate, his heart, his soul ... and he, hers."*

"Well, now. That was extraordinarily direct for a prophecy, was it not, Fawkes?"

~ Albus Dumbledore, upon hearing the prophecy.

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The early morning light filtered through the small window of the drawing room at number twelve, Grimmauld Place, its golden rays casting an ethereal glow around the pyjama-clad girl sitting at the black piano. Her slender fingers raced across the ivory keys, the melodic strains filling the small space.

Luna smiled contentedly and closed her eyes to better experience the music flowing from beneath her hands. She adored the piano. When they had all first moved into Grimmauld Place after the war, Neville had asked Harry if he could bring the baby grand from his grandmother's house as he found it soothing to play. Luna had been delighted when Neville had given her permission to play it whenever she wanted. Sighing wistfully, she wished Neville wasn't taking it with him when he moved to his new flat in Clapham next week. She would miss the piano desperately...and Neville, too, of course.

Her one consolation to the loss of Neville and his piano was that now the only residents at Grimmauld Place would be herself ... and Draco Malfoy. She sighed again, her eyes closing in bliss as she considered the possibilities. Luna had known since she had heard the prophecy in her mother's old Pensieve the summer after her fifth year that one day she would fall in love with and marry the so-called "prince of Slytherin." She had watched him carefully since learning that bit of information, and so she alone had been unsurprised when Draco had shown up at Order headquarters grasping tightly to Fawkes' tail feathers. Whilst she had trusted in the prophecy, she had been inordinately relieved to know that she would not one day be married to a Death Eater.

That had been over five years ago. She wondered just how long Fate was going to make her wait for him. Once she had learned Draco was her soul mate, Luna had turned a blind eye to boys and dating...not that anyone had ever noticed her in that way. She had never had a boyfriend, never been kissed, never even held a boy's hand. Of course, she hadn't realised it would take quite so long for him to notice her as more than Loony Luna. If she had, she might have been tempted to experiment a bit whilst she waited. Merlin knew Draco had. The man went through women like a Niffler through a piggy bank.

After the war, Luna had watched Draco parade a stream of women through his bedroom, none lasting more than a night. She had reminded herself that he didn't know yet that he belonged to her, and so she did not hold his excursions against him, even though she was bloody sick of seeing them firsthand. When would it be her turn?

Oh, they were friends, she supposed. Since Draco had asked her to dance at Hermione's wedding reception, they had taken to spending quite a bit of time together but never as anything more than friends. Luna guessed that would be a good foundation for their marriage ... some day. Not that she was complaining. Oh, no. She loved spending time with him, especially when he would relax, his dry wit and ever-present charm entrancing her each time. Most importantly, he seemed to actually see her now. She had caught him staring at her pensively several times; each time he would quickly look away but not before she had caught an unfamiliar emotion on his face. Considering she had been watching him for so many years, the fact that she was unable to identify that particular emotion both concerned and elated her. Whatever it was, it made her want to rush across the room, throw herself into his arms, and snog him into next week. Perhaps next time she would ... but probably not. That wouldn't be very smart of her, pushing him into something for which he was not ready. So, she would wait. She'd been waiting for so long now, it was second nature. In the meantime, she would take comfort in the knowledge that one day he would be hers and hers alone.

Her fingers flying across the keys of the piano, Luna was completely absorbed in her task and her thoughts when she heard the sound of someone clearing his throat from the doorway behind her. Startled, she almost tumbled backwards off the bench before catching herself. Twisting her body around and bending one leg to rest her knee on top of the bench, she turned to face the doorway.

Her eyes widened at the sight before her. There was Draco, the object of all of her dreams, standing in front of her...she swallowed hard...half-naked. Not one to miss an opportunity, she immediately dropped her gaze to his feet which were peeking out at her from under the hem of his green pyjama bottoms. She studied his feet for a brief moment. They were different from hers, more muscular and toned with long toes. Like the rest of him, they were perfect. Her eyes roamed up his cotton-covered legs, studiously avoiding a certain area...she was ogling, not leering, after all. The pants hung loosely around his hips, and she followed the trail of silvery blond hair up his tight stomach to his chest. She'd never seen a man's bare chest before, and it entranced her. She wanted to run her fingers across the smooth skin, to feel the lean muscle ripple under her fingertips. She wanted to touch her mouth to his chest and hear him moan .... She took a shuddering breath. It was best to stop that train of thought for now. She could continue it later in the privacy of her room. Her mouth dry, Luna licked her lips and then forced herself to look him in the eyes.

Draco's cheeks were tinged as pink as she imagined her own to be, and she found herself staring blatantly at his eyes. Usually, they were an icy silver, cold and hard, or when he was in a good mood, they would warm to a foggy grey. Right now, however, they were the colour of a storm, dark and tumultuous ... passionate. Entranced by the unguarded moment, she could not look away. It seemed an eternity before Draco glanced away, clearing his throat once again before running a hand through his sleep-rumpled hair. Luna blinked but continued to stare at him. She knew she was being impolite, but he was just too perfect, and Merlin knew when she would see him like this again.

"What's all the racket?" Draco asked, his smooth voice roughened by sleep.

Luna's brow furrowed in confusion. "Racket? Oh! You mean the music." She turned to face the piano again, a small smile upon her face. She now had plenty of material for her nightly fantasies. "I love to play the piano. It's ever so much fun." Once again, she placed her fingers on the keys and began to play.

"Is that what you call that? Playing?" he asked. He sounded amused. That was good, right?

"Technically, I believe I am playing an *arpeggio*," she responded smartly, her fingers running from the bottom key to the top and back again ... over and over and over. "It's my favourite thing to play."

An exasperated...but still amused, she hoped...huff came from the man behind her. She bit her lip as she heard him moving closer until he was standing beside the piano. He lazily leant against the instrument, and her breath caught at the erotic picture he made, his pale form a stark contrast to the ebony wood.

"*That* is certainly not an *arpeggio*. Budge up," he ordered imperiously, sliding onto the bench next to her.

Luna stared at him as she slid to her left to allow him room to sit. They had not been this close to each other since Hermione's wedding. His masculine scent was intoxicating, and she inhaled deeply in an effort to imprint it into her olfactory memory. Draco's arm was pressed against hers, sending fire racing across her skin straight to her .... Merlin, his proximity was wreaking havoc in her brain.

"What you are *playing*," he began snidely, "is a *glissando*. *This* is an *arpeggio*." His long fingers stretched across the keys and began to play a chord, one note at a time. He repeated the *arpeggio* a few times, before stopping and folding his arms across his chest. Turning his head to face her, he looked down his nose at her. "You see the difference?"

Luna nodded earnestly. "Oh yes, certainly. The difference is quite clear. Thank you for showing me. Do you play the piano?" She had heard music coming from the drawing room late at night on occasion and had always assumed it was Neville, but now she wondered if she had been wrong.

The storm in Draco's eyes flashed ice for a moment before warming again to a foggy grey. Saddened by the loss of the storm, she sighed, the smile falling from her features as she realised she had inadvertently caused him to remember his painful childhood.

"Of course, I play. What sort of aristocratic pure-blood would I be if I had not been forced to endure years of piano lessons?" He stuck his nose into the air pretentiously before sliding a glance at her and winking.

Luna's smile returned. "Oh, won't you play something for me, Draco? Please?"

He heaved a long-suffering sigh and with narrowed eyes, gave her a calculating look. "No," he said, raising a hand to forestall her protests. "However, I will teach *you* how to play something." He stood, moving to stand behind her. "Move your arse to the edge of the bench, pet."

Luna was delighted at his offer to teach her a song, but she was beyond thrilled at the term of endearment, even though she knew he used it often with women. Still, he had never used it with *her* before. How lovely! She did as she was told and scooted to the front edge of the bench. The next thing she knew, he was sitting behind her, her hips cradled between his legs and his chest flush against her back. His arms came around her sides to the keyboard. It was official; she had just died and gone to heaven.

"Watch me," Draco said, placing his fingers on the keys and beginning to play. "This piece is called *Heart and Soul*, and it is quite easy to learn. You see, I'm simply repeating the same four chords." He repeated the series of chords several times before stopping and positioning Luna's fingers on the keys. Rather than moving his hands away, his fingers paused on hers, lightly caressing them for a moment. Luna's eyes closed in rapture before he cleared his throat and removed his fingers from hers. "Now, you try," he instructed.

Luna began to play the chords haltingly at first, each time improving until she was playing with ease. Staring at her hands as she played, she smiled so widely her cheeks hurt. "Oh! I'm doing it, Draco! I'm playing the piano!"

"Obviously," he stated dryly. "I am instructing you, am I not? What else did you expect? Now, you need to learn the melody line. Watch."

Within a quarter of an hour, Luna was able to play the melody as well, and Draco began to improvise on the piano, embellishing his part and making up his own lyrics. "Cod and sole," he sang animatedly, his rich baritone filling the room. "I like to eat fried fish. Cod and sole, it is my favourite dish. Truly, I'd like to eat some now!"

Luna laughed until her eyes watered and her stomach hurt, Draco's own deep chuckle resonating in her ear. Relaxing against his chest, she removed her hands from the keyboard and watched contentedly as Draco continued to play, his chin now resting on her shoulder. She watched as his fingers stretched across the keys, the music shifting from the light-hearted tune he had taught her to something more classical, more soulful, more melancholy.

"What is that piece called?" she whispered, not wishing to distract him.

Rather than answer her, Draco continued to play, his arms brushing against hers as he seemed to lose himself in the music. It suited him, this musical lamentation. Underneath the pretentious façade, even under the sly wit and dry humour, there remained a sad, lonely man who was pouring all of it into this one piece of music. It was heart-wrenching ... and it made her love him all the more.

When the piece ended, Draco's fingers remained on the keys until the final strains of music faded. He slid his hands from the keyboard only to place them on her bare upper arms, his thumbs absentmindedly stroking her sensitised flesh. Luna was instantly reminded of her exact location...pressed up against his bare chest and wedged between his thighs. She closed her eyes and memorised the moment, the feel of his hands on her skin and his body against hers, his warm breath against her cheek.

"Moonlight Sonata," he murmured suddenly.

"Hmm?" What was he talking about?

"The piece I just played. Moonlight Sonata. It's by a Muggle composer...Beethoven."

She smiled softly. A Muggle composer. Draco Malfoy had certainly come a long way since his days at Hogwarts.

"It was lovely," she said. "Thank you for this morning. I had a very nice time." Turning her head slightly, she impulsively pressed a kiss to his cheek. She felt him stiffen and hesitantly raised her eyes to his.

The storm was back, his silver eyes darkening as he gazed into her own grey ones. Her mind briefly registered that the unidentifiable emotion had returned to his face just before he raised a hand to her cheek.

"Luna."

His voice sounded different to her ears, deeper and more sensual than she had ever heard it before. She felt his hand move, his fingers fanning out against her neck, his thumb tracing her lower jaw. Her breath quickened as he slid his thumb to caress her full lower lip.

"Luna?" he whispered.

"Yes?" Was that husky sound her voice?

"Have you ever been kissed?"

Slowly, she shook her head no and watched as he swallowed reflexively.

"Would you like to be?"

"Oh, yes. Please," she responded breathily as her eyes flittered shut and his mouth lowered to hers.

It was much different than she had ever imagined. His lips were unbelievably soft and warm and ... oh, just ever so lovely. Unsure of what she was supposed to do, she raised a trembling hand and threaded her fingers into the silken strands of his hair. Inexpertly, she attempted to mimic the movement of his lips against hers.

"Open for me, pet," he murmured against her mouth before touching his tongue to her lower lip.

Luna's eyes opened briefly in surprise before she realised what he meant and enthusiastically opened her mouth to allow him to deepen the kiss.

It was a good thing he had wrapped one arm around her back; without that support, she might have melted right off the bench. Her senses were on overload. She had dreamt of this for so long, and she desperately wanted to remember each and every moment of it...the feel of his lips as they moved against her own, the way his tongue brushed against hers, the pure male scent of his skin permeating the very air she breathed. It was glorious. Unable to contain it any longer, Luna moaned in pleasure.

Suddenly, Draco wrenched his mouth from hers, his eyes wide in shock. He leant away from her and ran a shaking hand through his hair.

"Bloody hell, Luna. I..."

She covered his mouth with her hand. "If you are about to apologise to me, I really wish you wouldn't," she said, her tone somehow managing to be simultaneously serious and dreamy.

"I ... Merlin's beard. I don't know what to say."

His shell-shocked expression was almost comical, and Luna found herself stifling a most inappropriate giggle. "It's all right, Draco. I quite enjoyed your kisses. You're very good at kissing, you know."

If anything, he appeared even more out of sorts after that statement.

"I'm hungry," she said, smothering yet another giggle as he merely blinked at her. "I'm off to the kitchen for breakfast. See you later." With a quick peck to his cheek, Luna stood and all but waltzed from the room.

As she made her way to the basement kitchen, she grinned broadly. At last, things were looking up. Perhaps Fate was finally making its move. Regardless, after that kiss

there was absolutely no way she was waiting any longer.

Opening the kitchen door, she nodded to herself. The prophecy hadn't said *how* they would come together, only that they would. Maybe it was time to take a more Slytherin approach. Yes, a little scheming might not be remiss...not if she wanted Draco all to herself any time soon. And after all, she was her mother's daughter.

It was time to get her wizard.

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*A/N: My unending gratitude to Subversa, not only for beta reading but for being my friend, and to LettyBird for being the best Brit picker ever, as well as the world's best cheerleader.*

*Unlike Enraptured, this story is not complete at this time. Because of the odd pairing, I will only continue if readers are interested in seeing more. If I do continue ...*

*Up next ... what's up with Draco?*

## Your Lips Were Thrilling

*Chapter 2 of 10*

Sequel to my SSHG story, Enraptured. A prophecy says Luna and Draco will one day fall in love. That was six years ago, and Luna is tired of waiting around. It's time to take matters into her own hands. Unfortunately, Draco has a plan of his own. First Place in Draconian Measures at the 2007 OWL Awards; Runner Up for Best Fluff in Round Three of the Quill to Parchment Awards.

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*A/N: Just a reminder that this story is not compliant with Deathly Hallows. It is, however, compliant with my SSHG fic, Enraptured. \*winks\**

### Chapter Two

#### Your Lips Were Thrilling

A smirk played upon his lips as Draco watched the witch he had just thoroughly kissed exit the room with a bit of an extra swing in her step and swish in her hips. Tilting his head to one side, he allowed his eyes to linger a moment on the delicious roundness of her arse before he turned on the bench to face the piano once again. He grinned smugly. All the weeks of witty banter and teasing innuendo had paid off.

His plan was working perfectly.

He closed the fallboard on the piano and leant his elbows against it, his hands cradling his chin. It was an ingenious plan, one that had come to him unexpectedly as he had watched his blonde-haired housemate dancing alone at the Snapes' wedding reception.

*Weddings*, he thought with a mental shudder. Gods, how he hated them. It used to be that all the talk of love and commitment would give him the creeps. His parents had often said they "loved" each other. Draco was barely able to restrain himself from rolling his eyes. If lying, cheating, and hexing the shite out of one another was love, he had wanted no part of it.

In recent years, however, he had seen other examples of marriage that made him wonder if perhaps there was more to this love business than he had previously thought...marriages like those of Molly and Arthur, Bill and his late wife, Fleur, Remus and Tonks ... hell, even Potter and Ginevra. Their examples had started him thinking. Watching Severus Snape, bastard extraordinaire, twirl his new wife around a dance floor, obviously deliriously happy...to the trained Slytherin eye, anyway...had given him even further pause. If he could find a love like *that*, he would grab onto it and never let go.

He wouldn't hold his breath, though. That kind of love and devotion was something special and not easily found. The problem was that after seeing what a truly loving marriage was like, Draco did not want to settle for anything less. That is why he now hated weddings: they reminded him that if he wanted to get married, he might have to do just that...settle.

But settle he would if it meant that he could have a family of his own. Draco was tired of playing the field, tired of meaningless shags with random women who didn't mean anything more than just that...a meaningless shag. He was ready for a wife, kids ... the whole Quidditch pitch. Unfortunately for Draco, there was one thing hindering his wife-finding abilities.

His reputation.

And he didn't mean the "he might have been a big bad Death Eater" reputation. His role in the Order and the defeat of Voldemort had conveniently rendered that particular rumour an exaggeration. It was his reputation as a womaniser that was causing him grief.

He slid off the bench and began to pace the length of the room in agitation, his hands clasped behind his back and his brow furrowed in thought. Since the end of the war and the revelation of his part in the downfall of Voldemort, women had flocked to him, drawn by his aristocratic looks, charming personality (when he so desired, anyway), and the rumours of both his sexual prowess and the vast Malfoy fortune. The reality of those particular rumours was somewhat different.

In regard to the so-called 'vast' Malfoy fortune, it was true to some extent. There was a fortune. Unfortunately, Draco had no part of it. His father, after all, was very much alive...although currently residing in Azkaban...and had refused to sign over the fortune to "that blood-traitor," saying Draco would not see a single Knut until it was absolutely necessary...meaning until Lucius Malfoy had drawn his last breath. Draco knew his father would never cut him out of the will entirely, as his pure-blood sensibilities would not allow the Ministry to gain from "family issues," but he would make him wait for it. Even in Azkaban, his father could easily live another fifty years, and Lucius hoped Draco would suffer the wait every moment. Draco stopped in front of the window, his satisfied smile reflected in the glass. It was too bad for Lucius that Draco didn't really care about the money...of course, it helped that upon the deaths of his mother and aunt, he had inherited what was left of their share of the Black fortune. It wasn't much, but it was enough to have paid for University as well as his share of living expenses at Grimmauld Place. Some wise investments had proven fruitful as well, and whilst he couldn't afford the sort of lavish lifestyle his family had once enjoyed, he was financially comfortable.

As for the other prevailing rumour, it also contained a grain of truth. He had certainly entertained his fair share of witches, especially right after the war had ended. Although

he liked to think of himself as a more-than-adequate shag, he reckoned he was no more experienced than most men in their mid-twenties. Contrary to popular belief, he did not shag everything in a skirt; he was actually quite selective about the women he ... entertained. He did have some standards, after all. The women he bedded had to be smart...he couldn't stand dimwits. A sense of humour was also a must, the wittier the better. She had to have a positive outlook on life...he could be moody enough all by himself; he certainly did not want to deal with someone else's angst, even if only for a few hours. Obviously, the outer package was nice, but like most men of his age, he had learnt that physical beauty alone was not enough to keep him interested. He glanced out the door Luna had exited a few moments earlier. He needed substance.

He heaved a sigh. Beggars couldn't be choosers, however, and when it came to finding a wife, Draco was well on his way to becoming a beggar. Convincing a woman he was now reformed and looking for someone to marry and start a family with had proven to be more difficult than he had anticipated. After all, he had a reputation as the "love 'em and leave 'em" sort of bloke. Now, the women he tended to attract were the type who were only interested in a one-night stand. The question had been, how did one go about informing the witches of the wizarding world that he was marriage material?

That was where The Plan came in. It had occurred to him that what he needed was to show wizarding society that he was serious about looking for a wife, and the way to do that would be to have a serious relationship...or at least one that looked serious. The only problem had been finding the right witch to be a part of this plan.

Enter Luna Lovegood.

Oh, yes. Draco was well aware of Miss Luna Lovegood's little crush. He had always found it rather endearing, actually. She had never fawned or thrown herself at him like so many other witches had done. On the contrary, she had been the soul of discretion in her infatuation; but Draco had known that she was interested in him in *that way* since shortly after the war. He had seen the slight blush that would grace her cheeks when he spoke to her, the secretive smiles when he entered a room, the way her eyes followed him. To be honest, he had never given it, or her, much thought until two months ago at Severus and Hermione's wedding. It was then that he had seen her across the ballroom, and he had instantly known that she was the answer to all of his problems. And that was when he formed The Plan. He would have just what he wanted, and Luna Lovegood was going to help him...albeit unwittingly.

She was going to help him find a wife.

Returning to the piano, Draco sat, lifted the fallboard, and began to play a simple melody as he continued to mull over the situation. It was a straightforward plan, really. He would use his knowledge of Luna's fascination with him, lure her in, and ask her out. He would be sure that they had a grand time and that they appeared in public often. He would see her exclusively for a few months, thereby showing potential mates that he was capable of a monogamous, long-term relationship. And when he quietly broke it off with Luna...appearing suitably depressed over losing the love of his life (he couldn't help but snigger)...witches would be beating down his door to offer their condolences.

He stopped playing, his hands lingering on the ivory keys. Luna was his friend, of a sort, and the thought of hurting her in any way was troublesome, which was why Draco had decided that there would be absolutely no physical intimacies beyond a bit of snogging. He was aware of her inexperience with men; he didn't want her to regret her time with him, and sleeping with her and then dumping her would certainly give her cause for regret. As it was, his plan would benefit her as much as it would himself. Luna was a bit of an odd bird, and she certainly did not have a queue of interested suitors. As part of The Plan, she would be seen on the arm of a highly desirable wizard, and after he ended things and they parted amicably, some nice bloke would have taken notice of her and be standing in the wings waiting for his turn. He and Luna would remain casual friends, and everything would be tied up all nice and neat. After all, it wasn't as if Luna was in love with him; she just had a little crush.

It was a great plan...almost foolproof.

He dropped his hands into his lap and frowned as he considered the one potential flaw: he was desperately attracted to the loony witch. Draco had no explanation for it; Luna wasn't the usual type of woman he was attracted to...he preferred a more sophisticated woman...yet he found her strangely appealing. She could be wickedly clever, with a sharp wit that often surprised even her closest friends. She was generous and kind and modest to a fault. At the same time, she was, even by her own estimation, a bit peculiar. His lips twitched in amusement. That was putting it lightly. He never knew if a conversation with her would be about some new Charm she was researching or the latest wild-goose chase her father had sent her on for *The Quibbler*. Talking with Luna certainly kept one paying attention.

Perhaps the thing he liked most about her was her ability to laugh at herself, to ~~just~~be herself, regardless of who was watching or ridiculing. Luna was a witch who was comfortable in her own skin. And that was something of which Draco was intensely covetous. Malfoy or not, he only wished that one day he would feel the same sort of quiet self-assurance as Luna. *Lucky witch*. What would it be like to see the world through her eyes?

With that thought, his mind turned immediately to Luna's rather large, silvery eyes. They were often wistful and unfocussed, but every now and again he had seen her gaze turn sharp and intent, a sure sign of just why the witch had been sorted into Ravenclaw. Draco wondered at times if her dreamy demeanour was camouflaging something more devious .... He shook his head, his lips curling into a smirk. No, the witch did not have a cunning bone in her body.

And while he was thinking about her body ... Merlin, had she grown into hers. Luna was taller than average, although she was still a good three inches shorter than his own six-foot frame, with curves that would make any man take a second look ... maybe even a third. She had cut her hair to shoulder length a few years ago, and although it still appeared a bit stringy at times, it was a flattering look for her. She had a strong nose, not too big but not dainty either; it suited her face. But it was her mouth that Draco found most appealing. It was wide and lush, perfect for kissing. Her lips were petal pink, and he now knew they were soft and warm and pliant beneath his own. He groaned softly at the reminder of their earlier snogging session, of how she had melted into him, eager for his kiss, his touch ....

*Shite!* he thought as he felt his body respond to the thought of just*kissing* her again. Draco ran his fingers through his hair, tugging at his scalp before allowing his head to fall onto the keyboard, the resulting dissonance echoing throughout the room.

He would have to make certain all their outings were in public...he could not afford to give in to temptation. It was too bad that they weren't more compatible. She was a nice witch who already had shown an interest in him, and she could make him laugh, a skill few possessed. She also seemed to enjoy playing with the new little Potter brat, so she probably wouldn't mind having a few sprogs of her own. If she had been less eccentric...of a more socially acceptable family...he might have considered courting her.

Instead, he would pretend to court her and hope that The Plan worked. It just had to ... because if it didn't, the alternative was a lifetime alone, and Draco didn't think he could possibly survive the rest of his life with just himself, his own right hand, and a half-rate shag every now and again from some dim-witted tart looking to get a piece of *the* Draco Malfoy. He shuddered.

It just had to work. It had to.

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Draco sauntered into the basement looking every bit the Investment Finance Arithmancer he was. He had carefully chosen his attire; the dark blue of his business robes complimented his colouring, and the cut emphasised the broadness of his shoulders. Of course this morning his intent was not to impress the witches at his Ministry office, but one witch in particular...the one who was currently singing off-key with the Weird Sisters on the Wizarding Wireless as she was slicing a banana and adding it to a bowl of oatmeal.

With a smirk, he quietly walked toward Luna, hoping to surprise her. He was just about to cover her eyes with his hand and ask, "Guess who?" when ...

"Good morning, again, Draco," she said.

He dropped his hand and huffed exasperatedly, feeling a bit put out that she had ruined his fun. "I was trying to surprise you. How did you know I was here?"

Luna turned, and her small smile caused Draco's eyes to fall to that mouth that was oh, so tempting ...

"I recognised your cologne. You always smell quite lovely."

His nose wrinkled in distaste. "Lovely? Come now, pet," he said, noticing the hitch in her breath when he uttered the endearment. He moved closer to her, enough so that she had to tilt her chin slightly to meet his eyes. "No man wants to smell *lovely*. We want to smell divine or delicious or sinful ...." With each word, he stepped closer to her until they were almost touching. Luna gasped slightly at his proximity, her lips parting and once again inviting him to partake of their sweetness .... Bloody hell. He had to stop looking at her mouth...now he was waxing poetic!

Slowly, he moved closer still, and just as Luna's eyes were about to close, he reached behind her and grabbed an apple from the fruit bowl on the counter. "An apple a day, right?" he teased as he backed away from her and took a bite of the fruit. "Mmm. Juicy."

Her eyes widened in shock for a moment, then narrowed, giving him the sense once again that there was more to Luna Lovegood underneath the dreamy façade. But then the moment passed, her eyes turned misty again, and Draco found himself wondering if he had imagined the sharpness in her gaze. Well, this was no time to wool-gather. He had a plan to implement.

"So it's Friday. Got any big plans for tonight?" he asked smoothly after swallowing the bite of apple. "If not, I was hoping you might be interested in joining me for dinner."

Now she did look surprised. "You ... are asking me ... to dinner?"

"I am. I realise that what happened earlier wasn't planned," he said with a casual shrug of one shoulder, "but I don't regret it. Do you?"

She stared at him and then shook her head slowly.

"Excellent. Neither do I. In fact, I wouldn't mind repeating it." *I wouldn't mind at all.* "But being the gentleman that I am, it wouldn't be appropriate to do so until I take you out on a proper date."

Luna blinked.

Draco waited.

And waited some more.

He sighed dramatically. "Well?"

Finally, she seemed to snap out of her bewilderment. "Oh! No...I mean, yes! Yes, I would like that. Definitely."

He allowed himself a rare wide grin. "Good. I'll pick you up around six. Dress casually." He winked at her and loudly crunched another bite of the apple before strolling out of the room.

Everything was going according to plan.

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*A/N: As you can see, I have decided...thanks to you lovely readers and reviewers...to continue this story. My thanks to my wonderful betas, DeeMichelle and Subversa. You rock. My fabulous Brit picker, LettyBird, is moving this week, and so I have posted this chapter without her keen Brit picking eye. I hope I didn't butcher things too badly.*

*The chapter titles are from the lyrics to Heart and Soul.*

*I must warn you now that it may be November before I am able to get to chapter three. I am terribly busy writing a new story for the SS/HG Exchange on LiveJournal. Please be patient and know that I will never abandon a story. Chapter three will be coming, I promise!*

*Up next: Luna ponders and the first date.*

# The Way You Held Me Tight

*Chapter 3 of 10*

Sequel to my SSHG story, Enraptured. A prophecy says Luna and Draco will one day fall in love. That was six years ago, and Luna is tired of waiting around. It's time to take matters into her own hands. Unfortunately, Draco has a plan of his own. First Place in Draconian Measures at the 2007 OWL Awards; Runner Up for Best Fluff in Round Three of the Quill to Parchment Awards.

*Disclaimer: JKR owns it all. I'm just having fun.*

*A/N: Just a reminder that this story is not compliant with Deathly Hallows. It is, however, compliant with my SSHG fic, Enraptured. \*winks\**

## Chapter Three

### The Way You Held Me Tight

Luna's office at the Ministry of Magic was tucked away in a far corner on level three, where her experimental Charms could be easily contained. Typically, her work day was filled with new Charms to research or test, paperwork to be completed (in triplicate, of course), and meetings to be attended.

The current day, however, found Luna sitting behind her desk, the surface littered with neglected parchments requiring her attention. Her gaze was fixed upon a small crack in the plaster that resembled a Nargle, her head tilted to one side as her fingers toyed absently with one radish earring. Near the ceiling flew dozens of pale violet paper airplanes that had been sent via the Ministry's interdepartmental memo system. Around and around they soared, occasionally nudging into each other or flying into a wall before returning to their circular pattern along the ceiling. Luna ignored them all. Her attention was presently focussed upon one person...Draco Malfoy.

She closed her eyes and allowed the music to fill her mind; the steady rhythm of the repeated chords from the song Draco had taught her to play that morning was echoed by the beating of her heart. A blissful smile graced her features as she submerged herself in the memory of being held in his arms, and her tummy flipped as she recalled her very first kiss. Had it only been a few hours? It felt as though days had passed. Luna wanted nothing more than to kiss him again ... and again ... and maybe once more

for good measure. Then he could kiss her so that things would be nice and even between them. She hummed along with the music in her head, not caring in the slightest that she possessed the singing voice of a Fwooper without a Silencing Charm.

It wasn't uncommon for her to be consumed by thoughts of the wizard she adored; however, it was not the norm for her to be so consumed that she could not focus on anything else. Of course, it wasn't every day that she could say Draco Malfoy had kissed her.

He had *kissed* her.

Draco Malfoy had kissed Luna Lovegood.

And he had said he wouldn't mind doing so again.

A giddy shudder swept over her at the thought. Perhaps their next kiss would happen that very evening, after their date.

Her brow furrowed in contemplation, and her wistful smile slid from her lips. The piano lesson and the kiss had been the loveliest things to ever happen to her, and her recollection of that morning would be amongst her most cherished memories, closeted away in a corner of her mind with the precious, vague memories of her mother. Something niggled at her, however. The Draco who had sauntered into the kitchen and asked her to dinner had been different from the one in the drawing room. She had recognised the look in his eyes...he was up to something.

Luna was no fool; she had an idea of what the wizard was thinking. She was all but certain he was using her somehow to gain something he wanted. What that something was, however, she had no idea. What she *did* know was that she would have to keep her wits about her when dealing with Draco Malfoy.

Dutifully, Luna reminded herself that she needed to make certain that her feet were planted firmly on the ground whilst her head was in the clouds. She did not want to end up as nothing more than yet another notch on his broomstick. She was after his heart. It was only fair...he had already captured hers. All right, so he wasn't aware of that fact, but that was neither here nor there.

A paper airplane soared into the office and crashed into the middle of her forehead before plummeting onto her desk. As if it were an everyday occurrence, she merely picked up the crumple-nosed plane and gently unfolded it. She gasped, her eyes widening comically, as she read the memo. It was from *him*. With a dreamy sigh, she tore open the plane and began to read.

Luna,

*You have enchanted and enthralled me. I have been unable to think of anything but you. Your hands ... how I crave to feel them. Your eyes ... how I long to gaze into their depths once more. Your dulcet tones ... how I yearn to hear them. Your lips ... how I hunger to taste them again. This evening cannot come soon enough.*

Yours,

DM

Her eyes narrowed. Now she *knew* he was up to something. She had seen the way he spoke to women he was interested in shagging; he was treating her as if she were one of his one-offs, and she was not about to stand for that. Draco Malfoy would have to learn that she would not be spoken to in such a fashion ... unless, of course, he truly meant the words, because that would be lovely, but in *this* instance, she was quite certain that he did not. At least, not yet. In the meantime, she would demonstrate just how different she was from the witches he usually encountered.

She rummaged around her desk until she found a quill and a pot of ink and then quickly penned a reply. Her eyes scanned the page before she nodded, satisfied with her response.

As Luna watched the paper airplane zoom out the door and fly off toward Draco's office, she caught sight of the clock. It was nearly noon! She removed her wand from where it rested behind her ear and cast a quick organisation spell in hopes that it would look as though she had accomplished something that morning, and then she all but ran from the office. If she didn't hurry, she would miss lunch with Hermione ... and Merlin, did she have things to discuss with her!

---

Four levels away, Draco Malfoy was knee-deep in Arithmantic calculations and equations, his mind completely focussed upon his work. He was certainly not distracted by thoughts of Luna Lovegood and her delectable mouth. Absolutely not. He glanced at the equation he had been working on for the better part of the morning. It was gibberish.

He snapped his quill in two and tossed it away in disgust.

All right, fine. So he was distracted. It meant nothing. He was still in control. Everything was going according to plan. He was *fine* ... even if there had been more truth than false flattery in the smarmy message he had just sent to the eccentric witch.

He let his head fall to the desk with a thud, groaning when the resulting ache reminded him that he needed to stop banging his head against hard surfaces. Twice in one day...he would be lucky if he didn't bruise.

Malfoys did not bruise.

He never should have kissed her. That had been a mistake. Merlin knew that now all he could think about was kissing her again, and he could not afford the distraction. He should have known better. His attraction to Luna would be his downfall if he wasn't careful, and he truly did not wish to see her unnecessarily hurt. That would be unavoidable if he shagged her. If he could rein in his raging libido, they would be able to exit the "relationship" as friends, he would be able to find a decent witch to marry...one suitable for a Malfoy...and Luna would have a plethora of eligible wizards who would have finally taken notice of her.

He resolutely ignored the sudden ache in his chest that appeared with that thought.

Shaking his head, Draco retrieved a new quill, and with renewed determination, he attempted to return to his work. It was not to be, however, as he was almost immediately interrupted by a swooping and diving paper plane. He watched in fascinated amusement as the plane flitted about the room before it nose-dived onto the desk, shuddering slightly before falling over on its side. He knew it had to be from *her*.

Draco,

*I am quite concerned. I received your note, and it sounds as if you may have been bitten by a Tootlewomper. Does your tongue have blue polka dots? If so, you should seek medical attention at once. I would be sorely disappointed if we had to cancel our dinner.*

Sincerely,

Luna

Draco couldn't have stopped it if he had tried he burst out laughing.

"All right, I get it. No sweet talking," he said aloud, sniggering for a moment longer until he realised he had been conversing with a piece of parchment. He scowled darkly. The loony witch was rubbing off on him already.

He sat back in his chair, his eyes scanning her message again. A reluctant smile pulled at the corners of his mouth, and he sighed in resignation. He should have known he could not treat her like any ordinary witch...Luna Lovegood was far from ordinary.

Perhaps he needed to re-evaluate his plans for their date that evening. Luna was not the type to be impressed by expensive dinners and baubles. He had planned to take her to a very casual but chic little bistro in Paris, but now he wondered if that was the right approach to take with the unusual witch. What would be appropriate?

When no immediate answer came to mind, he panicked. He needed help. Glancing at the clock, he saw it was time for lunch.

"Good," he muttered aloud as he rose from his seat. "I know just who can help me."

As he walked to the door, he paused by the decorative mirror which hung on the wall of his office and shrugged on his outer robes. Catching his reflection, he stared for a brief moment and then cautiously stuck out his tongue, just to be certain ....

He breathed a sigh of relief as he strode from the office. No blue polka dots.

---

*A/N: According to the HP Lexicon, a Fwooper is an African bird with brightly-coloured feathers whose song will drive the listener insane. Therefore, all Fwoopers are sold with a Silencing Charm already on it, which must be reapplied once a month. The Tootlewomper, however, is all mine.*

*My thanks, as always, to my beta readers, Subversa and DeeMichelle, and to my Brit picker, LettyBird. You are amazing!*

*I apologize for the long wait and for updating with such a short chapter. I am completely focused on this story now, and I hope to have it completed by the end of the month. Thank you for being so patient!*

# And Tumbled Overboard

*Chapter 4 of 10*

Sequel to my SSHG story, Enraptured. A prophecy says Luna and Draco will one day fall in love. That was six years ago, and Luna is tired of waiting around. It's time to take matters into her own hands. Unfortunately, Draco has a plan of his own. First Place in Draconian Measures at the 2007 OWL Awards; Runner Up for Best Fluff in Round Three of the Quill to Parchment Awards.

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Chapter Four

And Tumbled Overboard

It was lunch time, and the small café was teeming with people, both inside and out. Luna had run nearly the entire way from her office, hoping that she would not be late for her lunch with Hermione. She hadn't seen her friend in nearly two days, and with so much to share, she didn't want to waste a single minute.

She edged her way through the café's front door. "Pardon me," she said repeatedly as she squeezed her way further into the building. Standing on her toes, she looked around, smiling when she finally saw a familiar bushy head in the far corner of the café.

"Hermione!" Luna called, waving a hand to catch her friend's attention as she manoeuvred her way through the throng of people and tables. Hermione had already been seated, and her head was bowed over a pile of parchments, her quill rapidly moving to and fro. Luna grinned at the familiar sight, her large eyes sparkling with unconcealed delight, and quickly made her way to where Hermione was waiting. She slipped into the chair, carelessly dropped her bag under the table, and immediately launched into all of the exciting things that had occurred that morning.

"Oh, Hermione! You won't believe what's happened. I..."

Hermione looked up, and Luna's mouth shut with a snap, her brow furrowing with concern at her friend's careworn appearance. There were dark circles under her tired eyes, and her usual open expression was pinched. Something was most definitely wrong.

Luna immediately forgot about her news and asked worriedly, "Are you all right?"

Hermione gave a wan smile as she laid her quill on the table. "Just tired. Work is keeping me busy."

"You hate working for the Ministry," Luna said, keeping her voice serene and calming in an effort to soothe her friend's obviously frazzled nerves. "You should quit."

Hermione grimaced and rubbed a weary hand across her face. "That's what Severus says, too."

Luna glanced up as a black-clad waitress arrived to take their order...sandwiches, crisps, and fizzy drinks.

Once the waitress had left to fetch their lunch, Luna returned her attention to Hermione, who was like a sister to her; she did not like seeing her so overwrought. The brightest witch of her age...how many times had Luna heard Hermione referred to in such a fashion? And yet, for some reason, the Ministry had seen fit to remove her from her research projects and instead had inundated her with meaningless grant applications and administrative tasks. It was a travesty. Luna found it intolerable, but Hermione had stuck with the job despite the less than ideal circumstances.

"Severus is right, you know," Luna said. "You've hated your job for quite some time. They promised you research, and instead, your talents in the lab are being wasted doing all that silly paperwork that anyone who knows how to read and write could do."

Hermione attempted another smile. "It's just that ... I hate feeling like I've failed at something."



Oh, so that's what this is really about."You haven't failed, Hermione," Luna said sincerely. "The Ministry has failed you."

Hermione was pensive for a moment, her lower lip caught between her teeth as she considered Luna's words. "You know, I hadn't thought of it like that." She sighed. "Well, that certainly gives me something to think about." Then she smiled and reached out to take Luna's hand. "Thank you. You are the best friend a witch could hope for, you know."

Luna smiled. "Oh, yes, I know."

Hermione laughed, causing Luna's smile to widen, pleased that she had helped to alleviate her friend's melancholy.

The waitress arrived with their lunches, and Hermione moved her papers to her bag in order to make room for their plates. They tucked in, chatting in between bites about various goings-on and generally catching up.

"So," Hermione said after swallowing the last bit of her sandwich. She wiped her mouth with a napkin and then picked up one of the cups of tea the waitress had just brought to their table. "When you arrived you were almost giddy with excitement. What was that all about?"

Luna smiled and attempted to feign an innocent look, even though she knew her pink cheeks would give her away.

Hermione's eyes widened and her mouth curved into a surprised smile. "Oh, my. You finally told him, didn't you?"

Luna knew full well just who Hermione meant by "he." After all, Hermione was her best friend, and while Luna did have a secret or two she kept to herself...the truth of her involvement in prophecies being the biggest...for the most part, Hermione knew everything about her ... including her desperate crush on Draco Malfoy.

Luna shook her head, and Hermione's expression fell. "No, I didn't say a thing. But he did kiss me," Luna added nonchalantly and then took a sip of her tea as though they were merely discussing the weather.

"Oh," Hermione said, then realised what Luna had just told her. "Oh! Well ... that's ... that's ...."

"Wonderful? Amazing? Lovely?" Luna offered. She smiled dreamily, the cup of tea she held in her hands forgotten. "Yes, it is." She startled when warm liquid spilled over hand as she absentmindedly tipped her cup.

She looked up to find Hermione staring at her, her expression one of complete and utter surprise. "It just seems so sudden. I thought he saw you as a friend...that's what you thought, anyway. When did this happen?"

"This morning ... right after he taught me to play the piano." Luna set her cup on the table, so as not to spill again, and sighed wistfully as she remembered the feel of Draco's arms around her and his warm, soft lips pressing against hers. Oh, she dearly hoped he would kiss her again ... preferably as soon as possible.

Hermione leaned forward conspiratorially, her tired eyes now bright with excitement and curiosity. "Tell me everything."

---

Draco burst through the door of the apothecary, only to come skidding to an abrupt halt as he almost hit the back of the person in front of him. The shop was crowded with customers doing a bit of shopping in their lunch break. Exasperated, he used his height to his advantage and scanned the area for the person with whom he needed to speak.

He wasn't there. Damn.

Undaunted, Draco charmed, squeezed, and elbowed his way to the counter. "Pardon me, miss," he said to the very busy shop assistant as he flashed his most disarming smile.

"... your change, sir. Thank you for shopping at Renevatio," the young witch said to the customer she had been helping. She gave Draco a brief glance, and he watched as her entire countenance changed. Her tense posture relaxed, and she turned to rest a hip against the edge of the counter, her eyes softening as she gave him a coquettish look. One would believe she had all the time in the world.

*The Malfoy charm ... works every time*, he thought smugly.

"May I help you?" she asked with a coy smile, ignoring the other customers who had clearly been waiting much longer.

Draco leant against the counter, angling his body toward the woman. "I certainly hope so," he drawled lazily. "I'm looking for Mr Snape. Is he here?"

"He is," a familiar voice said. "And he is quite busy, as is Miss Foster."

The shop assistant immediately returned to her job without giving Draco a second glance.

Draco sighed and glanced up to see his former Head of House enter from the back of the store as he pulled a black work apron over his head, tying the strings about his waist.

"Severus," Draco said, pushing off the counter and extending a hand. "Just the wizard I need to see."

Severus clasped his hand briefly, his mind obviously occupied with work. "What is it you want, Draco? I am terribly busy, as you can see," the wizard said as he rung up a customer's purchases.

"Well, you see," Draco began, dropping his voice to a whisper, "I need some advice about a witch..."

Severus groaned. "Come back later, and we'll talk." He passed the small bag of potions to the waiting customer. "Thank you."

"But Severus, it's import..."

"Later, Draco! Can't you see we're swamped? Either put on an apron and get to work, or get out and come back in a few hours." He turned to help the next customer.

At the prospect of being forced into menial labour, Draco fled the apothecary. There was, after all, someone else from whom he could seek advice.

---

Hermione smiled wistfully as Luna completed her retelling of the morning's event. "Your first kiss. Was it everything you ever dreamt of?"

Luna's eyes glazed over even more than was usual as she relived the moment for the thousandth time that day. "Oh, it was much more. It was quite soft and gentle ...." She stopped to think for a moment. "And rather wet, actually."

Hermione shook with laughter.

Luna was puzzled. What was funny about that? Her brow furrowed, and she tilted her head to the side. "Aren't they supposed to be? Wet, I mean. I'm quite certain Draco is excellent at kissing...he's had loads of practice," she said earnestly. Then her eyes widened. "He's not doing it wrong, is he? Aren't Severus' kisses wet?"

Hermione sucked in a deep breath through her nose and then actually snorted before her eyes filled with mirthful tears as she desperately attempted to hold back her laughter.

Luna became quite concerned. With no mother to tell her about boys and a father who was too embarrassed to discuss specifics with her, Luna had learnt about such things from half-heard conversations between girls at Hogwarts. She supposed she could have discussed kissing and the like with Hermione, but her friend had always been the private sort, and as boys had never shown much of an interest in her, Luna had not been all that concerned, probably because she had known that Draco would one day teach her those things personally. She had been certain that Draco would know exactly what he was doing, and his kisses had felt ever so divine. Perhaps it didn't matter if he was kissing in the correct manner, as long as it made her feel weak in the knees.

Still, her curiosity got the better of her, and she said, "He put his tongue in my mouth ... is that normal?"

Hermione turned red in the face, a strangled sound escaping her throat and tears flowing down her cheeks.

"Are you choking?" Luna asked in alarm. "Oh, Merlin, you are!" She pulled her wand from behind her ear and was about to cast the Heimlich Charm when Hermione burst into riotous laughter, drawing the attention and ire of the other patrons.

"Oh, Luna," Hermione choked out as she gasped for breath, her fingers gripping the table for dear life. "I do love you, you know."

Luna's expression cleared and she nodded enthusiastically. "Yes. And I love you, as well."

Hermione wiped her cheeks, then reached into her bag and pulled out a few Galleons, waving away Luna's insistence to pay her share. "My treat," she said. "After all, it's not every day a witch gets her first kiss. Now then, you said he's taking you to dinner tonight, correct?"

Luna nodded.

Hermione's face filled with excitement. "I've got an idea. Let's take the rest of the day off and have a girl's afternoon. You can tell me more about what's been going on with Draco, and we can get you ready for your date."

"Oh, yes!" Luna exclaimed. "That sounds wonderful. Let's go."

The two witches stood and left the café arm in arm. As they walked out into the warm sunshine, Hermione patted Luna's arm and said, "Oh, and sweetie? It sounds to me as though Draco's kisses are just fine."

Luna smiled in relief; she really wanted him to put his tongue in her mouth again.

---

Draco knocked on the door to the flat and waited. He was starting to become discouraged, but he wasn't giving up. He knocked again.

He had rushed from the apothecary in Diagon Alley all the way back to the Ministry, simultaneously irritated and pleased that the lunch hour had just ended; irritated because he had not managed to actually eat lunch, and pleased because the end of the lunch hour meant his next target would have returned to her post. He had walked into the Potions Department, wondering why he hadn't thought of going to her first; she was Luna's best friend, after all.

He had been sorely disappointed when he had been tersely informed by a co-worker that Hermione was not returning for the day. He hadn't cared much for the man's tone, but then he had heard the rumours of Hermione's mistreatment by the Ministry. While her husband's general reputation had improved greatly over the past several years, in Ministry circles his name was still mud ... and Hermione, as the convenient scapegoat, was paying the price. Draco doubted that Severus was aware of the full extent of his wife's daily ordeal; if he were, the Ministry would have been a pile of rubble by now.

But that was not Draco's most pressing concern. Right now, he had to figure out where to take Luna on their first date. With the Snapes both crossed off the list of potential people who could help, Draco had wracked his brain for someone who could come up with a good idea ... and fast. One person had come to mind, and while he was not certain of just how big a help she might be, he had no choice but to try.

Now if only she would open the bloody door.

Pansy Parkinson had been his friend since they had been in nappies and running around Malfoy Manor with toy brooms and wands. They had attempted to date for a brief period of time, but it had felt almost incestuous. Their friendship had been through a few rocky patches, especially after the war, when Pansy...who had remained neutral in the conflict...had been livid that he had not only turned to the Order for help but that he considered them to be his friends. He would never forget the hurt and anger he had seen on her face. "You told *them* everything but not me?" she had said in a voice so low he had needed to strain to hear her. The knowledge that he had inadvertently hurt her had pained him until it was almost a physical ache. It had taken a lot of work...and jewellery...to convince Pansy to give their friendship another chance, and Draco was determined to never give her cause to doubt him again.

Now, he needed her help. He had stopped by his office to inform them he would not be returning for rest of the day, and then set off back to Diagon Alley to her place of employment. Once there, he had been informed that Pansy had taken the day off.

Was no one working? It seemed like everyone but Severus had gone home early.

He raised his hand to knock again when finally the door was thrown open, and she appeared.

"Draco?" Pansy said, drawing his attention back to the matter at hand.

His eyes widened at the sight of her, hair dishevelled, no make-up, and clad only in a green silk dressing gown. He had never seen her in such a state of dishabille. He felt a twinge of concern...perhaps she was ill?...but her cheeks were flushed, and she seemed normal. Satisfied that she was well despite her unusual appearance, he admitted himself into her flat, walking past her without a word.

She sighed audibly and shut the door. Draco turned around and barely caught the fleeting panic on Pansy's face. What was that about?

"Honestly," she said, rolling her eyes, "one would think you had been raised in a hovel. I know that your mother taught you much better manners than to just enter a witch's home without her express permission."

Draco arched an eyebrow. "Pardon me, your highness. I thought I was welcome in your home. Apparently, that is not that case. I'll not stay where I'm not wanted ...."

Pansy huffed and crossed her arms over her chest. "Don't be ridiculous, Draco." Her eyes shifted to some place behind him.

Draco glanced over his shoulder but saw only a closed door. He looked back to Pansy with narrowed eyes. "What's going on, Pansy? And why are you home in your dressing gown in the middle of the day? Why aren't you at work?"

"Why aren't you?" she shot back, tossing her head so that her hair would fall back across her shoulder.

Now Draco *knew* something was up. That little head toss was a telltale sign that he was quite familiar with...she was nervous and desperate to appear not to be. Unable to resist teasing his friend a bit, Draco looked at the situation more carefully. She was at home during the middle of the day, still in her dressing gown, and her typically meticulous appearance was conspicuously absent. He wondered ....

"What's behind the door?" he asked pointedly.

Pansy visibly swallowed, her eyes widening comically. "I don't know what you're talking about." She laughed nervously.

Draco could have fun with this...if he had the time. But he was a wizard on a mission; he had no patience for games. "Have it your way, then. That's not why I'm here. I need your help with something ... something very important."

"Is everything all right?" Pansy asked as she led him to the sofa, casting a brief glance once more to the closed door behind him.

"Yes, yes. It's not life or death, but it is urgent. You see, there's this witch..."

Draco was interrupted by the closed door opening and Pansy's strangled gasp. She leapt to her feet, her expression one of such pure, unadulterated terror that Draco stood and pulled his wand, ready to defend his friend from whatever horrible thing was about to appear from behind the door.

"Hey, Pans? I can't find my shirt. Any idea where you threw it after you ripped it off my back?"

Draco stared in horror. Merlin's hairy armpits...it was Ron Weasley ... in nothing but a towel.

"Oh, shite," Pansy breathed.

Draco turned, his eyes wide with shock. "Pansy?"

"It's not what you think. All right, it *is* what you think, but I can explain!"

Weasley seemed to finally realise that there was someone else in the room, turned a deep shade of scarlet, and then all but ran back through the doorway, the towel flapping behind him.

"Oh gods," Draco whispered, his eyes staring blindly at the spot Weasley had just vacated. "I'll be scarred for life after seeing that."

Pansy scowled and slapped his arm.

"Hey!"

"Don't you 'hey' me, Draco!" Pansy glared at him, her chin tilting defiantly. "I won't hear one bad word about Ron. I like him, and that's all you need to know."

Draco shuddered. "Quite right, that."

Pansy hit him again and glowered fiercely. "Be nice or leave."

His brow furrowed. He knew Pansy better than anyone, and her reaction to him discovering her with Weasley was quite telling. "You really like him," he said sceptically.

"Yes, I really do." She dropped the cool façade and gazed at him pleadingly. "You're all right with this, aren't you?"

Draco's first inclination was to remind her of her reaction when he had become even remotely friendly with the Gryffindor, but he couldn't do it. She was obviously smitten with the ginger-haired wizard, and Draco knew that making a fuss about her relationship with Weasley would only harm his own friendship with the witch.

"As long as you're happy, I'm happy."

He laughed as she threw herself into his arms.

"Thank you!"

He smiled into her hair. "He does make you happy, though, right?"

She nodded enthusiastically and then released him, taking his hand as they sat back down on the sofa.

"He's so lovely to me, Draco. He treats me like a queen! Why, just last week, he took me to that lovely little bistro you told me about, and we had a delightful time. And then yesterday he brought me ...."

Pansy kept up a steady stream of praises for Weasley's treatment of her, and Draco suddenly realised that he had come to the wrong place. Pansy would have no clue how to help him decide on the perfect date for a witch like Luna Lovegood. Pansy was too materialistic, too jaded, too worldly ... too much like the sort of witch who would be a suitable Malfoy wife.

Gods. That sounded as appealing as snogging a Blast-Ended Skrewt.

Shaking off his unease, but now admitting that Pansy would be of little help, he quickly brought the conversation to a close.

"I'm glad you're happy. I ... I have to go now." He stood and walked to the door, a confused Pansy following in his wake.

"But I thought you wanted to ask me something urgent about a witch ...?"

Draco shook his head. "Oh, that was nothing. I'll explain later. I really have to go." He pressed a quick kiss to her cheek. "I'll owl you the next time I decide to just drop by," he said with a wink, and then he exited the flat, leaving a bewildered Pansy behind him.

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"... and then he fell flat on his arse in front of the entire department!"

Luna let out a peal of laughter and gripped her aching sides. They were having so much fun! She and Hermione had giggled and laughed their way through the afternoon, simply relaxing and enjoying each other's company. Now, they were ensconced on Luna's bed, varnishing their toenails the Muggle way. There were charms they could have used, of course, but Hermione had insisted that it would much more fun this way, and she had been right. Luna was having a grand time slathering the foul-smelling substance onto her toenails, turning them a shade of glittering royal blue that Hermione had raised her eyebrows at, but Luna adored. Bits of tissue had been wedged between her toes to keep them separated, and the novelty of it made her smile. How lovely!

Once done, Hermione insisted that they allow them to air dry...no drying charms. Luna eyed her toes, wiggling them a bit.

"Be careful," Hermione warned. "You don't want to smear the varnish."

"Oh, yes. You're right, of course," Luna agreed as she stared at her toes, willing them to remain still. It was difficult; watching her blue toenails sparkle had been quite entertaining.

"So," Hermione said, her tone serious for the first time that afternoon.

That caught Luna's attention.

"I know that you fancy Draco," Hermione began, bringing her hands together and clasping them in her lap. "And from what you've said, it appears that he's now quite taken with you, as well."

Luna smiled.

"However ..."

The smile faltered.

With an earnest expression, Hermione shifted to face her and said, "It's just that you've fancied him for so long, and Draco is ... well, he's ~~Draco~~. His reputation with women isn't exactly stellar. I would hate for you to end up with a broken heart because you fell in love with him. Promise me, Luna, that you will guard your affections until you are certain that he adores you as much as you adore him. Please, try not to fall in love with him until he loves you."

Luna was touched by her friend's concern, but her advice really wasn't applicable. "Oh, it's too late for that," she said as she surreptitiously moved her big toe, unable to resist watching it sparkle. "I've been in love with him for ages."

"What? I thought you merely fancied him! Luna!"

"Oh, it started out as merely a crush," Luna rushed to explain. "But the more I watched him, the more I saw who he really is ... underneath all the icy coldness." She began to remove the bits of tissue from between her toes. "He can seem aloof, but I've found him to be quite warm, actually."

She stopped when she felt Hermione's hand on her foot. She looked up into Hermione's thoughtful gaze.

"What else have you seen in Draco Malfoy?"

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Draco slammed the front door to Grimmauld Place behind him with a loud *bang*. The entire afternoon had been a waste of time and energy. He had been to see Severus, Hermione, Pansy, Molly Weasley, Tonks, Remus .... No one had been available. Some were working, several had taken the day off, one was off on a trip to Romania, and one was in the midst of an afternoon tryst. Just when he needed advice, everyone disappeared. It was maddening.

He stormed down the hallway to the stairs, and then marched up the steps and straight to the drawing room. He would take out some of his frustration on the piano. Maybe if he played for a while, an idea would come to him.

Draco was so caught up in his thoughts that he was startled to see Neville sitting at the piano. He hadn't even heard the jaunty melody the wizard was playing. Disgruntled to find his plans foiled yet again, Draco threw himself into a chair to brood.

What was he going to do now? He supposed he could use the reservations in Paris, but his instincts were now telling him that Luna would not be suitably impressed by fine dining. He wanted to do something special, something as unique as the witch herself ... but what?

He racked his brain, trying to think of something...anything...but with such short notice, nothing was coming to mind. *Paris it is, then*, he thought gloomily.

"Erm ... Draco?"

Broken from his reverie, he glanced up to see Neville staring at him in a most peculiar fashion.

"Are you all right? I had to say your name several times."

Draco cleared his throat and ran a hand through his hair. "My apologies," he said. "My mind is elsewhere."

The corner of Neville's mouth curved upward in a small smile. "Not a problem. Anything I can help with?"

Draco would have laughed out loud, but he genuinely liked Neville; he didn't want to hurt his feelings, but there was no way on earth that the shy wizard who had dated the same girl since Hogwarts would know where to take an eccentric witch on a first date. On the other hand, Neville had lived with Luna as long as he had...perhaps he *could* be of some help.

"How well do you know Luna?" he asked, attempting to sound casual.

Neville's eyebrows shot up in surprise, and then he turned contemplative for a moment. "I don't know. About as well as any of us in the Order, I suppose, except Hermione, of course."

Draco nodded pensively. "Of course." He crossed his legs at the ankle and linked his hands behind his head. "But say a friend of hers wanted to do something nice for her ... you know, something special. Take her to dinner or out for the night ... something like that. What might Luna enjoy?"

"Merlin, I don't know, Draco," Neville said, his forehead crinkling as he considered the question. "Maybe go Nargle hunting or something?"

So much for that idea. Draco sighed. Only Neville would think of Nargle hunting ....

And then it hit him. Of course! Why hadn't thought of it before? It was perfect, and Luna would love it. There was even the added benefit that she would never expect such a thing from him...it would be just the sort of thing that would show her that he was looking for more than a quick shag. He quickly mulled it over. Yes, it could work ... it *would* work.

He stood to his feet with a broad grin. "Thank you, Neville. That was brilliant!"

Neville was visibly confused, but then he shrugged. "You're welcome," he called as Draco strode from the drawing room and headed toward the library.

One Floo call later, Draco had everything in hand. He bounded up the stairs, laughing at having taken dating advice from Neville Longbottom, of all people. Oh, the irony!

He strode into his room and opened the wardrobe. He pulled out a few well-worn items and his dragon hide boots with a smug smile.

The night would be perfect.

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"Well," Luna said in response to Hermione's query, "I suppose it started back in my fifth year. I could tell he wasn't happy, even though no one else could. And then when he came to us after the headmaster died, I could clearly see he was in pain. He didn't want to kill the headmaster, but he didn't want to disappoint his parents either, especially his father, and he was quite upset that his decision to follow Severus' advice was a step away from them."

Luna stopped and tested the varnish to see if it was dry, then bought her knees up, tucking them under her chin and wrapping her arms about her legs. She stared at her glittering blue toenails. "He'll never know what his mum thought of what he had done...she died before he could speak with her again...but Lucius was livid with how Draco was 'tainting the family name.'"

She sighed and wriggled her toes. "Draco loves his father, but at the same time, he dislikes him a great deal. Lucius still has expectations of him that Draco finds distasteful, and yet he wants his father to love and approve of him. He's afraid if he distances himself even more from his upbringing, he'll lose all sense of his identity, what it is that makes him a Malfoy, not to mention what little relationship he and Lucius have left. Lucius has already cut him off financially and refuses to allow him to visit him in Azkaban. It's quite sad, really."

Hermione hummed her agreement, and Luna continued. "Did you know Draco volunteers at St Mungo's on Saturdays? He doesn't know that I know, but I saw him there once. One of the Healers told me he comes every Saturday morning. He wants to keep it a secret. He does all sorts of things like that...he's very generous and kind, but no one notices. That's how he likes it."

"You notice," Hermione said softly.

Luna nodded. "I notice everything about Draco."

It was true. She did. And currently, Draco's behaviour was changing, altering from its usual pattern. He hadn't brought a witch home in months. He still went out, but there had been no one-offs in quite some time. That was an oddity in itself, but he also seemed to enjoy things he never had before. She was reminded of how the Lupins' little girl, Andie, had seemed to terrify him, and it had been somewhat of an on-going joke that if she were to be present at an Order function, Draco would find some way to miss it. Then, one day, he had seemed to take a liking to the little pink-haired girl, and now, he was completely enamoured with baby Lillian, Ginny and Harry's daughter. He often held her, cooing and tickling until she would flash him a toothless grin.

Something was attempting to take root in Luna's mind but was just out of reach. She stretched for it, attempting to grasp the idea. No one-offs, playing with babies, kissing her, asking her out for dinner, sending her notes at work ....

Luna sat up suddenly, her spine as stiff as a board.

"Luna?" Hermione said. "Are you all right?"

But Luna's mind was whirling. She had known he was up to something.

Draco Malfoy was looking for a wife.

Her heart leapt within her chest...he was looking for a wife!...but then her mind continued its train of thought. Whilst Draco had changed in many ways, as she had just told Hermione, he had not yet been able to completely walk away from his upbringing. Therefore, Luna knew with absolute certainty that he would be looking for the perfect high society wife, one worthy of the name Malfoy ... a designation that certainly did not apply to her. Luna was well aware that she was not the type of witch that Draco would be considering for a wife at this point in time...after all, he didn't love her yet...and her eccentric nature would keep him from even looking at her as a possibility. High society wives were refined and elegant, not dotty and unconventional.

Which meant that he must be using her somehow.

She waited for a moment, for the anger she fully expected to come, but nothing happened.

"Luna?"

Well, that was interesting. She pondered the possible explanations for her lack of ire. Perhaps her mind had yet fully processed her newfound revelation. She just needed to think a bit longer. So she did.

She considered all she knew of Draco Malfoy...which was quite a bit, given how many years she had been observing him...and if her suspicions were correct, he was probably trying to improve his reputation as a womaniser by having a steady girlfriend. She suspected he would play the part of dutiful boyfriend for the next few months, then break things off gently.

Yes, that seemed exactly the sort of thing he would do.

Of course, Luna knew something that Draco did not: the prophecy had said he would fall in love with her, just as she had with him. Spending time together as a couple...even if it began as a ruse...would give him plenty of time to fall in love with her. This was it! Her dreams were coming true ... in a very peculiar way, but then she was a peculiar witch. It seemed to suit.

She relaxed her posture and smiled brightly at Hermione. "It's all right, Hermione. Everything is going to be just perfect." She bounded off the bed and rocked on the balls of her feet excitedly. "What do you think I should wear?"

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*A/N: I apologize profusely for having taken so long to update this story! Hopefully, we are back on track, now. Thank you so much to everyone who voted for this fic in the OWL Awards. It tied for first place in Draconian Measures, and took third for best snog. Thank you!*

*My profound gratitude to my beta readers, Subversa and DeeMichelle, and to my Brit picker, LettyBird. I'd also like to thank machshefa for all of her help and advice.*

## In the Moon Mist

*Chapter 5 of 10*

Sequel to my SSHG story, Enraptured. A prophecy says Luna and Draco will one day fall in love. That was six years ago, and Luna is tired of waiting around. It's time to take matters into her own hands. Unfortunately, Draco has a plan of his own. First Place in Draconian Measures at the 2007 OWL Awards; Runner Up for Best Fluff in Round Three of the Quill to Parchment Awards.

*Disclaimer: JKR owns it all. I'm just having fun.*

Chapter Five

In the Moon Mist

Draco stood in front of the bathroom mirror and stared at his reflection. He had never dressed so casually for a date...or anything else for that matter...in his entire life. The ensemble he'd chosen for his evening with Luna had last been worn several years before during the renovations of number twelve, Grimmauld Place. The denim jeans and grey cotton tee-shirt had been purchased specifically for that purpose, worn consistently for the entire two week period it had taken to complete the work on the house, and then unceremoniously thrust to the back of his wardrobe never to see the light of day again ... until now.

He couldn't believe he was going out in public dressed so ... commonly. Draco sighed and raked a hand through his hair, smirking as it immediately fell back into place, perfect as always. At least he was comfortable, he supposed, and it would be worth the potential humiliation of being seen in public in such casual clothing if it helped to impress Luna.

Luna.

His stomach churned. If it hadn't been so shocking, he would have laughed aloud. He was Draco Malfoy...no witch had ever made him nervous before a date.

Earlier, in the hall, he had been surprised to hear her voice from inside her room...yet another person who had decided not to work that day...and so he had stopped to inform her of the proper attire for the evening. She'd been excited about their date and had apparently been enjoying what she termed "a girls' afternoon" with Hermione. Draco supposed that meant they'd been discussing him. He wondered if Luna had said anything about the kiss they'd shared that morning. It had been her first kiss, so she would have certainly wanted to discuss it with her best friend. Had she enjoyed it as much as she had seemed? As much as he, surprisingly, had? What did she think of him now? What did she expect of their date?

He felt another wave of nausea.

Draco scowled at his reflection. He refused to ponder why he would feel anxious over a date with Luna Lovegood, especially one as farcical as this one was bound to be. Nothing good could come of such thoughts; it was best, then, to ignore them and continue on as if everything were completely normal. Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath and exhaled very slowly, smiling as he felt the tension leave his body. Much better.

Before his traitorous mind could return to its previous occupation, Draco exited the bathroom and walked down the hallway to his room. He went to the wardrobe, grabbed the leather jacket Pansy had insisted he purchase for his rare excursions into Muggle London, and then strode across the room to the table beside his bed. Reaching inside the drawer, he pulled out enough Muggle currency for their dinner, as well as a few Galleons in case of emergency, and then stuffed the pounds into the right pocket of his jeans and the Galleons into the left.

After one final look to ensure he had not forgotten anything, he strolled from the room, pleased with both his appearance and his plans. If all went well, the evening would be one Luna Lovegood would never forget.

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Luna was all but giddy with anticipation...not that anyone could tell, really; she appeared on the outside to be as serene as always. The only indication of her excitement was the wriggling of her sparkly, blue varnished toes.

She couldn't remember a time she had felt such excitement; perhaps when Hermione and Severus had announced their engagement, indicating that all of her hard work had paid off in her friend's happiness. Or maybe that morning when Draco had kissed her ... no. Whilst the memory of the kiss made her want to swoon in ecstasy, it had been unexpected, and so she hadn't had time to build up a large amount of anticipation. Which was fine, because who needed that when there was kissing to be done? Immediately after the kiss, however, was very exciting, as was the moment she realised that the prophecy was beginning to come to fruition.

With everything considered all together, it had indeed been quite the exciting day! And there was still more to come.

She wriggled her toes again and smiled. Nothing could compare to how she was feeling now, about to embark on the first date she had ever been on and with none other than the man she was destined to love for all time. Despite her earlier epiphany regarding Draco's motives, she knew beyond a doubt that tonight was the beginning of their life together. What could be more exciting than that?

She stood and went to face the full-length mirror Hermione had Transfigured from a drinking glass. Draco...she sighed longingly...had come by earlier and informed her that jeans were appropriate for the evening, and that she would need to wear her dragon hide boots. She was dying of curiosity but was thoroughly enjoying the mysteriousness of his plans. So, she had elected to not ask any questions and had merely agreed to his request.

"I like this," Luna said as she eyed her dark jeans and lavender shirt. The latter had a large outline of a peacock on the front.

Hermione was lying on the bed...working, of course...and looked up. She smiled. "Yes, I like it, too. That colour is lovely on you."

"Thank you," Luna replied, beaming.

"I wonder what he has planned," Hermione mused, almost as if speaking to herself, before her attention returned to her work.

"I don't know, but it's terribly exciting...don't you agree?"

Hermione set down her quill on top of her ever-present stack of parchment and said, "It is. You've waited a very long time for this, sweetie, and I hope you have glorious night."

Luna grasped Hermione's hand. "Thank you."

"Whatever for?"

"For being my best and dearest friend."

"Oh, Luna," Hermione said, suddenly sounding near tears, "you don't have to thank me. You must know how much I treasure our friendship." Hermione sniffed, then shifted until she finally clambered off the bed and stood in front of Luna, clasping her hands together. "Right. Let's get on with things, then. Are you all ready to go?"

"Yes," Luna replied dreamily.

Hermione rolled her eyes and sniggered under her breath. "Really? You plan on going out with Draco without your shoes?"

Luna cast a glance at her glittering blue toes and sighed. It seemed such a shame to cover them up...and she had been enjoying looking at them...but she did need to wear shoes.

"I suppose not," she said wistfully.

"I thought not. Draco said to wear your dragon hide boots...Merlin knows what for. Do you know where they are?"

"Yes. They're under the bed," Luna said before dropping to her knees, her entire head disappearing as she searched for her footwear.

"Why don't you just Summon them?" Hermione's muffled question could barely be heard from under the bed.

Luna felt about and found the toe of one boot. She pulled it out, tossing it behind her before returning to search for its mate. "I Charmed them not to respond to magic ... it prevents the Blibbering Humdingers from stealing them."

"What in the world is a Blibbering Humdinger, and why would it want your shoes?"

Biting her lip in concentration, Luna stretched out her arm as far as it could reach. "Well, it's a creature, obviously, and..."

Her explanation was interrupted by a loud knock and then the sound of Hermione opening the door. Luna froze, her hand on the heel of her misplaced boot.

"Good afternoon, Hermione. Have seen ... Luna, is that you?"

Oh, Merlin. It was Draco. Luna wasn't often embarrassed, but she thought perhaps now, half under her bed with her bum in the air, might be a good time to start. She attempted to rise from her position but didn't quite clear the bed before she began to stand; her head hit the bed frame with a resounding crack.

"Ouch."

"Luna!" Hermione cried, concerned. "Are you all right?"

"I think so." Strong hands helped to slide her out from beneath the bed and gently lifted her to her feet. She tilted back her head, wincing as Draco's fingers ran across her scalp, looking for any sign of injury. Yes, she was definitely embarrassed. Even so, despite her emotional discomfort and the sharp pain at the back of her head, Luna delighted in his proximity. "Thank you," she said. "I'm quite well."

Draco's brow furrowed as his fingers found a rather large knot on the back of her head; this time he noticed as she flinched at the slight pressure. "You are not," he said imperiously. "You're in pain. We are not leaving until you have taken a Headache Relieving Potion, and you will bring a phial with you in case the pain returns while we're out." He took a step back and crossed his arms over his chest, his expression almost belligerent, as if daring her to disagree.

He was concerned for her well-being! Luna couldn't have possibly been more elated. "All right."

Draco blinked several times before schooling his features into a serious, but satisfied, expression.

Unable to resist, Luna pressed a quick kiss to his cheek and all but skipped from the room to retrieve the potion.

Not wanting to take any longer than necessary...she was more than ready to leave for their date...Luna hurried to the bathroom and quickly found what she needed. She swallowed one dose, breathing a sigh of relief as the pain eased almost instantaneously, and then grabbed a second dose. She would put the phial in her bag, although she hoped she wouldn't have to use it; Nargles would be attracted even to the miniscule amount of mistletoe that was used in the potion, and she doubted that Draco had been inoculated.

With her tasks completed, and her head feeling much better, she walked back down the hall, slowing as she neared her room; she could hear Draco and Hermione discussing something, and though she didn't like to eavesdrop, the conversation sounded serious...and it would be rude to interrupt. She stood against the wall, to the side of the open door.

"... don't understand why the bloody hell you are putting up with such shoddy treatment. You and I both know why it is you have been relegated to the department's errand witch, and it has nothing to do with you or your abilities."

"It's none of your concern, Draco Malfoy," Luna heard Hermione snap. "And you're wrong...everything is fine."

"You can lie to your friends and your husband, but you cannot lie *to me*; I've witnessed it firsthand."

"I have not lied to my friends," Hermione countered hotly.

Luna noticed that Hermione had neglected to include Severus in her denial.

Draco sighed. "Look, you and I both know what's really going on...you're trying to protect him. You have to know he's going to find out eventually. These things have a way of getting out."

"Are you threatening me?"

Still standing in the hall, Luna's eyes widened at the menace in Hermione's tone.

"Don't be absurd. I have no intention of interfering, so I won't say anything to Severus...but only because he should hear it from you. He's your husband, and I don't think it's a good idea to keep secrets from the person you love."

Luna gulped. She agreed that Hermione needed to talk to Severus...she had borne the brunt of the Ministry's idiocy for far too long...and Luna berated herself for not having done more for her friend. Draco's words, however, frightened her. She was keeping an absolutely enormous secret from the person *she* loved. If Draco were to ever find out, would he be able to forgive her, or would he be so angry that he would cut her out of his life forever? The mere thought sent a shockwave of pain through her from head to toe.

Even as her heart ached, her mind continued to process. Draco had a rather large secret of his own. She was certain he had never intended her to learn of his plan for finding a wife and the role he had relegated to her. And it wasn't as if he would ever find out about the prophecy unless she decided to tell him. Luna decided that, all things considered, their respective secrets balanced nicely.

Happy with her rationalisations, Luna decided it was time to interrupt and entered the room. "All done," she said cheerfully. "Are we ready to go?"

Draco glanced at Hermione and then nodded. "More than ready," he murmured.

Hermione gathered her belongings whilst Luna hurriedly put on her socks and boots. "Have a lovely evening," she said stiffly, but as she left the room, she stopped and hugged Luna. "Use the Floo to let me know when you get back, all right? I want to hear about *everything*," she whispered into Luna's ear.

Luna nodded, and Hermione released her before quickly exiting the room. The sound of the front door opening and closing soon followed.

"Shall we?" Draco asked, offering Luna his arm.

She placed her hand in the crook of his elbow and smiled. "Yes, please."

Luna was absolutely certain she was about to have the most wonderful evening of her entire life.

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Draco could not remember ever being so horrified in his entire life. He was sitting...only after he had surreptitiously cast a cleaning charm...in a horrendously bright yellow plastic chair, attempting to ignore the screaming children at the adjacent table and staring at his ... well, he supposed it was meant to be dinner, but he'd never seen a meal served in such an unusual fashion.

Luna had been thrilled beyond belief when they had arrived at the...he used the word loosely...restaurant, whilst Draco had been wary; he'd been expecting something more along the lines of a Scottish pub, given the name of the establishment. However, despite his reservations at the sight of the garishly coloured building, it was obvious from Luna's brilliant smile that her father had given him sound advice.

Draco had been astonished by the ease of his conversation with the eccentric wizard. Xenophilius Lovegood was even dottier than his daughter, but Draco had found him to be quite congenial and very helpful. The man obviously adored Luna. Mr Lovegood had been pleasantly surprised when Draco had asked him for his advice on where to take her for dinner, as well as for directions to their final destination for the evening, and had happily told him everything he needed to know ... and a few things he didn't.

According to her father, Luna enjoyed eating at a certain restaurant whenever she ventured into Muggle London and frequently commented that she didn't have the opportunity to go as often as she would like. At the time, it had sounded like the perfect place to begin their evening. Now, as he took in the cheap, tacky interior and fussing children, Draco wasn't at all convinced it met the requirements for what could be considered a romantic first date.

However, the lack of elegant furnishings, candlelight, and champagne did not seem to bother Luna in the slightest. In fact, she appeared quite pleased with his dining choice. How peculiar. Ah, well. As long as she was happy, nothing else mattered. He needed to make an impression, and if this would do it, then he was willing to try anything once.

Draco poked a finger at his food warily. "Are you sure this is safe to eat?" he asked Luna, who was blissfully chewing on what he thought perhaps had been, at one time, part of a chicken.

She swallowed and then smiled happily. "Yes," she replied simply. Then, she tilted her head to one side, her expression curious. "Haven't you eaten here before?"

He bit his tongue to keep from scoffing as he so desperately wanted. *As if a Malfoy would ever be caught dead in such an establishment.*

Wait. He was a Malfoy, and he currently *was* in such an establishment. Perhaps he was dead. *One can only hope*, he thought as he eyed his meal. If he wasn't currently dead, he might be after he finished eating.

"Certainly," he lied. "I merely don't recall the food looking so ..."

"Delicious?" Luna offered, her eyes wide as she took another bite of her meal.

"Erm ... yes." Draco sniffed at the ... whatever it was he had ordered and swallowed the bile that rose in his throat at the greasy aroma. He suppressed a shudder.

He heard a giggle escape Luna's mouth and looked up to see her attempting to hide her laughter behind her slender fingers, her eyes sparkling with amusement.

"What's so funny?" he asked.

"You weren't telling the truth. You've never been here before, have you?"

He was startled by the sly gleam in her eyes, but then, once again, it was gone as quickly as it had arrived. He sighed and then, unable to help himself, offered her a small smile. "All right. You caught me. I've never been to ..." He grimaced. "... McDonald's."

She nodded knowingly. "Now you have," she said before popping another chip...no wait, a fry, she'd called it...into her mouth.

Shaking his head, Draco sighed. Gathering his courage with both hands, he picked up the ... he paused to read the side of the box ... Big Mac, closed his eyes, and took a bite.

And then he chewed.

And chewed.

And chewed a bit more.

"What do you think?" Luna asked.

Draco swallowed, his brow furrowing as he considered her question. "I think ... well, I think it's absolutely revolting." Then he smirked and took another bite.

Luna laughed...a bit too loudly but joyfully nonetheless...and the rest of the meal was eaten as they chatted idly about their jobs, their friends, and their respective days. Luna was not surprised at all by Draco's revelation regarding Pansy and Ron, claiming that the attraction had been clearly obvious to those who were paying attention to such things. He was sceptical but hummed his agreement.

After a few more bites, Draco decided that the food wasn't completely awful and found that he was almost enjoying it. It was by no means on par with, say, *boeuf bourguignon*, but it was edible ... barely. He considered Luna's contented expression as she ate the last of her fries and then discussed her latest Charms research. Perhaps the company more than made up for the lack of romantic ambience.

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When they were both finished eating, Luna showed Draco where to dispose of the rubbish..."Don't they have house-elf sorts for this?"...and then they were off.

As they left the restaurant, Draco once again offered his arm, and they walked toward the ill-lit alley that served as an Apparition point. Luna was already thrilled beyond measure with the evening. She couldn't imagine that it could get much better...unless kissing were involved, and then it could get infinitely better, especially if he did that bit with his tongue...but as they walked along the pavement, Draco assured her that there was more to their date than just dinner; he refused to tell her anything further.

Luna was tickled pink.

One of her favourite things in the world was to be surprised. She loved the suspense of knowing something exciting was about to happen. She revelled in the moments before a surprise was revealed. She was odd that way, she supposed, but she truly enjoyed the anticipation more than the surprise itself. Even so, she couldn't help but wonder what else Draco had planned for the evening, especially given the clothing he had chosen to wear. She had instantly recognised the jeans and shirt he was wearing...she had spent enough time ogling him in those jeans when she was supposed to have been repairing the wallpaper...and her inquisitive nature was piqued. On this occasion, her curiosity won.

"Are we going to be renovating someone's house?" she asked as they entered the alley. Not that she minded if that was what he had planned; a date with Draco was a date with Draco, no matter what they did or where they went. She wondered whose house they were going to be fixing up.

He seemed to be puzzled by her reaction and asked, "Why would you think that we were?"

"Those are the clothes you wore when we helped Harry renovate his house. You haven't worn them since, so it seemed to be a logical conclusion."

His eyebrows lifted slightly; he seemed surprised that she had remembered his clothing. As if she could ever forget the way the shirt had stretched across his chest, accentuating his broad shoulders. Or the way his arse had looked in those Muggle jeans when he had bent over to grab some sort of tool or something ....

Luna sighed wistfully. Such lovely memories she had of renovating Harry's house.

"I see," he said, staring at her as if she had grown a second head. "But no, we won't be doing any renovating this evening."

Luna was a bit disappointed, having warmed to the idea. "Where are we going, then?" she asked even as she relished the final moments of anticipation.



Draco smirked and shook his head. "That is my little secret. You'll find out in just a moment. Hold on to me, and I'll Apparate us to our destination."

Luna nodded and allowed Draco to draw her to his side. She looked up at him and smiled.

His lips curled into a smirk. "Right. Let's be on our way, then." As if they were about to dance, he turned on his heel, and they Disapparated.

With a soft *pop*, they appeared in a familiar clearing. Luna's eyes widened as she turned in a circle, taking in the forested area that she had hiked through the previous summer. She spun around to face Draco, her face alight with pleasure. "We're going to look for the herd of Grifflerback Snorflunks?"

Draco appeared quite pleased with her reaction, a smug smile firmly fixed in place. "We are."

Luna grinned wider than she had previously thought was possible. That he would do something so beyond the norm...so beyond *his* norm...had her head spinning and her heart swelling with emotion. First McDonald's and now this ... but how had he known?

Tilting her head to one side, she asked, "How did you learn about this place? I'm the only person who knows about it."

Draco arched one pale eyebrow and folded his arms across his chest. "Not the *only* person."

Luna gasped as the implication of his words became clear. The restaurant, the forest .... "Daddy!" she exclaimed. "You talked with my father!"

He smirked. "I did."

Luna could not have stopped herself if she had tried...not that she had. She threw her arms around his neck and hugged him.

"Thank you," she murmured. That he had spoken with her father, a man that few cared to be bothered with, meant the world to her. Uncharacteristic tears pricked her eyelids, and she blinked them back, breathing in the familiar scent of the wizard in her arms. "Thank you."

Draco returned her embrace, pulling her even closer as he laughed softly, his warm breath tickling her ear. Luna shuddered, her arms tightening reflexively about his neck.

"You're welcome," he murmured, then pressed a kiss to her temple.

Luna sighed contentedly. She would have happily stayed there, in his arms, for the remainder of the evening, but Draco had other plans.

Drat it.

He released her but kept one of her hands in his, linking their fingers together. "Shall we get started? I know that we're quite far north, so sunset is not for several hours yet, but your father only gave me the directions to this clearing. I'm not certain how long it will take us to reach the last known location of the herd."

She smiled serenely; it was obvious that Draco knew absolutely nothing about the Grifflerback Snorflunk, and he was trying so very hard to keep his scepticism to a minimum. She adored him even more in that moment. "Yes, we should get started."

Draco nodded. "Right. You lead, and I'll follow."

Luna suspected very few people had heard that phrase from Draco Malfoy's mouth; the amount of trust behind those words was quite enlightening. Turning her focus to the task at hand, she looked around for a nice place to begin their hike. She spotted a small patch of pretty blue flowers growing at the base of one of the trees near the edge of the forest. The shade of blue reminded her of her nail varnish. "Let's start over here," she said, tugging his hand and guiding him into the forest.

Something told her they were about to find what they were looking for ... in more ways than one.

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Draco was pleased with how the evening was playing out so thus far. Luna appeared to be having a grand time, which was of paramount importance. Although they had been walking for much longer than he had anticipated, he was surprised to find that he was actually enjoying the evening, as well.

He walked along, listening to Luna discuss the migration patterns of the ever-elusive Grifflerback Snorflunk. Though he was loath to admit it, the nonexistent creature was fascinating, and he found himself mesmerised by her breadth of knowledge on the subject.

The best part, however, of their little jaunt through the forest was the feel of Luna's hand in his. Her skin was warm and soft, and Draco liked how her long fingers twined with his in a perfect fit. He glanced at her surreptitiously. She looked lovely in lavender. He wondered if she knew that the peacock had represented the Malfoy family since the Middle Ages. It was as if she had marked herself as *his*. Feelings of possessiveness and satisfaction overwhelmed him, but he quickly pushed them away. She was not his ... would *never* be his ... a fact he had to remember. His chest tightened.

Damned indigestion.

He rubbed at his sternum until the tightness eased a bit. His mind, however, could not be eased so quickly. Something was telling him that he was in over his head, that this was bound to turn out badly for one, if not both, of them. His lips thinned into a grim line. No. That would not happen; everything would go according to The Plan. In any event, it was too late now. The Plan had already been set into motion, and he was determined to see it through to the end. Luna would have her pick of suitors...he rubbed the already tender spot on his chest again...and he would have the wife and family he wanted. He would make the Malfoy name something to be proud of again. Once that was done, he could easily deal with any possible repercussions. Everything was going to work out perfectly...he would see to that.

"... and oftentimes they will have travelled over 300 kilometres in a single season. I know that doesn't sound like all that much, but considering how short their legs are, it's really quite impressive! Oh, I do hope we'll get to see the herd. They're simply lovely creatures, and if you hear one calling to its mate, you're certain never to forget it. Have you heard one before? Of course you haven't; you've never seen one. They make quite the distinctive noise ... like this: WACKAWOO! WACKAWOO!" she cried loudly, startling Draco and causing him to trip over the uneven ground.

Draco managed to steady himself and chuckled under his breath as she prattled on, oblivious to his misstep.

"I've only seen them once, but an unusually bushy tree was obstructing my view, so I only caught a glimpse. I don't know what kind of tree it was, but it had the most unusual leaves I've ever seen .... Oh, dear!" Luna suddenly exclaimed before bringing them both to an abrupt stop. "You're limping...are you all right?"

Draco frowned. He had been so caught up in what Luna had been saying that he hadn't noticed he was favouring one leg. "I must have twisted my ankle."

He looked around and saw a fallen tree a few metres from where they were standing. He hobbled over and sat down, quickly removing his boot and sock. His ankle was an angry red and already beginning to swell.

"Ouch," Luna said sympathetically as she came to stand in front of him, the grass and leaves crunching beneath her feet.

"Lucky for me, I'm a wizard," Draco said. After a quick healing spell, he was almost as good as new. "Did you bring the extra phial of Headache Relieving Potion?"

Luna nodded and rummaged around in her bag, her eyes unfocussed as she felt around for the small phial. "Do you have a headache, then?"

"No, but if used topically ..."

"... it works as a pain-relieving agent!" Luna finished as she produced the phial from her bag.

Draco smiled and nodded, dipping his finger in the potion and rubbing it over the exposed skin of his ankle. He was surprised to hear Luna inhale sympathetically as he touched the bruised flesh; or perhaps she had a foot fetish? He suppressed a groan. *I would certainly love to find out*

He immediately chastised himself. He could not allow his thoughts to wander down that path; that way lay nothing but heartache and pain for Luna, and he would not do that to her. It would be all too easy to throw caution to the wind and seduce her into his bed. In his mind's eye, he purposely envisioned a heartbroken Luna and then imagined his own guilt at being the source of her pain. He would not let that happen, no matter how tempting she might be. Strengthening his resolve, he replaced his sock and boot and then looked up at her.

At least he would get to kiss her again...he had quite enjoyed that. His eyes drifted to her mouth, and he recalled the feel of it beneath his own, how pliant her lips had been, how warm and accepting ... just as she was. Vaguely, he wondered what other parts of her might be warm and accepting ....

Damn. It was going to be more difficult than he'd thought.

He sighed and rose to his feet. After a moment's hesitation, he reached out to retake Luna's hand.

"Everything all right?" she asked.

"Absolutely."

---

Luna was having a fabulous time. It was unlikely that they would actually find the herd...they were notoriously shy creatures, which was why they had never been photographed...but that Draco had chosen to make an attempt at locating them for their first date meant more to her than any fancy dinner ever could. That, in fact, had been what she'd fully expected from him: an expensive meal in a trendy little bistro in an exotic location...Paris, perhaps. She would have been fine with that, but she had certainly never imagined Draco taking her to dinner at McDonald's and then hiking through the forest, looking for mythological creatures.

Her cheeks ached from her constant smile, but she couldn't stop; the ache was worth every lovely moment she spent in Draco's company. Surely, he must have already been harbouring some sort of affection for her if he had been willing to do all this just for her.

She sneaked a peek at him out of the corner of her eye. He'd been such a gentleman as they hiked through the forest, never once releasing her hand, the only exception being when he had needed to heal his ankle. He claimed it was because he did not want to her to trip, but Luna was certain that it had more to do with how much he liked the feel of her hand in his.

She liked it, too.

Luna was broken from her reverie when Draco squeezed her hand lightly, drawing her attention. "Is it much farther?" he asked. "We've been walking for some time, and the sun will set in another hour or so. Perhaps you should Apparate us to ...." He trailed off at the horrified expression on her face. "What is it?"

"Even if I knew their location, we couldn't Apparate there...it might cause them to stampede!"

Draco shook his head lightly. "Wait a moment. What do you mean...if you knew their location? You don't know where they are?"

Luna stared at him, puzzled. "No. Don't you remember? They're migratory animals...they could be anywhere in the area ... or not at all."

He froze, bringing them both to an abrupt halt. "What you're saying is that we've been wandering about the forest for the better part of two hours, with no clear destination in mind, on the off-chance that we might *possibly* come across a herd of mythological creatures?"

"Precisely!" she replied, pleased that he was so clever, and then patiently waited for his reaction.

She wondered if he would be angry; she couldn't remember a time when Draco had "wandered" anywhere. Everything he did was planned and thought out to an exacting standard; he preferred things neat and tidy. There was no meandering from his determined path; he always went directly from Point A to Point B.

In fact, now that she thought it over, he was probably already miserable, and knowing that they had no set destination was all but certain to drive him insane. The thought saddened her.

She watched as his lips began to twitch and his body grew rigid. If not for the warmth in his silvery-grey eyes, she might have worried that he was about to lose his temper. Instead, she rather thought he seemed...

He exploded in laughter.

...amused.

Luna smiled.

---

His loud guffaws echoed through the forest as he bent over at the waist, his hands on his knees. She had him on some wild goose chase, randomly walking about and...and he was *enjoying it*. Who but Luna Lovegood could accomplish such a thing?

Draco wiped at his eyes with his palms. Merlin, he hadn't laughed so hard in ages. She probably thought he was a lunatic.

The absurdity of that thought almost sent him over the edge again, but he somehow was able to rein in his emotions. He eventually managed to get his laughter under control, but he couldn't erase the grin from his face.

"Well," he said once he could finally speak again, "I don't see any reason to stop now. We might as well continue on until the sun goes down...there's always a chance we could come across the herd."

Rather than the happy smile he had expected, her brow furrowed, and she looked at him with serious eyes. "Do you really want to keep going? Perhaps we should go home."

The smile that had been hovering about his lips disappeared, and he frowned. Without thinking, he reached out and brushed a lock of her hair from her forehead. "I thought you were having fun."

"I am!" she said, taking a step toward him, her expression earnest. She laid a hand on his arm. "I'm having a wonderful time."

"But you want to go home." He cringed at his petulant tone, but he was confused and, though he would never admit it, a bit hurt, as well. He had tried his damndest to make their date something she would enjoy, and despite his reticence, he'd thought he had succeeded. Obviously he had not.

Where had he gone wrong? The restaurant was her favourite, and her father had assured him that hunting for the herd of Grifflback Snorflunks would be perfect. That only left one detail...him. Perhaps he was the problem. Did she not enjoy his company? Why the hell not?

"I don't want to go home, Draco," she assured him softly, interrupting his descent into further petulance. "It's only that I know this isn't the sort of thing you like. I'm very appreciative that you went to so much effort to ensure that I had a lovely first date...and it *has* been so very lovely...but it's not fun for me, if you're not having fun, too. If you'd rather we go home, I'll understand."

Draco's ire vanished in an instant, and that uncomfortable tightness returned to his chest. She was worried that *he* wasn't enjoying *her* company. Once again, he acted without thinking and took her hands in his. He stepped closer, until they were a hairsbreadth apart, and then looked directly into her eyes; he wanted to be certain that she heard the sincerity and truth behind what he was about to say.

"Luna," he said, "I am having the most fun on a date that I've ever had."

"Really?" she whispered.

"Really." It was true. Most of his previous dates...if one-offs could be referred to as such...had been focussed on making sure the evening ended with the witch in his bed. They had been more calculated than fun. "I like being with you."

"Oh." She seemed happy with that revelation.

Draco, on the other hand, was confused. He hadn't meant to say that. Uncomfortable and a bit embarrassed, he stepped back and cleared his throat, releasing one of her hands. Jerking his head in the direction they had been heading, he said, "Shall we continue on, then?"

Luna smiled in that dreamy way of hers and nodded.

He squeezed her hand, and they resumed their hike.

"Did my father say if he thought the herd was in the area?" Luna asked after a few minutes of walking in silence.

"Ah, no, he didn't."

"Oh."

"Your father is a fascinating wizard. I enjoyed speaking with him this afternoon."

"Really?" she asked, her grey eyes filled with hope and scepticism.

"Yes, I did. It surprised me, given his ... ah ... reputation."

"You mean that he's crazy as a loon?"

Draco attempted to cover his amusement at her candidness with a cough. "I was thinking more along the lines of eccentric."

"A nice way of saying he's one Quaffle short of a Quidditch pitch."

This time he laughed out loud. "Yes, I suppose so."

Luna patted his forearm with her free hand. "It's all right, Draco. I'm not at all offended. I am well aware that the rest of the wizarding world considers my family an oddity. From what my father says, that's been the case since he and my mother first married. We're quite accustomed to the comments and sniggers by now. It doesn't bother us."

Draco wondered if that could possibly be true. Did she really not care what people said behind her back ... or worse, to her face? It was a sang-froid that Draco envied.

She was such a fascinating witch. What was it about her that made her so content with life, with herself? He found that he was drawn to her more and more with each passing second ... which was definitely going to lead to nothing but trouble. Still, he had to wonder how it was that so many people found it easy to dismiss her as nothing more than "Loony Luna."

With that in mind, he said, "I wonder why is it that no wizard has been smart enough to ask you on a date...present company excluded, course."

Luna laughed loudly. "You're very funny."

"Thank you," he replied, turning his head to wink at her, "but I wasn't trying to be funny."

"Yes, I know."

They walked in silence, the only sounds those of the forest, while Luna seemed to contemplate his question. "I see the world a bit differently than everyone else, and most people feel uncomfortable when they drift too far from what's considered normal."

She paused as Draco helped her over a fallen log in their path. She thanked him and then continued. "To be fair, I never really had much of an interest in wizards...present company excluded, of course." She smiled, visibly pleased with how she had been able to turn his words back at him.

Shocked, Draco once again ceased walking, whilst Luna continued moving forward until their arms stretched to the point that she had to stop. She turned to face him, her expression quizzical.

He had been caught completely off-guard. His mouth opened, as if to speak, but then he snapped his jaw shut. Had she known that he had been aware of her crush?

The question must have been written on his face, because she laughed and said, "Of course, I knew that you were aware of my feelings for you. I never tried to hide them."

Gobsmacked, Draco didn't know what to say. All this time, he'd thought she'd been attempting to hide her feelings from him, like any normal, ordinary witch in her circumstances would have done. He'd completely left out of the equation that Luna was no ordinary witch. When would he learn to stop painting her with the same brush as he did everyone else?

Acting once again on impulse...something he rarely had done before that evening...he asked, "Why didn't you say something before?"

This time it was *she* who squeezed *his* fingers. "It wasn't the right time. Now, it is."

"I see." He didn't see, actually. He didn't understand her at all. The right time for what?

"What about you?" she asked, breaking his reverie.

"Hmm?"

"How is it that no witch has been able to capture your attention? I know loads of witches have tried, too. I've seen them," she stated.

Draco felt his cheeks turn pink. He cleared his throat uncomfortably and decided to be honest. "Well, I wasn't looking for anything more than a bit of fun."

She turned her head to look at him, her eyes wide. "And now you want something more?"

He choked back a laugh. Merlin's beard, she was direct. "Yes."

"What sort of witch *would* be able to capture your attention?" she asked, her gaze never leaving his face.

He could lose himself in those silvery-blue pools. Her eyes were warm and tender, and as he stared into them, the truth spilled from between his lips. "Someone who sees the real me."

Good gods. He couldn't believe he'd said that. He was an utter fool. But Luna merely nodded, causing Draco to scoff.

"What is it?" she asked.

Once again, he spewed out the truth. Later, he would swear the witch was akin to Veritaserum.

"How can I expect someone else to know the real me if I don't?"

She looked at him quizzically.

"I'm not who I was five years ago, Luna. For Merlin's sake, I'm not who I was two months ago. How can I expect a witch to see me for who I really am, if I don't even know who I really am?"

Most witches would have attempted to soothe him with meaningless trivialities and a few tender kisses...but once again Luna was about to prove that she was not most witches.

"That's true, Draco. You're not the same spoiled, selfish little prat you were as a child, and you aren't the rakish playboy out seeking his own pleasure with no thoughts to the future that you've been in recent years, either."

She turned to face him fully. "That being said, I don't think it's impossible for someone to know the real you...because I do. I know you, and you're a better man than you believe you are."

He didn't know what to say. So he pulled her into his arms and hugged her. She didn't say anything but merely wrapped her arms around his waist and allowed him to find solace in her embrace.

It seemed she really did know something about him, after all.

"Oh, look, Draco!" Luna said, after a long while, her voice a low whisper. "Up in the trees ... mistletoe."

He leant back a bit and waggled his eyebrows. "I believe that tradition only holds up at Christmas, pet. But if you want to kiss me, you only have to ask."

Luna laughed and slapped his arm lightly, though he noticed how her breath hitched. "Not that. I just wanted to warn you to be careful of Nargles. They are attracted by mistletoe, so they may be living in some of the plants in the trees. The Headache Relieving Potion you used on your ankle contains a miniscule amount of mistletoe, but it might be enough to draw their attention. Please, watch out of for them...I don't want to have to take you home with an infestation."

Draco blinked. She seemed very sincere. "All right, I'll be careful, but tell me one thing."

She nodded earnestly.

"What the bloody hell is a Nargle?"

This time it was his breath that hitched as Luna smiled at him beatifically.

Merlin's beard. She was beautiful.

"I've been warning people about Nargles for years, and until now, no one has bothered to ask what they are," she explained happily.

Draco was irate. What was wrong with people? Could no one see in her what he did? Apparently not, and it did not set well with him. "Well, I am asking. What are they?"

"Very small, tiny little birds with unfortunately sharp beaks. They infest mistletoe, and live sort of like a swarm of bees in a hive. They like to collect shiny objects and take them back to their nests. When threatened, they attack all together, just like bees but with a much more painful sting. I would hate for them to attack you," she said earnestly. "I designed an anti-Nargle charm for just such an occasion as this. Would you mind if I used it?"

Draco wasn't certain about the existence of Nargles, but he trusted Luna's Charms skills and knew she would never hurt him. "Please, go right ahead."

She nodded, taking his trust in her quite seriously, and pulled her wand out from behind her ear.

Draco felt his lips twitch in amusement.

She took a few steps away from him, apparently needing a bit of wand room. She waved the slender piece of carved oak in an intricate pattern in front of him and spoke the incantation. "*Narglessus Repello*."

A dark blue light burst from her wand and enveloped him in a cloud, quickly fading to a lighter blue, and then white before it disappeared.

"There. All finished. Thank you. I feel much better knowing you're protected," she stated, allowing him to lead her away from the area and back on the random trail they had been following.

"What about you?" Draco asked. "The charm didn't seem to affect you."

"Oh, I'm fine," she assured him. "I've been inoculated against Nargle infestations."

Draco did not wish to know what *that* entailed, so he quickly thought of a way to distract her. Another mistletoe plant growing in the lower branches of one of the approaching trees caught his eye.

"While we're on the subject of mistletoe," he began, "did you know that people used to believe that mistletoe grew spontaneously on trees from bird droppings?"

"Doesn't it?"

Draco looked at her incredulously. "You can't honestly believe..."

Luna's expression was completely innocent ... save for the sly gleam in her eyes.

He shook his head. "You had me for a moment with that one."

She laughed until he joined in.

"Let me finish, witch. Because they believed it grew from the droppings, the word mistletoe was derived from two words which mean 'dung' and 'twig.' So in essence, mistletoe means ...."

"Dung on a twig!" Luna exclaimed, then wrinkled her nose. "That's disgusting. I think I shall pretend I never heard that and concentrate solely on its purpose."

Draco grinned. "As a home for Nargle infestations?"

"No," she said as she linked the fingers of one hand with his. "I'm thinking of the more traditional purpose."

"Ah, I see," Draco said, matching the feigned gravity of her tone. They stopped walking, and pulled her into his arms. "You're a very direct witch, asking me to take such liberties."

Her eyes widened, and she opened her mouth to speak, but Draco shushed her. "There's nothing wrong with asking for what you want, Luna. Not with me. So please don't apologise."

She shook her head slowly. "I wasn't going to apologise."

Draco began to lower his head slowly towards hers, his eyes on her mouth. "No?"

"No. I was going to agree," she breathed, her eyes closing as she lifted her chin and raised her mouth to his.

"In that case, allow me." Their lips touched briefly, softly, and Draco suppressed a groan at even the slight contact. He pulled back to see if she was all right, smirking as her lips puckered, seeking his. He was more than willing to oblige her silent request. But then ....

"WACKAWOO!"

Luna's eyes popped open in surprised delight.

"WACKAWOO!"

"Draco, it's them! It's the herd!"

"WACKAWOO!"

"That's nice. Now where were we? Oh, yes." He was about to kiss her again when she wriggled out of his arms and hurried in the direction of the sound. He dropped his chin to his chest with a groan.

"WACKAWOO! WACKAWOO!"

"Come on, Draco. Don't you want to see them?" she called, tossing a glance over her shoulder.

Draco laughed then began to chase after her. "Hey, what about my kiss?"

Her laugh echoed back to him, and Draco grinned as he quickly gained on her.

"Do you have a mating call?" she teased breathlessly as she continued to run towards the sound of the herd.

He closed the distance and grabbed her arm, spinning her around and trapping her inside his embrace. "Absolutely," he said, slightly winded by the chase.

"You do?" she asked, her eyes sparkling with mirth as she tilted back her head just enough to meet his gaze.

"Mm-hmm." He closed his eyes and inhaled deeply; her hair smelled of spearmint, filling his senses with its pleasant and refreshing aroma.

"What is it?" she murmured softly as he leant in close, his mouth at her ear.

"Wackawoo," he breathed more than voiced, allowing the warm, moist air from his mouth to tickle the sensitive flesh behind her ear.

Luna giggled half-heartedly, and he could feel her heart pounding in her chest. Somewhere in the back of his mind he wondered if she could feel his pounding just as hard.

"Wackawoo," he muttered against her skin as he dragged his lips along her jaw line, until at last he reached her mouth. "Wackawoo," he whispered against her lips.

And then he kissed her.

The Gruffleback Snorflunks could be seen another day.

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*A/N: Another chapter. Can you believe it? I hope to get one more chapter out before I leave for Portus next week, but by now I know not to make any promises.*

*The Gruffleback Snorflunk is a product of my imagination. You might remember it from Enraptured, chapter seven.*

*Blibbering Humdingers and Nargles are both from the books, however, canon doesn't tell us much about them. According to canon, Nargles infest mistletoe, but that's all we are told. I took the liberty of making up the rest.*

*My unending gratitude to my wonderful beta readers, Subversa and DeeMichelle, and to my amazing Brit picker, LettyBird. I'd also like to thank GinnyW for listening to me whine and encouraging me (even though she would rather I be working on a different story right now), and Lady Rhian for reading this when I was feeling unsure about it. All of you are the best.*

## So Strangely Willing

A prophecy says Luna and Draco will one day fall in love. That was six years ago, and Luna is tired of waiting around. It's time to take matters into her own hands. Unfortunately, Draco has a plan of his own. First Place in Draconian Measures at the 2007 OWL Awards; Runner Up for Best Fluff in Round Three of the Quill to Parchment Awards.

*Disclaimer: JKR owns it all. I'm just having fun.*

Chapter Six

So Strangely Willing

*Two months later*

Draco glanced at the clock on his office wall. *Almost time for tea*, it read. He needed to finish his work soon if he wanted to be on time to meet Luna. Their schedules had kept them apart for much of the week, and so he was pushing himself to finish early so as not to miss afternoon tea with Luna and her father. It had been a long, hectic week at the office; he had remained after hours for the past four days, painstakingly going over equations and calculations until he had thought his eyes would shrivel up and fall out of their sockets. Ignoring the sense of anticipation he felt at knowing he would soon be in Luna's company, Draco returned to his work.

He had finally finished the last of his calculations when a lavender airplane came zooming into his office, landing on the surface of his desk with a sputter. He smirked, knowing the memo was from Luna; they had been exchanging notes at work all week since they had not been able to communicate in person. He picked up the plane and carefully unfolded it.

*Draco,*

*I'm afraid I will be delayed for tea. I've reached a critical point in my research regarding the Charm I was telling you about last week, and I cannot possibly leave until I try one more thing. It won't take long, but please, go on to the house without me. Oh, and please tell Daddy that I will be a few minutes late and not to worry.*

*I've missed you this week, but now I have an entire bin of lovely lavender airplanes. It's really quite wonderful.*

*Luna*

Disappointment washed over him; he'd been looking forward to seeing her. He had wanted to discuss her project with her, to run a few equations by her...her mind worked in ways his did not, which had been helpful on more than a few occasions. He had wanted to hold her and perhaps sneak in a kiss or two ... or three.

Grimacing in disgust...he was turning into quite the sap!...he grabbed a piece of parchment, quickly scribbled a reply, and then sent it flying toward her office on level three.

He stood behind his desk, watching until the airplane zoomed out of sight. So now, he was to go to tea without her. Sulking, he threw himself into his chair. All right, so she would just be a little late. Still, it rankled a bit that she would throw him over for some project. He sighed and ran his fingers through his hair. He knew that her work was important to her, and obviously, her job had to come first. He couldn't truly begrudge her that, especially given that his own hectic schedule was the reason they had spent so little time together that week.

He waved his wand, sending parchments to their proper files, and then leant his head against the back of his chair. He stared blankly at the ceiling for a few minutes, allowing his mind to decompress. Inevitably, his mind turned to The Plan.

It was working rather spectacularly, all things considered. The *Daily Prophet* had been speculating for months about his conspicuous absence from the wizarding hotspots he had once frequented. Headlines had pondered his drastic change of habit, and now they believed they knew the reason why. The weekend after their first date, Draco had taken Luna to visit the British National Wizarding Museum in Kensington. The *Prophet's* headline the following day had said it all: *Malfoy Heir Off the Market! Is It Love At Last?*

Draco snorted. One very public date had been all it had taken. The press had gone wild, following both him and Luna in an attempt to confirm that the two were in a relationship. Draco had allowed it go on for a few weeks...Luna had appeared blissfully oblivious to all the attention...until he had decided the timing was right. He had released a statement, with Luna's approval, that confirmed they were indeed in a mutually exclusive relationship and requested that their privacy be respected.

Soon after, the public's fascination with them had dwindled, thanks in part to the revelation of Pansy Parkinson's secret affair with Ron Weasley. Both had explosive temperaments, and it showed in the number of break-ups and reconciliations the two had managed to have over the course of their brief relationship. The press found the volatile pair much more interesting than the quiet, stable relationship between the loony daughter of their so-called rival paper and the newly reformed pure-blood heir.

Still, it had been enough. Over the past several weeks, Draco had overheard several conversations about his transformation from playboy to dutiful boyfriend, pleasing him to no end. Witches flirted with him more now than ever before, their interest only increasing when he would politely excuse himself to find his date; witches obviously found a faithful wizard appealing. He found it strange, then, the number of times he had been slipped a piece of parchment with a name and Floo address.

Yes, The Plan was working beautifully. Why, then, did each passing day feel like another step toward his impending doom?

He grimaced; it was obvious that he was feeling anxious because the end of The Plan was in sight, and he knew that he would keenly feel Luna's absence in his life when he ended things with her. But then that was only to be expected...after all, over the past few months they'd spent almost every free moment together.

During the week, they typically stayed at Grimmauld Place. They would have dinner together; it was just the two of them now that Neville was gone. After, they would share the washing up and then retire to the drawing room. Since Neville had taken his piano to his new flat, Draco had purchased a replacement. Luna would listen to him play whilst she read, or occasionally, he would teach her to play a simple melody. He enjoyed those times the most...the quiet evenings with just the two of them and no one else.

On the weekends, however, he had taken to planning evenings out, specifically tailored to Luna's tastes. Once they had gone to a Muggle amusement park. Draco shuddered; he would never forget that day as long as he lived. Luna, clever witch that she was, had quickly realised what he was doing and had insisted that they do things they both could enjoy together. Draco had been surprised that their likes and dislikes had been so compatible. They both enjoyed debating the latest research in their fields, they were both avid readers, and they both loved music. Finding things they both could enjoy had not been as difficult, then, as he had anticipated. They frequented museums and art galleries, had once gone to the Bodleian Library at Oxford, even taken in a Muggle movie. That wasn't to say that they didn't do the occasional ... *odd* activity, but even those times were entertaining.

With Luna, life was never dull.

Most importantly, she'd taught him a thing or two about being in a real relationship. For all the "firsts" he was for her...first kiss, first date, first relationship...she was, for all intents and purposes, his first girlfriend ... even if it was all a ruse. Of course, she didn't know that, but he certainly did. It didn't seem to matter, however; he was learning quite a lot from Luna about life and love, and he found himself soaking it up like a sponge.

He truly enjoyed the time he spent with her. He had never had an ongoing relationship with a witch, and he was surprised by how much he liked it. In fact, if marriage were

at all similar, he rather thought he would enjoy it, too.

He frowned. But marriage would not be like this. A proper pure-blood wife would never laugh and play as Luna did. Once married, he would never again have a picnic on the floor of the drawing room because it was raining, only to go splash in the mud puddles when the storm had passed; nor would he ever again discuss the benefits of Nargle inoculations or go searching for Grifflerback Snorflunks. Which was a shame...he had enjoyed hiking through the forest, laughing and stealing kisses .... He would miss it. He would miss *her*.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, alarm bells were sounding furiously, but Draco was steadfastly ignoring them.

He was becoming accustomed to her presence in his life, and that was all. He was certain that he would recover quickly enough once a more suitable witch was on his arm. His stomach churned at the thought, and then he shifted in his seat, his brow furrowing. But what about Luna? She had no sense of self-preservation and had welcomed him into her life with open arms. And what about her father? The wizard had exuberantly received Draco into his home and treated him like family, thrilled that his daughter had found someone who had looked past her eccentricities to see the intelligent, kind, witty woman beneath the surface.

Guilt was not an emotion that Draco was particularly accustomed to, so he did not immediately recognise the uncomfortable feeling, registering only the churning, burning sensation in his stomach. It was becoming more and more unlikely that someone would not be hurt...significantly so...when The Plan came to full fruition. Luna and her father did not have the same knowledge that he had; Draco knew that the situation was only temporary, and therefore, it had been somewhat easy...although more difficult than he had imagined...to keep himself from growing too attached to the odd little family. Luna and her father did not have that luxury.

Draco scowled at the little voice in the back of his mind taunting him, whispering that it was too late, that he was already more attached...especially *to her*...than he would allow himself to believe.

Ruthlessly, he pushed the thoughts aside, ignoring the pang he felt at the knowledge that his time with Luna was quickly coming to a close. He had no intention of dragging things out any longer than necessary; every moment he spent with Luna increased the amount of pain she would feel when he ended their romantic involvement.

"Enough!" he snarled between clenched teeth, rising to his feet and stalking to the door, grabbing his cloak as he left his office. What was done was done. He would deal with the consequences later.

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Draco passed through the broken down gate and walked up the winding path toward the cylindrical house. He smirked as he passed the sign encouraging him to pick his own mistletoe. He'd asked Luna on their first visit to her childhood home why her father cultivated the plant...didn't it attract Nargles? Luna had informed him that this was a special variety, grown by her father to be Nargle-resistant. Draco had pulled her into his arms and asked if it was tradition-resistant, as well. Judging by the scorching kiss she'd given him, the answer was a resounding no.

Anxious to see her, even though he knew she could not have yet arrived...and denying that it was anything more than just a desire to garner another kiss...he lengthened his strides until he reached the door. He was about to knock when the door was flung open, and he was greeted by a jovial Xenophilus Lovegood.

"Ah, Draco, my boy. Come in, come in," the wizard said, ushering Draco inside. He peeked out of the doorway. "Where is Luna? Is she not with you?"

Draco crossed the threshold into the circular kitchen and unclasped his cloak, folding it over one arm as he entered the brightly coloured kitchen. "No, sir. She said she would be delayed a few minutes, but she should arrive momentarily. She had some work she wished to complete."

"Ah, I see," Xenophilus muttered. He appeared anxious for a moment before his expression cleared. "Here, here, let me take your cloak. Did you see the gnomes in the garden? Mrs Weasley brought them over yesterday. Absolutely delightful creatures...I cannot wait to study them! Tea is on the table upstairs; go on up and settle in by the fire...it's terribly chilly out there. Wouldn't want you to catch a sniffle."

Xenophilus followed him upstairs to the cluttered living room, tossing Draco's expensive cloak over a well worn chair. Draco winced at the careless handling of the fine material but held his tongue. Material goods held little significance to the Lovegoods, something he found both admirable and perplexing.

They sat down, the table having already been set for tea, and settled into the now familiar routine, despite a certain witch's rather conspicuous absence. Draco had been surprised at how quickly he had felt at home in the odd little home near Ottery St Catchpole. He had been wary of the tall, oddly shaped house with its wild tangle of a front garden on his first visit two months prior, but now it represented to him all things Luna: unusual, quirky, but filled with delightful surprises and smartly organised...if one knew the system.

The two men talked as they sipped their tea, eating a fair few biscuits, as well. They chatted amiably for some time and were deeply entrenched in a conversation about Xenophilus' upcoming excursion to Sweden...his third attempt to search for the Crumple-Horned Snorkack...when Draco caught sight of the clock.

"Luna is quite late," he said, frowning at the bottom of his now empty teacup. "I hope everything is all right at the Ministry."

Xenophilus stiffened, then fidgeted in his seat, his eyes widening at Draco's comment.

*Curious*, Draco thought. He had noticed over time that Luna never mentioned her work at the Ministry in front of her father. He had assumed that Xenophilus had wanted his daughter to join him in running *The Quibbler* on a full-time basis, rather than as merely an occasional contributor. Now, he wondered if that were the case, or if it was something deeper that caused the usually open witch to keep such an important part of her life from the father she adored.

With a trembling hand, Xenophilus poured them both another cuppa. He settled into his chair and attempted to look at ease ... however, his overly exaggerated expression of nonchalance said otherwise.

"You don't like Luna's work at the Ministry, do you?"

The older wizard's lips thinned into a grim line. His good eye shifted from side to side as he considered his answer. After several moments, he said quietly but firmly, "No, I do not."

"If you don't mind my asking, sir, why is that? She does exceptional work, and is well-respected by her peers." Draco ran a finger along the edge of his saucer, debating about whether or not to pose his next question before charging ahead. "Would you rather she worked with you...here at *The Quibbler*?"

Xenophilus stood, clearly agitated, his arm slicing through the air in dismissal as he began to pace about the room, effortlessly dodging piles of books and other knick knackery scattered about the floor. "Nonsense. I want whatever my Luna wants. Her position makes her happy, and I am happy for her, despite what she believes." He ceased his pacing and muttered under his breath, almost as if to himself, "Even if it kills me to think of what could happen."

Draco was confused. Did Xenophilus have some sort of grudge against the Ministry? If so, it would not be wholly surprising; Draco could well imagine the Ministry turning away one of Xenophilus' hypotheses on the benefits of Gnome saliva or some such thing, and the wizard was quite dogmatic when it came to his beliefs ... even if some were utterly unbelievable.

Xenophilus moved to the window, visibly agitated, his hands clenched at his sides as he stared down the wild array of plants below. "Has Luna spoken of her mother?"

"Only a little. She said she was a beautiful and talented witch and that she somewhat resembles her. She misses her."

"As do I, dear boy. As do I," Xenophilus whispered. Then he turned to face Draco, clasping his hands behind his back as he resumed his pacing.

The older wizard made his way the other side of the room and another window. "Solange was my love, my life. We met at Hogwarts, you know, though we were in different houses. She was quite beautiful, much like my Luna." He turned around and moved back across the room to the fireplace. "Would you like to see her portrait?" he asked as he lifted a small oval-shaped object from the back of the mantle and handed it to Draco before resuming his seat at the table.

Carefully holding the portrait in his hands, Draco studied the image of the woman who had been Xenophilius' wife and Luna's mother. Beautiful had been an understatement...she was an angel. Although it was a magical portrait, she did not move, save for the blinking of her eyes and a short nod of acknowledgement.

Solange Lovegood did look very much like her daughter, but her eyes were intensely focussed and one corner of her mouth lifted in a sly smile; quite different from Luna's usual wistful expression. Long, golden blonde hair fell in cascades down her back, almost to her hips, the same way Luna had worn her hair when at Hogwarts. She wore a set of deep green robes with bronze-coloured piping that were obviously tailor-made and very expensive. Unlike her rather bohemian husband and daughter, she exuded confidence, poise, and wealth. Eerily, she reminded Draco of his mother and her gaggle of friends who had come round for tea every now and then. This woman had definitely been a member of the pure-blood aristocracy. Who was she? And how had she come to marry someone so obviously ill-suited for her?

Draco glanced up at Xenophilius and then back at the portrait, his expression carefully schooled to conceal his amazement. Mrs Lovegood was not fooled; she lifted her chin defiantly and arched an eyebrow, as if daring him to say the thoughts crossing through his mind.

"I know what you're thinking," Xenophilius taunted, shaking a finger playfully in Draco's direction. "You're wondering just who this magnificent woman was and how did she end up with an old wally like me." He chortled loudly and asked, "What would you say if I told you it was *she* who chased after *me*?"

A quick peek at Mrs Lovegood, whose sly smile had widened, confirmed the man's statement.

"Oh yes, she was quite the spirited girl, my Solange. She decided she wanted me for her own and did not rest until it was so." Xenophilius reached for the portrait, his laughter diminishing. His eyes watered as he gently ran the tips of his fingers along the surface. "I miss you, my heart," he murmured lowly as he set the portrait on the table in front of him.

Draco caught sight of Mrs Lovegood's raised hand, as if she were reaching for the man who held her so tenderly in his hands. It was an intimate moment, and Draco felt a now familiar tightening of his chest at the devotion the man still held for his long departed wife.

"We married the day after we left Hogwarts, despite her family's wishes. I did not possess the proper pedigree, you see. Being a pure-blood wizard was not enough...I did not have the necessary connections, so they disowned her. Solange said she didn't mind, but I know it hurt her. She never saw her mother or father again."

Draco pondered what it must have been like for a young, aristocratic witch to have turned her back on her family and everything she had ever known, all for the sake of love. He decided Solange Lovegood must have been a Gryffindor to have had such courage; he knew he was not so brave.

Sniffing, Xenophilius pulled a purple and orange polka-dotted handkerchief from the sleeve of his robes and loudly blew his nose. "I didn't understand what she saw in me, but she insisted that she just knew ... we were meant for each other." He sighed. "She was right. She encouraged me to follow my dream and my heart, and so I did. With her in my life, I found it fairly easy to believe in the unbelievable. How could I not?"

Looking again at the portrait, Xenophilius continued, "Solange was my sun, Draco. My entire world revolved around her. Even her name ... it means angel of the sun. Isn't that lovely?"

Draco murmured his agreement.

"Yes," Xenophilius said, "and that is why we chose the name the Luna for our daughter. For the moon, you know. Together, they were my sun and moon. Fitting, yes? Solange told me just weeks before she died that we were expecting another little miracle...it's not often that pure-blood families are able to have more than one child, as you well know," he said, wagging his finger in Draco's direction. Pensive, he continued. "His name would have been Aster, and I would have held the sun, moon, and stars in my arms." He traced the edges of the portrait. "It was a lovely thought, but it wasn't meant to be."

"What happened, Xenophilius?" Draco asked when the wizard fell silent.

"She was an exceptionally talented witch, particularly at Charms. Luna takes after her in that regard." He appeared old beyond his years as he stood and returned to the window overlooking the front garden. "She had been working on a rather complicated experiment, out there in her garden, when something went wrong. She died instantly, and my poor Luna ... she was there."

"Dear Merlin," Draco murmured, aghast. Luna had witnessed her own mother's death; he could not imagine anything more horrifying.

Xenophilius nodded, his eyes focussed upon the landscape outside the window. "Horrible for a nine-year-old to witness, is it not? Now perhaps you understand why I remain concerned about Luna's choice of profession. I will not stand in her way, of course. She has great talent, and that should not be suppressed! Absolutely not! But I do worry, nonetheless."

Draco was worried, too. Luna was quite late now. While it was not unusual for her to be running a few minutes behind, she was meticulous about sending an owl or some other sort of message...once Draco had even received a message from her Patronus when she had been unable to get to an owl. Where was she?

Xenophilius returned to the table, and they continued with tea. The conversation turned to more mundane matters, and the time passed quickly, even though Draco was preoccupied by their earlier discussion.

He reflected upon the relationship between Luna's parents. On the surface, it should have never worked, but it had. And from what Draco had seen and heard that afternoon, neither had felt a moment's regret, even though she had given up her entire family and system of beliefs. Could that truly be possible? And if it were, what could that mean for him?

His reverie was broken when Xenophilius looked up and exclaimed, "Ah, here we are. She must have been further delayed." He stood to open the window, and the large brown owl flew inside, perching itself on the back of an armchair.

Xenophilius removed the message from the owl's leg, thanked it profusely and gave it a bit of a biscuit. The owl hooted in gratitude and then flew out of the window, heading back in the direction from whence it had come.

Draco watched as Xenophilius' one good eye quickly scanned the parchment. Without warning, the man paled and then swayed dangerously before his legs gave way and he collapsed to the floor.

Shocked, Draco swiftly moved to the shaking wizard's side and knelt down beside him. "What's happened? Is it Luna?"

With trembling hands, Xenophilius handed the parchment to Draco, who quickly began to read.

*Dear Mr Lovegood,*

*A Ministry employee has listed you as his or her emergency contact. We regret to inform you that the employee has been involved in an incident and has been transported to St Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries ....*

Draco didn't have to read any more. He dropped the parchment and hauled the other man to his feet before Apparating them directly to St Mungo's.

He had to get to Luna.



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*A/N: My thanks, as always, to my beta readers, Subversa and Deanna, and my Brit picker, LettyBird. A note of thanks to Potion Mistress for providing me with term "wally" for Xenophilus Lovegood.*

# Now I See

*Chapter 7 of 10*

A prophecy says Luna and Draco will one day fall in love. That was six years ago, and Luna is tired of waiting around. It's time to take matters into her own hands. Unfortunately, Draco has a plan of his own. First Place in Draconian Measures at the 2007 OWL Awards; Runner Up for Best Fluff in Round Three of the Quill to Parchment Awards.

*Disclaimer: JKR owns it all. I'm just having fun.*

Chapter Seven

Now I See

She was going to be ever so late.

"Drat, drat, drat," Luna muttered as she hurriedly signed the parchments that triumphantly declared her experiment a success. As soon as she signed the last one, they rolled up and disappeared with a *pop*, then reappeared on her supervisor's desk. A glance at the clock told her she was very, very late indeed; Luna hastily grabbed her cloak and rushed from her office.

As she hurried towards the lift, Luna smiled. She had been working on a new Charm for the past two months, but all of her experiments had failed time and time again. That afternoon, she had finally discovered the missing link in her research, and everything had fallen into place. A few trials had proved her theory correct. Tomorrow, the controlled experiments would begin, but Luna's part in the project was complete. She sighed wistfully as she stepped into the lift. The end of a project was almost as lovely as the start of a new one. It had been a very good day.

The lift was filled with people leaving early for the weekend, and Luna waved hello to a few co-workers. Several lavender airplanes floated above her head, and she smiled as they brought to mind the bin in her office that was filled with notes from Draco. She had missed his company terribly over the past week, which was why she had felt so dreadful about being late for tea, but it couldn't be helped; she'd had to finish or she would have spent the entire weekend focussing on the project, and she'd much rather spend her time focussing on Draco. And now she could!

She couldn't wait to share the news with him. They often discussed their ongoing projects with each other, and Luna knew Draco would be inordinately happy for her. The thought of his proud and pleased expression when she told him of her success warmed her from head to toe.

Or maybe it was just hot in the lift.

She hummed happily...*Heart and Soul*, of course, as it was 'their' song...ignoring the irritated looks of the others in the lift as she recalled the past few months with Draco. They were some of the best days she'd ever known, and she was excited for what the future would bring. Luna could tell that Draco was beginning to care for her...he showed it in dozens of ways every day. Like how he always left a blanket in the drawing room because he knew she was easily chilled, and how he made sure that her favourite foods were in the kitchen at all times. Then there were his kisses. Oh, she could swoon just thinking of his kisses. She never knew when the urge would strike him, not that she minded. She especially loved when he would come to stand behind her and press open-mouthed kisses to her neck, nibbling and sucking lightly while his fingers drew tiny circles on her hips ....

Luna waved her hand in front of her face; it was definitely hot in the lift.

Returning to her original train of thought, Luna knew that whilst she was aware of Draco's deepening feelings, she also knew ~~that~~ he was not...she knew because she fully expected that when he did realise that he cared for her more than he had anticipated, he was quite likely to have a complete strop.

Wouldn't that be lovely?

*Ding!*

Filled with eager anticipation, Luna dreamily followed the crowd of witches and wizards, moving along with the flow of people towards the Atrium where she could travel to her father's house by Floo. She could hardly wait to see Draco again. It felt like an eternity since she'd seen him and even longer since she'd kissed him. Perhaps they could sneak off for a bit of a snog in the garden ....

"Oh, pardon me," she said after she almost walked into a slower moving witch. Maybe she should pay more attention to where she was going. The Atrium was bustling with people, many waiting in line for the next available fireplace. It was Friday, after all, and it seemed that most of the Ministry's employees had decided to leave early in anticipation of the weekend.

Luna had just passed the Fountain of Magical Brethren when she saw a familiar bushy head of hair in the midst of the crowd. Smiling, she picked up her pace so that she could say a quick hello to her friend.

"Hermione!" she called out, carefully navigating her way through the maze of people.

When she finally caught up, Hermione turned to face her, and it was all Luna could do to refrain from gasping. Hermione's skin was the colour of fresh parchment, pasty and ashen, and her eyes were dull and red-rimmed. She looked utterly exhausted, as if she might fall asleep where she stood. What in the world was wrong with her?

"Hi."

Luna blinked. It had been years since Hermione had greeted her in such a lacklustre fashion. It was quite unsettling. "Are you all right?"

Hermione yawned, belatedly covering her mouth with the fingers of one hand, and then smiled sheepishly. "Yes, thanks. It's just been a very long week at the office. Lots of work, you know."

Luna was jostled by a wizard in deep purple robes who begged her pardon as he walked past. She gave him a fleeting glance and then returned her attention to Hermione. Tilting her head to one side, Luna studied Hermione's tired face and then nodded. "Yes, it has been. I've not seen Draco all week, and we live in the same house."

Smiling weakly, Hermione sluggishly continued on towards the fireplaces.

Luna quickly followed, her concern multiplied by Hermione's lack of response. "Are you certain that you're all right? Do you want me to go home with you, to be certain you arrive safely? You look dead on your feet."

Hermione's step faltered as she was bumped by a passing witch, but then she continued on towards the Floo. "I'll be fine. Truly. I just need some sleep, that's all."

"If you're certain." Luna's scepticism coloured her tone.

"Yes, thanks. I'll be fine..." She yawned widely. "I'll be fine once I get home and have a long rest."

"All right," Luna agreed reluctantly. Perhaps she would owl Severus later and voice her concerns; something was not right with her friend. "Floo call me later so I know you made it home. Please?"

Hermione nodded and reached out to grab a handful of Floo powder when her face lost what little colour it had left. She swayed dangerously, and Luna reached out to steady her.

"Hermione?"

"I'm fine. I ... I ...." Hermione's eyes rolled back in her head, her knees buckled, and she collapsed in a heap on the marble floor.

"Hermione!"

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The reception area at St Mungo's was crowded, as always. A long line of people snaked all the way around the room, beginning at the Inquiries desk and winding its way to the entrance. Witches and wizards with a variety of maladies sat in the long rows of rickety chairs as they waited for the Healers to speak with them about their conditions. The sounds of quills scratching against the Healers' parchments occasionally rose above the chatter.

Draco and Xenophilius had arrived at St Mungo's as quickly as Apparition would allow, only to be faced with the throng of people. Xenophilius balked at the long line and turned to Draco with troubled eyes.

Shaking his head stiffly, Draco's jaw clenched as he took in the chaos of the room. They didn't have time to wait in the queue; it would take too long, and they needed to reach Luna as soon as possible. Who knew how long the Ministry had waited to contact Xenophilius. The accident could have happened any time after she had sent Draco the note telling him she would be late for tea.

He wasn't about to waste a single minute by standing in line. The Malfoy family had been donating money to St Mungo's for four centuries; protocol could go to hell. He drew himself to full height, his lips curling into a cold, familiar sneer, and his grey eyes turning to ice. If ever there was a time to draw on the Malfoy name and reputation, this was it. His eyes searched the room, and he smiled grimly as he saw that the person he was looking for was indeed at her usual location. "I'll take care of this. Follow me."

Draco strode to the front of the queue, wishing he had his father's cane to move people aside as he all but dragged Xenophilius behind him. A chilling glare ceased the indignant gasps and whispers of those who had, in all likelihood, been waiting all afternoon. Draco stopped directly in front of the welcomewitch, making sure Xenophilius stayed out of the irritable woman's line of sight.

He was about to demand she tell him Luna's location when he paused a moment. If he played his hand right, they would get the information they needed; if he didn't, they would be sent to the back of the line and forced to wait. If it came to that, Draco was prepared to forgo the queue and personally search every floor, every ward, every room until he found Luna. However, it would be much faster to get the information from the welcomewitch. He wondered ....

Acting on instinct, Draco quickly re-evaluated his plan and adjusted accordingly. Taking a deep breath, he curved his mouth into his most disarming smile and gingerly sat on the corner of the Inquiries desk.

"Good afternoon, Belinda," he drawled.

The blonde-haired witch, who had been in the process of exasperatedly directing a man who had splinched himself to the fourth floor, turned her head, her cool blue eyes widening with recognition. She arched an eyebrow, her eyes flitting to the back of the queue and then returning to Draco.

He winked.

The witch blushed, her round cheeks turning a rosy pink, and she raised a hand to smooth her hair as she looked up at Draco through her heavily-mascaraed lashes.

Draco almost sighed in relief; his ploy had worked. *You truly can catch more flies with honey than vinegar*

"Good afternoon, Mr Malfoy. What a surprise to see you...I wasn't expecting you until tomorrow," the welcomewitch said coyly.

"Yes, I know. How are you, my dear? Working hard?"

Xenophilius released a choked whimper from behind him, but Draco ignored it; they needed Belinda's full cooperation to find Luna quickly, and Draco intended to have it. If chatting her up was what it took, then so be it.

The plump witch's lashes fluttered before she gazed up at Draco with an simpering smile. "Oh, no more than usual," she replied as she waved dismissively at the grumbling queue.

"And how is your daughter...Aurelia, isn't it?" Draco asked, mentally congratulating himself when he saw Belinda's eyes light up with pleasure at the mention. His weekly volunteer work and sneaky Slytherin skills...also known as eavesdropping...were proving their worth.

The woman's face flushed with her delight at his inquiry. "Oh! How did you ... erm ... yes! Aurelia is doing quite well, thank you. The baby was born last week, actually."

"I find it hard to believe that you are a grandmother, Belinda. You look much too young," Draco said smoothly as he reached for the witch's hand and pressed a kiss to her fingers.

She giggled and pressed her free hand to her pink cheeks. "Oh, Mr Malfoy, what a charmer you are!"

Those waiting in the queue were in awe as they watched the well-known wizard charm the notoriously prickly witch; they were so caught up in the welcomewitch's atypical behaviour that they merely stared in stunned silence.

Draco smirked even as the fingers of one hand curled into a fist, clenched, and released. "It seems quite busy today, my dear, and I don't wish to take you away from your very important work," he said, deciding he had sucked up enough to the easily-ruffled witch. "I have a small favour to ask."

"I see," Belinda said, schooling her features into a more professional expression. "How may I be of service?"

With a casual shrug, as if his request were of no real importance, he replied, "It pertains to a patient actually. She was brought in earlier today."

"Oh, dear. I hope it's nothing serious."

"I'm sure everything is fine," Draco replied, forcing his voice to remain even, "but I would like to see her and make sure she is well."

"Of course. What is the name of the patient?"

"Luna Lovegood."

Belinda checked her parchments, frowned, and then checked again. "I'm sorry, Mr Malfoy. No one by that name has been admitted."

That wasn't possible. She had to be there. "Are you certain?"

Those in the immediate vicinity gasped, and all eyes flew to the welcomewitch, waiting for her reaction.

She looked at Draco with sympathetic eyes and said, "You must be so worried. Let me check again."

The murmuring in the crowd intensified; had anyone else asked the witch that question they would have been skewered on a pole and served on a platter for dinner.

"No, she's not here. I'm sorry."

Draco's mouth thinned into a tight line; frustration began to build, but he forced himself to relax. "Hmm. How strange. The Ministry sent a letter saying that she had been brought in."

"Ah, now that's something quite different." She leant forward to whisper conspiratorially, "Only one patient has been admitted today from the Ministry. Third floor, room 314."

With a relieved smile, Draco stood from his perch on the desk. "Thank you, Belinda."

"You're quite welcome, dear." She winked at him and then turned away. The smile slid from her face, and her usual bored expression returned. "NEXT!"

Draco grabbed Xenophilius by the arm and hauled him to a set of double doors, pushing him through into a small corridor.

"Not very welcoming for a welcomewitch is she?" Xenophilius whispered, glancing back at the witch over his shoulder.

Draco considered the question rhetorical and instead thought about what the witch had said. His eyebrows drew together in confusion. "Did she say third floor?"

"Yes, yes," Xenophilius said absentmindedly as they opened the door to a narrow stairwell.

"That can't be right," Draco muttered as he took the stairs two at a time, no longer willing to wait for the older wizard in his haste to reach Luna. "The spell damage ward is on the fourth floor. If there had been a Charms accident, she would have been taken there," he called out, now half a flight ahead. He tried to block out the image of Luna lying in a hospital bed, helpless and alone ....

"What's on the third floor?" Xenophilius asked breathlessly, his eyes wide with fear as he doggedly followed Draco, rushing up the stairs as quickly as he could.

Draco paused, one foot resting on the next stair as he attempted to swallow the panic that was threatening to overtake him. "Potion and Plant Poisoning."

Xenophilius gasped. "Dear Merlin."

They raced up the stairs, doubling their efforts.

---

More than anything else, Luna hated hospital.

After witnessing the Charms accident that had taken her mother's life, she had been taken to St Mungo's. She had been distraught, unbearably so, but her expression had given no indication of the turmoil churning beneath the surface. Concerned by her apparent lack of response, the Healers had insisted that Luna stay overnight for observation so that they could be sure the magic that had killed her mother had not also affected her.

She did not recall much of that day, only her father's sad and worried face as he held her hand and pleaded with her not to leave him, too. When visiting hours were over, the Healers had forced her father to go home, leaving Luna alone, frightened, and grieving. For years after, she had suffered from nightmares, not only of her mother's death but of being left alone in a sterile, white hospital room.

Yet now, she was once again at St Mungo's, her expression blank as she stared at the closed door of the room opposite her chair. At the moment, however, there was no other place Luna would rather be in the entire world ... except perhaps inside Hermione's room rather than waiting in the hall whilst the Healer examined her.

She clasped her hands together, wringing them slightly in her lap, a handkerchief clutched between her palms. Her whitened knuckles were the only visible sign of her distress. Her father and Draco must have been terribly worried when she hadn't arrived for tea, but at least she had managed to activate the emergency contact charm before following Hermione and the mediowizards to St Mungo's. Hermione's charm had been triggered the moment she had lost consciousness within the Ministry's walls, and Severus had appeared at hospital within moments of their arrival.

Twisting the handkerchief, she closed her eyes and breathed deeply in an attempt to keep from crying. Her best friend, the woman whom she thought of as a sister, lay in a hospital bed, pale and unconscious, possibly poisoned. Luna took a small measure of comfort in the knowledge that her friend was not alone; Severus had refused to leave his wife's side for a single moment.

Luna sniffed...just once...and then the door finally opened, revealing a visibly harried young Healer and a scowling Severus Snape. He glowered at the Healer's back as she primly marched away; then he turned to Luna, his eyes softening.

"Hermione's condition does not appear to be the result of a potion or a poisoning, thank Merlin, but another Healer will be arriving shortly to verify the results of the examination," he said. He muttered something about incompetent upstarts under his breath before continuing. "She is resting comfortably. You may come and sit with her whilst we wait."

Luna nodded and rose to her feet, quietly entering the hospital room so as not to disturb Hermione's rest. Moving to the far side of the bed, she sat in the provided chair, her fingers reaching out to grasp Hermione's. Severus, meanwhile, shut the door and sat on the other side of the bed, entwining his fingers with his sleeping wife's. He leant forward and rested his head on her forearm, murmuring so lowly that Luna could not make out his words.

They were just settling in when a commotion came from down the hall. It sounded as if someone was running, their heavy footfalls echoing throughout the corridor. Severus lifted his head and scowled at the intrusion of noise. Curious, Luna stood and was about to step into the hall when the door to the room burst open, revealing a visibly panicked Draco, followed immediately by her frantic father.

Draco's crazed eyes looked to the bed and then to Luna. He shook his head, as though dazed, and then bellowed, "What the hell is going on?"

Luna was gobsmacked; she'd never seen Draco in such a state. After a worried glance at the thankfully still sleeping Hermione and a glaring Severus, she hurriedly made

her way around the bed and pushed her father and Draco out into the corridor, gently shutting the door behind her.

She turned to face the two men, taking in their appearance. Their robes were askew, their hair and eyes wild. They were breathing quickly, their chests heaving with the effort to pull oxygen into their deprived lungs.

Goodness. She had expected them to be upset, but this was far more than she had anticipated.

She opened her mouth to explain, but before she could utter a word, Draco lunged for her, his eyes wild as he pulled her to him. He dragged his hands over every part of her he could reach, his touch gentle but firm, checking for any sign of injury or harm.

Luna frowned slightly; she had often wished for Draco to touch her all over, but this wasn't quite what she had in mind.

As quickly as he had begun, he ceased, and then he embraced her, pressing his face into her neck as he trembled against her. Shocked by the severity of his distress, Luna threaded her fingers into his platinum hair, stroking his scalp in an attempt to offer some measure of comfort.

Not knowing what more to do, Luna looked over Draco's shoulder to her father, her expression puzzled.

"We thought it was you, poppet," Xenophilius whispered brokenly as he leant against the wall for support. "We thought it was you."

Luna's eyes widened in understanding. "Oh."

Draco's arms tightened around her waist, and she snuggled into his embrace, murmuring assurances as she continued to run her fingers through his hair. "It's all right. I'm fine. I'm fine."

---

It was chilly in the sterile corridor. In his haste to reach Luna, Draco had left his cloak behind, and since hospital regulations precluded the use of magic inside its walls by non-personnel, he could not cast a warming charm. Instead, his arms were wrapped around Luna, holding her tightly to his side as she shivered ever so slightly.

"Are you cold, love?" he asked, wincing as he heard the never-before-spoken endearment somehow slip from between his lips.

Luna, however, acted as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. "No," she said, even as she pressed herself closer against him.

Draco smiled and rested his chin atop her head, one hand gently travelling up and down her arm. He couldn't seem to stop touching her, and her responsiveness urged him to continue.

He had wanted to take Luna home as soon as Hermione had awakened, desiring nothing more than to curl up with her on the sofa in the drawing room and hold her, to assure himself that she truly was healthy and whole, which was a tad troubling, but there it was. Luna had resisted, however, calmly explaining that she did not want to leave until she was certain her friend would be all right. He had been about to insist that Severus could Floo call them with the results, but one look at Luna's tired yet pleading expression, and he'd given in with no resistance.

How bloody embarrassing.

He had obviously completely lost his mind. Not only had he given in to Luna's request after a mere look, but his earlier behaviour upon finding her safe and sound had been positively mortifying ... and disconcerting.

She was his friend, his *pretend* girlfriend...though she didn't know that...and nothing more. He should have been concerned, yes...worried, even. But the utter panic he had experienced? The need he felt to touch her, to keep her in his line of sight? Surely that was not *normal*!

He raked a hand through his already dishevelled hair and glared down at the top of Luna's head; it was all her fault.

"Are you all right?" she asked, her words muffled due to having her face burrowed into his chest.

"I'm fine."

"Are you certain? You seem tense."

Draco sighed and kissed the top of her head. "Merely uncomfortable after sitting so long in this chair, love."

Damn it. He'd said it again.

Just as he was convinced that he might need to make a stop at the Janus Thickey ward for an examination, the door to Hermione's room opened, and a kind-faced Healer walked out, a compassionate smile upon her lips, followed by an exhausted Severus.

"Thank you, Healer Pinkton. You have greatly eased my concerns," the wizard said, shaking the Healer's hand.

"You're quite welcome, Mr Snape. Good night."

As the Healer walked away, Severus turned to face Draco and Luna, who stood to their feet. He ran a weary hand over his face and said, "Hermione will be fine. The Healers have all agreed that her collapse was due to extreme exhaustion, exacerbated by the fact that she..." he paused, his jaw clenching in anger and frustration, "...neglected to eat today. Healer Pinkton has recommended Hermione stay overnight for observation."

"Thank goodness," Luna breathed, her hand squeezing Draco's forearm.

Severus nodded, then sank into one of the chairs.

"Are they going to move her to another floor?" Luna asked.

"No," Severus replied tiredly, one hand absently rubbing his stomach. "They've decided not to disturb her rest. She will remain here until she is released in the morning."

Draco's eyes flitted from Severus to Luna and back to Severus again. The man was in obvious need of sustenance...and Draco could use the distraction, as well as food. "You look like you could use a cup of strong tea and something to eat. Why don't we go up to the Visitor's Tearoom? I'm sure Luna will be happy to keep Hermione company for a few minutes."

Severus shook his head and was assuredly about to decline when Luna spoke. "I'd be more than happy to stay with Hermione. Go, Severus. I know you'll want to stay with her, and you've missed dinner. You'll need something to get you through the night."

Draco could have kissed her. "Yes, come on. I could use a little something myself."

"You will continue to pester me until I agree, won't you?" Severus said resignedly.

"You know me so well," Draco tossed back, a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.

Severus gave a long-suffering sigh. "Fine. The sooner we go, the sooner I can return." He stood and started walking down the hall, not bothering to wait for his former charge.

Draco winked at Luna and then brought his hand to lie against her cheek. He ran his thumb along her jaw line and then leaned down to press a brief but firm kiss upon her lips. "We'll be back soon, and please ... do try to stay out of trouble."

She smiled at him dreamily. "All right."

Draco watched as she slipped into Hermione's room...wanting already to kiss her again and cursing himself for feeling so...and then he quickly strode down the hall towards the stairwell.

"You're fast for an old wizard," Draco said as he caught up with his former Head of House and fell into step beside him.

Severus said nothing, merely sliding a brief but baleful glance in Draco's direction.

Draco smirked.

They climbed the stairs to the fifth floor, exited the stairwell, and then headed down to the hall to the Visitor's Tearoom. Within minutes, they were ensconced at small table with tea and sandwiches.

"So," Draco said after devouring his first sandwich, "are you going to make her quit?"

Severus arched an eyebrow and set his teacup on the saucer in front of him. "I beg your pardon?"

"Hermione. Are you going to make her quit the Ministry?"

Leaning back in his chair, Severus looked at Draco with amused eyes. "What makes you think that I could?"

Draco shrugged. "You're her husband. It's your right...your duty even. She's endangering herself by working there."

Severus sighed. "Whether or not Hermione chooses to return to her position at the Ministry is her decision. Believe it or not, I am aware of the ... difficulties she has faced. There are those in power who feel that the six months I spent in Azkaban were not nearly enough, and Hermione has borne the brunt of their ill-will. She felt she had something to prove, but of course, she has approached the situation in a very different manner than would you or I."

"Gryffindor," Draco said knowingly.

"Right in one," Severus said, raising his teacup in salute. "She's being stubborn and ridiculously stout-hearted, rather than cunning and sly."

"What will you do, then, if you're not going to forbid her to return?"

"The two of us will discuss the current happenings at the Ministry, as well as today's events. The ultimate decision, however, rests in Hermione's hands, so long as she promises to take better care of herself."

"You trust her to do that, even after today?" Draco asked, sceptical but intrigued by Severus' view of marriage; the willingness to discuss and compromise was vastly different from what he had witnessed in his parents' marriage.

Severus looked troubled, his gaze sliding to the table. "I must." He paused in contemplation. "Our marriage is based on love and trust and honesty...I have to believe that Hermione will not allow herself to dishonour that any more than she already has."

Draco's eyebrows lifted almost to his hairline. "You're angry with her," he said, realising that the man's calm demeanour had been belied by his words.

"Yes," Severus said between clenched teeth, his eyes still focussed on the table. "She endangered her health, kept from me the severity of her situation at her place of employment, and by omission, lied to me. The word 'infuriated' comes to mind. She and I will have much to discuss once she is feeling better." Severus pinched the bridge of his nose between his thumb and forefinger. "Let's not talk about this now, shall we?"

"Of course," Draco murmured then took a bite of his second sandwich.

After a few moments, he looked up to see Severus staring at him with a rather smug expression.

"What is it?" Draco asked as he looked down at his shirt, wondering if he had spilt his food or drink.

"Nothing of import," Severus replied, smugness still firmly in place. "I was merely recalling your rather dramatic entrance this afternoon."

Draco cringed. "Don't remind me."

"Come now, Draco," the older wizard drawled. "There's nothing to be ashamed of. Such behaviour was to be expected...you were merely concerned for the woman you care about."

Draco choked on his tea, coughing until Severus pounded him on his back. Waving the other man off, Draco shook his head in confusion. "What are you on about?" he rasped.

Severus sighed and briefly placed a patronising hand on Draco's shoulder. "There's no point in denying it...it's written all over your face."

Draco's hand flew to his face. What was written all over his face? "What the hell are you talking about?"

Severus arched an eyebrow. "Honestly, Draco. It's nothing to be embarrassed about. You obviously care for the girl, and she cares for you. This is a good thing."

Ah, well. That was no surprise, then. Draco had known for years that Luna had fancied him, so the idea that she cared for him was nothing new. She was his friend and for the time being, his pretend girlfriend, and he cared for her as such. Surely that was what Severus had noticed.

His relief at the explanation was expected, but it was surprisingly overshadowed by a longing so deep that he felt it in his very bones...for what, he did not know.

Slowly and carefully, without looking at his former Head of House, Draco said, "We are dating. It's only natural that we care for each other."

There was a long pause before Severus spoke again. "It is."

They continued to eat their small repast in silence, whilst Draco was lost in thought. He was on the cusp of a realisation...one that he somehow knew would either be his salvation or his damnation. His mind replayed his reaction to the message from the Ministry, finding Luna safe and unharmed, Severus' words regarding his marriage ....

*"Our marriage is based on love and trust and honesty."*

Draco frowned. His plan was all but complete. Ignoring the churning in his stomach...hospital food was not the most palatable, after all...he allowed himself to consider the

things on which his future marriage would be based. He didn't have to think long...his expectations for a proper marriage had been drilled into him from the moment he had first noticed the fairer sex.

Propriety, tradition, obligation, ambition.

The sort of marriage his parents had endured.

The sort of marriage that was expected of a Malfoy.

The sort of marriage that was expected of *him*.

It didn't matter if it was what he wanted or what he needed.

That was the marriage he would have.

Draco tossed the last of his sandwich onto his plate. Suddenly, he was no longer hungry.

And thinking was overrated.

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Luna was almost asleep on her feet when they returned to number twelve, Grimmauld Place. Draco gently led her to her room, opening the door and guiding her to her bed. She lay down, too tired to change into her nightclothes, and snuggled in as he removed her shoes then tucked the quilt about her shoulders.

As he placed a lock of blonde hair behind her ear, he bent down to kiss her. His instincts were screaming at him to stay with her, to lie with her, to simply hold her. Instead, he brushed her mouth with his and then backed away.

He had opened the door to leave the room when he heard Luna sigh sleepily and murmur the words he had never thought he would hear.

"I love you, Draco."

She rolled over, her breath evening as she fell asleep.

Draco's heart stilled within his chest; the realisation that had been hovering just beyond his grasp crashed down around him with all the grace and finesse of a raging Hippogriff.

And he knew.

He knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he loved her, too.

He loved the way she was always cold and how she would snuggle into him for warmth. He loved the way she looked at him, eyes wide with trust and affection. He loved how she listened to him talk about his work and that she asked his advice for her own. He loved how free he felt when he was with her and that he could make her laugh. He loved that she could so easily see past all his pretences to the man beneath the surface...the one even he wasn't sure he knew completely.

He even loved the annoying things about her. How her hair clogged up the drain in the shower and how she could never find her shoes, because she was hiding them from Blibbering Humdingers...whatever the hell they were. He loved her eccentric jewellery and bizarre fashion sense. Somehow even these annoyances were endearing ... because they were part of her.

Because he loved her.

And it was terrifying.

He ran from the room and down the stairs, escaping into the drawing room.

Shite. The piano.

He sprinted down the stairs...again...all the way to the little used formal dining room. There were no memories of her here.

He paced the room angrily. This wasn't supposed to happen...he had The Plan, damn it, and falling in love wasn't a part of it! It couldn't be possible. He had been preparing to end his faux-relationship with Luna so that he could find a wife suitable for a Malfoy.

For the first time, Draco was unable to ignore the ache in his chest. His heart hurt. At the mere thought of being without Luna, his heart hurt.

Even as he denied his feelings, he knew it to be true.

He loved her. Draco Malfoy had fallen in love with Loony Luna Lovegood.

And she thought herself in love with him.

He laughed, the harsh sound echoing in the small room. Luna was unaware to what lengths he had gone in his quest for a wife. She had no idea to whom she had so foolishly given her affections. He had used her for his own selfish gain, and she had stupidly fallen for his lies.

His worst nightmare had come true.

The Plan had gone all to hell.

He came to a halt and braced his arms against the drinks table. Closing his eyes, for a brief moment he allowed himself to entertain the idea of marriage to Luna. A marriage based on love and commitment ... given The Plan, he couldn't include trust and honesty. Even so, marriage to Luna would be all that he could ever dream of...one like that of the Weasleys, the Lupins, the Snapes, and even the Potters. And he wanted it. He wanted it like he'd never wanted anything in his entire life...but it would come at a high price.

It would mean that he would be giving up the very last thing that would have made his parents proud ... the very last vestige of what it meant to be a Malfoy. He had turned his back on everything else...the pure-blood supremacy mentality, the Dark magic, the following after evil megalomaniacs.

His heart ached with the knowledge that he couldn't do it. He couldn't give up the final piece that made him who he was. He had an obligation to his family, to his legacy. If he allowed himself to love her, he would lose himself in her ... and he simply could not do it.

He picked up a glass from the table and threw it into the fireplace, shattering it into a thousand pieces.

How fitting.

He returned to his room, packed his belongings into his old Hogwarts trunk, and did the only thing he knew to do.

He left.

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*A/N: My unending gratitude to Subversa and Deanna for beta reading and to LettyBird for Brit picking.*

*I apologize...again...for taking so long to update. I wanted the last scene in this chapter to be perfect, and it took me around ten attempts to get it right. Only two more chapters left. One should post in two weeks, and the other two weeks after that. Hopefully. Thank you so much for sticking with me!*

## The Way a Fool Would Do

*Chapter 8 of 10*

A prophecy says Luna and Draco will one day fall in love. That was six years ago, and Luna is tired of waiting around. It's time to take matters into her own hands. Unfortunately, Draco has a plan of his own. First Place in Draconian Measures at the 2007 OWL Awards; Runner Up for Best Fluff in Round Three of the Quill to Parchment Awards.

*Disclaimer: JKR owns it all. I'm just having fun.*

Chapter Eight

The Way a Fool Would Do

~o0o~

*Mr Neville Longbottom and Miss Susan Bones*

At home on Saturday the 3rd of November to celebrate their engagement

7pm

Black tie

RSVP, 9 Mill Street, Clapham, London

~o0o~

The bed and floor were covered in designer clothing—blouses, trousers, flowing skirts, casual dresses, formal gowns. All had been the height of fashion during the 70s. Luna's mother had dressed very well indeed prior to her marriage, and she had taken it all with her when she had left her family home to marry Xenophilius Lovegood. Luna's father had been unable to part with a single article of clothing, which was why Luna was currently in her father's bedroom, head-deep inside her mother's wardrobe.

After receiving Neville's invitation, Luna had decided that perhaps she could find something of her mother's to wear rather than spend the money on a formal gown she would only wear once. Besides, the vintage look was the current rage in the wizarding fashion world, according to her new friend, Pansy Parkinson, soon-to-be Weasley.

That had been an interesting turn of events. After Draco had taken off to Malfoy Manor, Pansy had stopped by Luna's office and invited her to lunch, saying that Draco was being "a bit of a bitch," and that "he needs to remove his head from his arse." The black-haired witch had bluntly stated that she had never seen Draco happier than when he had been with Luna, and that she was certain he would realise very soon that he should be with her. Pansy had informed her that, of course, he would never apologise, but that she would come home one day to find him playing the piano in the drawing room and acting as if he had never left. Luna had smiled gratefully, asked about how things were with Ronald Weasley, and a friendship had been born.

Luna smiled as she dived head first back into her mother's magically enlarged wardrobe. Pansy's friendship had been exactly what she needed, especially since Hermione had been too worried about her—and too angry with Draco—to be of much support. As the days and weeks had turned into a month then two, Hermione had become more and more concerned by what she considered Luna's "delusional behaviour" when it came to Draco Malfoy. She simply could not understand why Luna was still hoping that he would return after the way he had abandoned her.

"He left a note," Luna had assured her.

"Which said absolutely nothing!" Hermione had retorted hotly.

In truth, the note hadn't said much. It had been short and succinct, saying that they "were never meant to be" and that he was leaving to return to Malfoy Manor.

Luna had been ecstatic. Obviously, her sleepy declaration of love had caused him to realise that his feelings for her went well beyond those of mere friendship. Maybe she should have waited until a better, more proper time, but her heart had been so full of love for him that night that she hadn't been able to keep the words inside a moment longer. He had been so wonderful that day, and his reaction to the mere thought that she had been harmed had left her brimming over with hope that perhaps he had realised that he loved her. It was that hope, coupled with her fatigue, which had allowed the words that she had harboured in her heart for so many years to finally break free.

She hadn't been surprised to awaken the following morning to find him gone, but she had been certain that he would return to her at any moment, ready to begin their lives together.

Hermione, on the other hand, had thought her insane.

Hermione had become even more convinced of Luna's delusional state when pictures of Draco with Astoria Greengrass began appearing in the *Daily Prophet*.

"You see? He's moved on. Luna, I love you. It hurts me to see you so hurt. Please, you have to *let him go*," Hermione had pleaded. "Dozens of wizards are asking you out. Why don't you go on one date and see how it goes? Please?"

Luna had refused. She didn't want any other wizard. She wanted Draco.

It wasn't that she didn't understand Hermione's concerns. She did. And she appreciated that her friend was looking out for her well-being. But Luna wasn't as naïve as she appeared; she knew exactly what was happening: Draco was still struggling with the desire to be his own wizard whilst simultaneously clinging to what he felt was the final remnant of his identity as a Malfoy. Luna had always known that Draco would have to make a choice, but thanks to the prophecy, she knew that no matter how dim the prospects appeared at the moment, in the end, he would choose her.

Seeing the photos of Draco with Astoria had hurt, but Luna had looked very carefully and noted that his smile never reached his eyes. She inhaled deeply, then slowly exhaled, her mouth curving into a small smile.

He would choose her.

"What about this one?" she heard Hermione ask.

Luna pulled her head from inside the wardrobe to take a look at the dress Hermione was holding. The pale blue silk was demure, with a high neckline, fluttered sleeves, floor-length skirt, and a tie about the waist. It was beautiful but not quite right—it wasn't her.

She shook her head. "I don't think so."

"Why not? It's very pretty, and the colour matches your eyes," Hermione replied, running her hand along the luxurious fabric.

"Yes, but I'm certain Draco will be attending, and I want to look smashing."

Hermione dropped the gown and frowned in disapproval. "Luna. It's been over two months—longer than you were together—and he's seeing someone else."

"Yes, I know," Luna replied distractedly as she pulled out another armful of clothes and dumped them onto the bed.

Hermione must have known better than to argue—after all, it wouldn't have gone anywhere—and dropped the topic.

"Oh," Luna breathed as she pulled a dress from the pile. "This is lovely."

She held it front of her and moved to stand in front of the mirror.

"Hmm. It's very unique. Let's see," Hermione murmured, and with a wave of her wand, Luna's tee-shirt and jeans were replaced with the dress. "Oh, my."

Luna smiled as she turned to the left and then the right before spinning around to see the back. She bit her lower lip. It was far more daring than she was accustomed to, but it suited her. "I like it. Yes. I think this is it."

"That's gorgeous!" exclaimed a familiar voice from the doorway.

Luna grinned and looked at Pansy's reflection in the mirror. "I like it."

Pansy set her bag in a chair—only after casting a surreptitious cleaning charm—and approached Luna. She turned her to the left, then the right, pulling and tugging at the dress until she was satisfied with the fit. "Hmm. Yes. It's definitely vintage, custom made, and you look amazing in it. It's you but sexy. Perfect."

"Hermione?" Luna asked, despite knowing her friend's reservations. "What do you think?"

Hermione sighed, and her expression softened. "You're beautiful, and the dress is perfect. And look," she said, picking up a knitted turquoise cardigan from the pile. "I think this goes with it."

"Oh, yes!" Pansy cried snatching the cardigan from Hermione's hand. She held it up for Luna to see.

"But if I wear that, it will cover up—"

Pansy shook her head. "It will be fabulous. Imagine it. Once he's seen you, you'll peel off the outer wrapping ... like a present ... and reveal *that!* Draco won't know what hit him."

Luna smiled. "I like that."

"Thank you," Pansy replied smugly. Then her eyes turned serious, and she hazarded a glance at Hermione. "Did you tell her?"

Hermione's brow furrowed. "Tell her what?"

"That's a no, then," Pansy muttered. She grabbed her bag from the chair and pulled out a copy of the *Daily Prophet*. "This is today's edition. You might want to take a look."

Unconcerned, Luna took the paper, knowing that inside would be a photo of Draco at some high society soiree with a witch on his arm. She prepared herself for the sight and scanned the pages until she found it—yet another picture of Draco and Astoria. It stung—part of her had hoped to see him with a new witch rather than Astoria. The fact that he was seeing her exclusively pained Luna more than the years of one-offs she had witnessed.

"It's Draco and Astoria," she said calmly, rolling the parchment and extending it towards Pansy.

"Read the caption."

A thousand fairies suddenly took residence in Luna's stomach. She swallowed, her grey eyes wide with trepidation, and reopened the *Prophet*. Pain lanced her heart as she read the caption under the picture.

*The Malfoy Heir announced his engagement to the lovely Miss Astoria Greengrass prior to attending the season opening of the Wizarding Symphony ....*

"No. That's not true." *Remember the prophecy, remember the prophecy.* Luna didn't realise how desperately she had been clinging to the parchment until Pansy eased it from her hands before passing it to Hermione. Luna sank to the floor, surrounded by mounds of taffeta and silk, her mind whirling.

"Luna," Pansy said firmly as she knelt beside her friend. "I wanted you to see that so that you know what you're up against this evening. Draco is all but certain to bring her to Neville's party. He's making a huge mistake. He loves you. I know he does. But he's stubborn, and he's going to ruin any hope of happiness—his and yours—unless you do something."

Hermione soon joined them on the floor, wrapped her arms around Luna, and glared at Pansy. "What are you talking about? He's already hurt her enough. She needs to face reality, allow her heart to heal, and move on."

Luna sniffed once and shook her head. "No, Pansy's right. I've let this go on long enough."

"But Luna—"



"She needs to go after the man she loves," Pansy interrupted. She sneered at Hermione. "I thought a Gryffindor would agree. Where is that vaunted bravery now, Granger?"

"It's Snape, thank you very much, and you'd do well to shut up," *Parkinson*. You've only been her friend for a few months, but Luna and I are family. She may hide it well, but she's hurting, and I refuse to allow that pitiful excuse for a man to cause her additional pain!"

Pansy was about to retort when Luna shook herself from Hermione's grasp and scrambled to her feet. "It's not up to either of you. It's my life, my decision." She looked down at Hermione. "I know you're trying to protect me, but honestly, I don't need it. What I do need is your support. Please."

Hermione closed her eyes for a brief moment and then nodded. "All right. What do you want to do?"

Luna had a plan in mind, but she wasn't certain that either woman would think it was a good idea. There was no other option, however. If she knew Draco, and she did, then he would rush Astoria to the altar before he could change his mind. She had to act now.

"Pansy," Luna began, "do you still keep in touch with Adrian Pucey?"

"Yes, of course, but what—oh, no. Luna. What are you thinking?"

Hermione looked between the two women as they stared at each other. "What? What does Adrian Pucey have to do with—" Her own realisation dawned. "Do you think it will work?"

"I don't know, but I don't know what else to do," Luna murmured.

"You could just talk to him."

Pansy snorted. "Oh, Hermione, please. You're married to a Slytherin. How does the direct approach work for you?"

Hermione raised her chin, her eyes flashing with both irritation and sadness. "Better than keeping things from him," she stated firmly before turning to Luna. "Are you sure this is the only way?"

Luna nodded, pushing aside the smidgeon of doubt that had entered her mind with Hermione's words. Severus had forgiven Hermione, but Luna knew that her friend still struggled with the guilt she felt for not sharing all of herself with her husband. But the situations were entirely different. In this case, Luna was out of options. If she didn't do something, and soon, Draco would be lost to her forever.

"I'm sure."

Pansy, surprisingly, remained uncertain. "I don't know. Draco has always been the sort to make a decision and stick with it, no matter what. If what the *Prophet* says is true, then I foresee two possible outcomes to your little plan: One, he realises that's he's being an idiot, confesses how much he loves and misses you, and you leave the party together and walk off together into the proverbial sunset."

Luna smiled dreamily at the mental image.

"Or two, he does the exact opposite, determines that he did the right thing by letting you go, and you push him even further into Astoria's arms."

Luna frowned. "And if I do nothing ..."

"He'll marry her anyway."

Luna moved to the window, looking out to the garden below. It was a risk—the biggest she'd ever taken. But she was tired. Tired of waiting for fate, tired of playing games, tired of sitting back whilst everyone around her found love and moved forwards into the next phase of their lives. She'd had no qualms at all about helping Hermione and Severus. Now it was time she helped herself ... and Draco.

And she still had an extra wand up her sleeve: the prophecy.

She turned around and faced her friends. "It will work. I know it will."

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Draco lay on the bed in the room that had been his since the day of his birth and stared at the ceiling. A gold Snitch zoomed above him, flying at top speed throughout the room and zig-zagging amongst the furniture, as if trying to tempt the blond wizard to play.

If that was the Snitch's intent—if a Snitch could have intent—then it wasn't working. Draco didn't feel like playing. He didn't feel like doing much of anything at all.

He sighed. He supposed that he ought to get ready for Neville's party—not that he wanted to do that, either. Reaching out a hand, he plucked the Snitch from the air as it flew over the bed. The corner of his mouth twitched in a facsimile of a smile as he felt the familiar beating of the fluttering wings against his palm. He hoisted himself from the bed and, after returning the Snitch to its home, walked into the adjacent bathroom.

His ablutions were performed mechanically but thoroughly. He showered. He dried himself. He brushed his teeth. He shaved. He slapped on a touch of cologne. He dressed in his finest robes. He returned to the mirror and slicked back his hair as he had done during his days at Hogwarts. He sneered at his reflection.

It was as if he had put on a costume—and an ill-fitting one, at that.

Squaring his shoulders, Draco returned to his wardrobe and pulled out his dress shoes. As he was putting them on, he considered his return to what he had dubbed "the Malfoy persona." He had thought it would be simple, especially as he was now surrounded by all the trappings that he associated with being a Malfoy, but it had been more difficult than he had expected. The problem was that Draco no longer felt at home at Malfoy Manor, no longer at ease wearing the Malfoy mask. It was all very familiar and filled with memories, but it was like a boot that no longer fit; he'd outgrown its confines, and it was no longer comfortable.

He stood and ran a weary hand across his face. It was draining, acting like the pretentious pure-blood prat he had once been. For the thousandth time since leaving Grimmauld Place—and *her*, his mind supplied—Draco wondered why he was doing this. He'd given up his chance at love, at happiness. He looked about the ostentatious room and wondered: Was all this truly worth it?

And for the thousandth time, Draco pushed the questions and doubts away.

A house-elf winked in, bowed, and handed him a copy of the *Daily Prophet*.

"Thank you, Mina. That will be all."

The elf bowed again and then disappeared.

"Might as well see what the vultures have to say today," Draco muttered under his breath.

He skimmed through the pages until he found what he was looking for—the photo from the opening of the symphony. He smiled grimly as read the caption. Astoria hadn't

wasted any time in staking her claim. They made quite a striking pair, with their matching hair and supercilious expressions.

He looked up at the small framed picture he had saved from another *Prophet* ... one from three months prior. Luna was gazing at him dreamily as he grinned widely, their fingers intertwined as they walked into Florean Fortescue's Ice-Cream Parlour.

As he studied the photo, he considered the witch he had chosen to be his wife. She reminded him very much of his mother. Her hair was silvery blonde and fell in straight sheets to the middle of her back. Her eyes were a vivid ice blue, cold and unflinching. Perhaps most reminiscent of Narcissa was the way Astoria's nose wrinkled, as if she were perpetually smelling something sour.

If he had wanted a wife who fit the Malfoy mould, Astoria Greengrass was a perfect fit; he couldn't have chosen better.

It was too bad, then, that Draco wasn't fitting nearly as well.

He tossed the *Prophet* onto a small table and flung himself haphazardly into a chair. He had been so sure that this was what he wanted, but now that he had it .... Damn it all. He'd thought he had been so clever, using Luna to repair his reputation in order to find a suitable wife. If he were honest, however, he had to admit his stupid Plan had been riddled with holes from its conception—or rather one fairly large Luna-shaped hole. His attraction to her had obviously been more of an issue than he'd anticipated. The loony witch had worked her way under his skin—or maybe she had been there all along, and he'd been too blind to see it.

Whilst his heart ached with the knowledge that he had chosen his family duty over Luna, it nearly killed him to know that he had hurt her. At night, his dreams haunted him, displaying vivid images of Luna pining for him at Grimmauld Place, waiting for him to return ....

He shook his head. He still found it difficult to believe that she loved him, but then, did she really? He'd been putting on an act the entire time; she'd merely fallen for the man he had pretended to be. Meanwhile, he had fallen head over heels for the eccentric witch. The entire thing had been an unmitigated disaster, doomed from the outset. Luna Lovegood had been more trouble than she was worth.

And he missed her terribly.

He glanced at the clock and hauled himself to his feet. It was time to pick up Astoria and head to Neville's party—and the torturous hours that he would have to spend in the presence of the witch he loved but would never have.

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The party had already begun when Draco arrived—fashionably late, of course—with Astoria on his arm. He had debated about whether or not to bring her. After all, he was well aware that although he counted these people amongst his closest friends, their first loyalty would be to Luna.

And rightfully so.

He was going to marry Astoria, however, so they would need to become accustomed to her presence at some point, regardless of their loyalties. Having destroyed his only chance at true happiness in order to carry on the Malfoy legacy, Draco refused to relinquish his friends, as well—even if they would rather he did.

Astoria's fingers gripped his arm almost painfully as he guided her further into the large sitting room. His fiancée was a few years younger than he, and the members of the Order of the Phoenix were in all likelihood beneath her social strata, despite their hero status, so he doubted she knew anyone in the room beyond having seen their pictures in the *Prophet*. Draco was well aware that Astoria was used to much more spectacular events and was uncomfortable in such an intimate setting with people with whom she was unfamiliar.

Was it awful of him to admit that he couldn't care less?

He glanced about the room. Neville had outdone himself—or perhaps his fiancée had wielded some influence. The room was warm and inviting, with golden ivory damask wallpaper and plush furnishings in gold, red, and black—a rather obvious nod to both of their Houses. Classical music softly played in the background, loud enough to hear but not so much that it interfered with conversation. Most of the furniture had pushed against the walls to provide an area for dancing, leaving only a small drinks table, a large curved sofa ... and the piano.

*The piano.*

Not the one Draco had purchased for the house at Grimmauld Place after Neville had moved out, but the actual piano that had started it all.

He stared impassively at the instrument of his downfall.

That proved to be a mistake, for his mind soon turned traitorous—again—and he recalled that morning with vivid clarity.

*"Oh, won't you play something for me, Draco? Please?"*

"No. However, I will teach you *something to play*."

His jaw clenched as his eyes refused to leave the ebony tool of his destruction.

*"Have you ever been kissed?"*

She shook her head no, and he swallowed reflexively.

"Would you like to be?"

"Oh, yes. Please."

"Darling?"

Astoria's snide tone freed him from his memories, and Draco tore his gaze from the piano, glancing at her in feigned interest.

"Must we stay long?" she asked, looking about the rather posh flat with thinly veiled disdain.

Draco ignored her question and was rather proud that he was able to refrain from rolling his eyes at the snobbish witch. "Would you care for a drink?" he asked, not waiting for a response before herding Astoria to the drinks table. He would need Firewhisky, and lots of it, if he wanted to get through the evening with his sanity intact.

He poured two glasses, not bothering to ask Astoria for her preference. She sighed dramatically and took the glass, sipping at the drink as if it were bloody tea. Draco took a large swallow, relishing the burn as the fiery liquid coursed down his throat. Soon, the alcohol had warmed his blood, and after a second glass, he was quite content. He was about to pour yet another when he saw her ... his Luna.

Luna.

Try as he might, he couldn't tear his gaze away from her. He could see nothing else but her sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks, the familiar, dreamy smile curving her lips ...

The man entering the room behind her, his hand possessively placed at the small of her back.

Draco blinked, yet the man was still there. Scowling, Draco wanted to know only one thing:

What the bloody hell was going on?

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*A/N: My eternal gratitude, as always, to my fabulous beta readers, Deanna and Subversa, and my wonderful Brit picker, LettyBird.*

Erm ... I know I said last time there would be two more chapters, but would you object to an extra one? There will be two more chapters after this *one*.

# I Begged to Be Adored

*Chapter 9 of 10*

A prophecy says Luna and Draco will one day fall in love. That was six years ago, and Luna is tired of waiting around. It's time to take matters into her own hands. Unfortunately, Draco has a plan of his own. First Place in Draconian Measures at the 2007 OWL Awards; Runner Up for Best Fluff in Round Three of the Quill to Parchment Awards.

*Disclaimer: JKR owns it all. I'm just having fun.*

Chapter Nine

I Begged to Be Adored

Draco grimaced as Astoria's fingers tightened painfully around his forearm, her long nails digging through his heavy wool sleeve. Dragging his eyes away from Luna, he looked down at his fiancée, one eyebrow lifting in silent query; she didn't bother to respond. Her lips pursed, and she turned away to pour herself another glass of Firewhisky, then swallowed the lot, the corners of her mouth turning down into a deep frown. Draco's brow furrowed momentarily, but then he shrugged and returned his gaze to where Luna and the wizard...was that Adrian Pucey?...were greeting Neville and Susan.

His eyes narrowed as he watched Luna chat and laugh with their hosts, every now and then sneaking a glance at Pucey. Was she on a date? So soon? It had only been a few months, for Merlin's sake! He was well aware of his hypocrisy, but he didn't care. She was supposed to be at Grimmauld Place, mourning his loss and crying herself to sleep, wishing he was with her, damn it. Not that he enjoyed the idea of her being utterly bereft and heartbroken, but if she had truly loved him ... well, wouldn't she have been?

His hand moved to rake his fingers through his hair but then fell awkwardly to his side as he recalled that he'd slicked it back. Damn it all to hell. With a scowl, he clenched his hands into fists as he watched Luna and Pucey, their hands clasped together as they circuted the room to where Pansy and Weasley were standing.

Draco shook his head slightly, his forehead wrinkling in contemplation. Why would Luna be speaking with Pansy? He supposed she could be saying hello to Weasley ... but no. She was definitely speaking with Pansy.

Confused, he watched as they chatted amicably. As far he knew, Pansy and Luna weren't friends ... or at least they hadn't been. Of course, he hadn't spoken with Pansy since the day she'd shown up at the Manor after the news of his break-up had shown up in the *Prophet*, her face as red as her crimson silk robes. She had clapped him on the back of the head and then informed him, in no uncertain terms, that Luna had been the best thing to ever happen to him and that if he'd had any brains at all left in his head, he would go to Luna immediately, preferably on his hands and knees, and beg her to take him back. She'd been correct, of course, but Draco had not responded, merely let her rage at him all she liked. Pansy had ranted for at least an hour, until she'd realised he was serious about calling things off with Luna, called him a "daft prick," and stormed from the house in a whirlwind of silk and fury.

Draco hadn't seen her since.

His spine straightened as he considered the possible ramifications of a friendship between the two witches. Pansy did nothing without a purpose, and he had to wonder what she hoped to gain, especially since he had made himself perfectly clear as to the subject of Luna. He glanced at the couples again, and his eyes met Pansy's. Undaunted by the cool aloofness of her gaze, he nodded in acknowledgement; she tossed her head and glanced away.

He winced slightly and somehow managed to restrain his groan. That head toss could mean only one thing...she was nervous. And in Draco's experience, that was never a good thing.

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Luna calmly stood beside Adrian as they chatted with Pansy and Ron, but her mind was feverishly going over her plan whilst her stomach churned. Her entire future hinged on what would happen over the next few hours, and the uncertainty of it was gnawing a hole in her stomach. But she had to believe that she would be in Draco's arms before the night was through, and that knowledge gave her both comfort and the fortitude to carry on. She listened half-heartedly to the others as they talked; she wanted to discuss how things were going to go, but Ron wasn't aware of the plan being unfurled right under his nose. Pansy had insisted that it was for the best...whilst Ron was excellent at strategy, he was apparently pants at subterfuge.

It took every ounce of strength within her not to risk a glance at Draco. She hadn't seen him in so very long, and she'd missed him desperately. It didn't help that she could feel him looking at her, and she was very curious to know what colour his eyes were. That would tell her everything. Were they cold and icy, warm and foggy, passionate and stormy, or were they liquid pools of fiery molten silver?

She wrinkled her nose; the last comparison made her wonder if perhaps she had been spending too much time with Pansy.

Ron wandered off to speak with Harry and Ginny when they arrived, leaving the three conspirators alone.

"Draco hasn't been able to take his eyes off you since you arrived," Pansy murmured under her breath as soon as Ron left, her mouth curving into a satisfied smile. "Hmm. I think it's time to push things along a bit, show him what he's missing, don't you?" Pansy waggled her eyebrows suggestively.

Luna's eyes widened, and she fought the urge to squirm in her new designer shoes...they were frightfully uncomfortable. The knot in her stomach tightened; she wasn't certain she was ready for her unveiling yet.

Adrian must have sensed her discomfort, because he grasped her hand and gave her fingers a squeeze. "You look ravishing, my dear, but it's time to gild the lily, so to speak ... unless you've changed your mind about Malfoy," he goaded.

Luna wasn't one to fall for such blatant manipulations, or even non-blatant ones, but Pansy and Adrian were right; she'd set her course, and she wouldn't back down now. She looked up at Adrian and smiled. "Thank you for agreeing to this. You know, in case I forget later."

Adrian laughed, his hazel eyes dancing with mirth. "I'd do anything to see Malfoy brought to his knees. I consider it a privilege to take part." He winked. "Now, let's get on with it."

Luna started at Adrian's words...was that why he'd agreed? Oh, dear. If that was his motivation, she might have made a devastating miscalculation. No. No, she was quite good at reading people. Everything was fine. Determination straightened her spine, and as Adrian helped her to remove her cardigan, she thanked Merlin for warming charms and hoped that she had read all the players correctly.

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"Is everything all right, darling?"

Draco was able to tear his eyes away from Luna to glance briefly at Astoria before returning his gaze to the couple across the room. "Of course. Why wouldn't it be?"

Astoria shrugged one delicate shoulder. Draco noticed that she was staring at the same couple he had been watching, and he wondered if she were upset that his former girlfriend was in attendance. He didn't find that likely; after all, it wasn't as if she were in love with him. Astoria had no illusions as to what their marriage was about: ambition and power and tradition. It had nothing to do with love. He was about to inquire as to her interest in Luna when he was brought up short. Luna had turned to face him, her cheeks flushing slightly as she looked straight at him whilst Pucey helped her to remove her cardigan. The wizard's fingers lingered on the exposed skin of her shoulders and arms as the fabric slowly slid away. Draco felt his jaw clench, but then ....

Great Merlin's ghost.

When she'd arrived, he hadn't noticed what Luna was wearing...he'd been too caught up in his own miserable thoughts...but he couldn't help but notice now. The dress should be added to the list of Unforgivables...surely his heart wasn't the only one that had stopped at the sight of her. At least her long legs were covered by the floor-length skirt, the bright multi-coloured stripes standing out in stark contrast to the more staid colours favoured by most of the witches in attendance. But it was the top that had garnered his...and damn it, every other man's...attention. He glared at the room in general before returning his gaze to Luna.

Two pieces of turquoise fabric that looked like ... like knittedscarves, of all things, were attached to the front of the skirt. The pieces of fabric travelled up over her breasts, leaving in between them a tantalising sliver of skin, from navel to sternum, before crossing at the base of her neck and tying at the back of her nape. Draco shuddered; that bit of skin taunted him, daring him to run his finger along the strip of exposed flesh, followed closely by his tongue. Taking a deep breath, he struggled to control his baser instincts even as he felt himself begin to harden in response to the vision before his eyes.

Then she turned her back to him, and Draco was lost.

He swayed under the dizzying wave of lust that washed over him. Her hair, typically worn down, had been swept up, providing an unobstructed view of the elegant curve of her neck. He groaned softly; that wasn't the worst of it. Oh, no. The design of the dress left Luna's entire back and shoulders gloriously, wonderfully, sinfully *bare*.

Draco was amazed that he was still upright, his blood had rushed to his groin so quickly. His fingers itched to touch her, to revel in the warmth of her silky skin, to kiss every bit of flesh. As if that weren't enough, he longed to bask in her affection...he wanted her to love him, to need him, to desire him ... as he did her.

The fingernails digging into his arm, as well as the wizard who was currently resting his hand at the small of Luna's bare back, reminded him yet again that he'd already made his choice. He no longer had any right to touch Luna, no right to her affection or her love ... not any longer. And perhaps he never had.

Suddenly, it was too painful to watch her any longer, and having never been one for self-flagellation, Draco turned away, cursing his stupidity.

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"Well?" Luna asked, trying desperately not to fidget under the weight of Draco's stare. She might have had her back to him, but she knew his eyes were on her.

Pansy laughed. "He noticed all right. I'd say little Draco is getting quite a *rise* out of your dress."

Adrian sniggered.

Luna blinked, then smiled beatifically. "Really?" Not wanting to miss out on *that* display, she was about to turn to take a peek when Pansy grabbed her arm.

"Don't look!" she admonished. "You don't want him to..." Pansy didn't finish her sentence; her eyes narrowed, and then she shook her head slightly. "Oh, no."

"What?" Luna asked, concentrating desperately on not giving in to her urge to turn around but concerned by Pansy's reaction to whatever she'd just seen. "What's happened?"

Pansy seemed shaken for a moment, but she recovered quickly, her eyes gleaming with determination. "He's turned away. But don't worry. He saw what we wanted him to see. Everything will be fine."

Luna idly wondered why she didn't feel reassured.

"What did I miss?" Ron said as he rejoined the group and slung an arm around his girlfriend's shoulders.

Pansy sighed. "Nothing. Nothing at all."

---

Draco's resolve to refrain from watching Luna lasted all of two minutes, and he angled his body so that he could see her from the corner of one eye. He couldn't seem to look away no matter how hard he tried, no matter how much it hurt. Jealousy and regret slammed into him, hitting him like a Bludger to the chest. His fingers moved of their own accord to rub at the ache just above his heart, and for the first time, Draco didn't bother to blame the feeling on indigestion or nerves or any of the other excuses he'd given himself in the past. He knew exactly what it was ... and he also knew there wasn't a blasted thing he could do about it.

Damn it. It looked as though his plan had been a resounding success after all. But instead of the thrill of triumph, there was only the bitter taste of defeat.

Which made no sense whatsoever. After all, this was what he'd wanted, what he'd planned all along. He had found a witch who would satisfy the requirements of a Malfoy wife, and Luna had found ....

Coward that he was, he couldn't bring himself finish the thought, even with the evidence right in front of him.

Luna laughed at something Pucey said, the full, rich sound carrying across the room, and Draco felt as if something inside him withered and died. She'd often laughed that way with him...with such uninhibited joy...and he longed for her to do so again. To laugh with him, to look at him with that dreamy smile and those deceptively unfocussed eyes. He wanted to be the one to hold her hand, to entwine his fingers with hers, to kiss the lush mouth that had driven him mad with desire since he had first met her.

But he couldn't. He no longer had the privilege; he'd given it all up.

Because he was an idiot.

Draco was about to pour himself another glass of much-needed Firewhisky when Luna's laughter rang out again. He couldn't keep himself from glancing in her direction, but this time, what he saw confused the daylights out of him.

Luna was now standing a good distance away from Pucey, her posture unusually stiff, as if she were nervous or uncomfortable. Pucey, on the hand appeared bewildered; he edged closer to Luna and then once again took her hand in his. She jumped, obviously startled, and within seconds had managed to escape Pucey's grasp and moved away from him yet again.

Bemused, Draco watched carefully as the same scene played out again and again, until it seemed as if they were doing some bizarre sort of ritualistic dance. Before too long, they'd completed a circular pattern around Pansy and Weasley. It was the oddest thing Draco had ever seen.

What in Merlin's name was going on?

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Luna was having doubts about her plan. Adrian was acting oddly, Pansy was tossing her head nervously every few minutes, and Hermione had yet to arrive. Not that Hermione was essential to the plan, but Luna simply needed her friend's support. Without Hermione there to ground her, she felt a tad adrift.

"Don't you think that's funny, Luna?" Pansy said suddenly, her pointedly asked question freeing Luna from her thoughts.

Luna laughed instantly, playing her part, the sound a bit too loud even by her standards. She was terribly nervous, though, a feeling with which she was utterly unfamiliar. Usually she was quite calm and not easily flustered. She felt her lips quirk into a small smile...only Draco could draw out such emotions in her, and she loved him for it. Still, her nervousness only caused her to worry, something that was also new to her. She didn't think she was a very good actress, even under the best of circumstances...she had no idea how on earth she'd ever managed to convince everyone that she was a Seer...and she just knew that Draco was going see right through her, and the plan would be ruined.

She glanced at the doorway, but Hermione and Severus had still not arrived.

Adding to her somewhat distressed state was Adrian's insistence on holding her hand. Luna hoped he wasn't attracted to her...that would certainly throw a Bundimun in her plans! Pansy had assured her that she had told him everything, so Luna was perplexed by his actions. Unable to simply ask him to explain himself, due to Ron's presence, she settled for simply moving away ... over and over and over again. Merlin, but the man was determined!

"Would you care for a glass?" she heard Adrian say, his hand once again reaching for hers.

"I'm sorry...a glass of what?" Luna asked as she carefully moved out of range yet again. She really needed to pay more attention to the conversation. Of course, that was quite difficult when trying to avoid her date's advances; she certainly didn't want Draco to think that she'd moved on already. What a disaster that would be!

"Mulled wine, dear," Adrian murmured, looking at her oddly. "Would you care for some? Perhaps a canapé?"

"Oh." Luna contemplated the wisdom of imbibing when she had such important business to which she needed to attend, but she supposed one glass couldn't hurt. The food would help, as well. "Yes, please. Thank you."

Ron and Adrian excused themselves, leaving Luna and Pansy alone.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Pansy whispered harshly, pulling Luna into a far corner of the room. "This isn't going to work if you won't even stay within three feet of him!" She flung her hand in the general direction of Adrian's retreating form.

Luna blinked, her already protuberant eyes widening at Pansy's rebuke. "But the plan..."

"Exactly! You must remember the plan, Luna. This is important!"

Tilting her head to the side, Luna studied Pansy's perturbed but earnest expression. "I'm not quite certain how holding Adrian's hand will be of help, but if you think it's truly necessary ...."

Pansy stared at her blankly for a moment, then shook her head. "You're either very naïve or .... Never mind. Just stick to the plan, and everything will be fine."

Luna's forehead wrinkled in confusion, but she nodded anyway.

A flash of black near the door caused her to turn her head, and she sighed in relief; Severus and Hermione had arrived. Luna waved her hand wildly to garner their attention...she really needed Hermione to stay close by to help keep her calm and focussed ... and perhaps Severus would be able to keep Adrian occupied...dodging his incessant attentions was proving to be quite exhausting!

---

Dinner was served in the dining room. It seemed to Draco that most of the Order was in attendance: the Snapes, the Potters, a plethora of Weasleys, the Lupins, Minerva McGonagall, Kingsley Shacklebolt, and of course, their hosts, Neville and Susan. Neville's grandmother had been feeling under the weather and had opted not to attend. Neville had been quite relieved, as no one...save perhaps Severus Snape...could make Neville as nervous as Augusta Longbottom. In any event, it was quite a large group, so the dining room and table had been magically enlarged for the evening. Neville had explained earlier that his grandmother had insisted on sending a few house-elves to prepare and serve the meal since she would be unable to "supervise." The eager-to-please creatures were all but trembling with glee at the chance to be of service, popping in and out with various dishes and refilling glasses with a very nice burgundy.

Draco and Astoria had been seated opposite Severus and Hermione; perhaps the undoubtedly stimulating conversation would help to keep things from becoming too awkward, given that Luna and Pucey were seated to Hermione's immediate right. Draco was glad, however, that Luna was close; something strange was going on between her and Pucey, and it was a mystery he felt compelled to unravel.

The tinkling of a small bell pierced through the chatter, and dinner appeared on the plates, much in the same manner as dinner at Hogwarts. The fragrant smell filled the air, and Draco breathed it in, his body stiffening as he recognised the scent. *Boeuf Bourguignon*. Memories of his first date with Luna flooded his mind.

"*What do you think?*" Luna asked.

Draco swallowed, his brow furrowing as he considered her question. "*I think ... well, I think it's absolutely revolting.*" Then he smirked and took another bite.

After a few more bites, Draco decided that the food wasn't completely awful and found that he was almost enjoying it. It was by no means on par with, say, Boeuf Bourguignon, but it was edible ... barely. He considered Luna's contented expression as she ate the last of her fries and then discussed her latest Charms research. Perhaps the company more than made up for the lack of romantic ambiance.

A lump formed his throat, but he swallowed it down with a sip of his wine. Sliding a brief glance at his fiancée, who was delicately picking at her meal, he wondered if he would always feel this aching regret and longing or if it would dissipate over time. Part of him hoped it would go away, but an even bigger part wanted to cling to his love for Luna with everything he had in him.

His fork paused midair at that last thought. Wasn't that exactly why he'd chosen duty to family over love...because he had wanted to hang on to the final remnant of his life

as a Malfoy? He'd planned and schemed and manipulated, and now that he had achieved his goal, he yet again wanted the very thing he had given up.

What the hell was wrong with him? He had been unhappy when he'd chosen honour over duty, and now he was unhappy when he'd chosen duty over love. Was he purposefully sabotaging himself, and if so, why? Did he not think he deserved happiness? Was he doomed to this melancholic state no matter what decisions he might make?

He snorted softly at his maudlin thoughts, though the doubts lingered. He glanced at Luna and sighed. What was done was done. He'd made his bed; now he had to lie in it ... no matter how uncomfortable it was.

As he'd anticipated, the conversation was both stimulating and distracting; thanks to the Snapes, a wide variety of topics were covered. His initial ire at seeing Luna with Pucey had calmed considerably...in all likelihood due to the fact that the witch certainly wasn't acting as if she were on a date. She spoke with Pucey sparingly and instead chose to chat with either Hermione or Pansy, who was seated beside Draco and opposite Luna.

Pansy, he noted, was also acting oddly. She continued to be visibly nervous, that telltale head toss of hers occurring more often than not, which was utterly bizarre; his friend was rarely anxious. Even odder was the way her eyes seemed to bore into Luna, as if attempting to cast a nonverbal Imperius or some such thing. Luna, however, seemed blissfully unaware of the other witch's stare.

There was something strange brewing between the two witches, and between that and the odd behaviour Luna had exhibited towards Pucey, Draco was brimming with curiosity. The situation bore watching ... and that was precisely what he planned to do. That it provided an excuse...a reason, he corrected himself...to watch Luna was merely a pleasant side-effect.

Conversation continued unabated as he finished off the last of his dinner. Blessedly, Astoria had opted to remain silent throughout the course of the meal, her attention fully focussed on her plate. As soon as all the guests had finished their dinners, the plates disappeared, and the air was suddenly heavy with the scents of brown sugar and tart apple as bowls of apple pie and custard appeared. The room was silent for a few moments, save the scrape of silver against china, as the first bites of pie were taken, but soon enough, conversation began to flow once more.

"If Johnson would stop worrying about the Bludgers and let the Beaters do their job, maybe he could see the Snitch."

Draco snorted in agreement with Pucey's words, sniggering under his breath as Hermione rolled her eyes at the new topic of conversation.

Severus sneered. "Perhaps if the Beaters were more consistent in their efforts, Johnson *could* stop worrying about the Bludgers, thereby allowing him to focus on the finding the Snitch."

"That reminds me of my parents," Luna interrupted suddenly.

Draco instantly slid his gaze to Luna, only to find her eyes to be uncharacteristically sharp as she looked first at Astoria and then Severus.

"I believe you knew my mother, didn't you, Severus?"

Unflappable as always, Severus' arched eyebrow was the only sign of his confusion as to the abrupt change in topic. "Solange?" He gave a small shrug. "I didn't know her well. She was a few years ahead of me at school."

"Mm," Luna hummed around her spoonful of apple pie and custard. She finished chewing and swallowed before continuing. "She was a wonderful person, wasn't she? My father doesn't like to talk about her often...he still loves her dearly, you know, so it's quite difficult for him to speak of her. Their story is so lovely...are you aware of it?" Luna asked, her eyes wide.

Severus glanced at Astoria, and Draco, who knew his former Head of House quite well, saw something click into place in the older wizard's mind. His mouth curved into a small smirk. "I heard rumours and such, yes. They were quite the talk of Hogwarts during my fourth year, their seventh."

"Because of their families," Luna explained to no one in particular as she lifted another spoonful of custard to her mouth.

Draco was paying close attention now. He knew Luna, and the witch wasn't as loony as she appeared. This conversation hadn't come out of nowhere...there was a purpose to it ... he needed only to wait for that purpose to become clear. He listened closely.

Severus gave a deferential nod. "Partially, yes. But also because of their Houses." Severus smirked at Draco's questioning look. "Xenophilius, as you know, was a Hufflepuff, and Solange ... a Slytherin."

"No fucking way."

Hermione cast Draco a withering glance. Luna merely chewed another bite of her pudding.

Severus scowled. "Language, Draco." He sniffed and then began again. "Obviously you were not aware of that fact, but yes, Solange was a member of our esteemed House. Once she decided that Xenophilius Lovegood was the wizard she wanted, like any good Slytherin, she set out to make him hers. I seem to recall she had some sort of ten-step plan."

Draco choked on a sip of wine, coughing until Pansy began to beat him on the back. He waved off the witch. "I'm fine," he said before redirecting his attention to Severus. "A plan, you say?"

"That was the rumour, yes. Her family was livid, as you can imagine. Not only was he a Hufflepuff, but his family connections were nonexistent, despite his pure-blood heritage. The Lovegoods weren't exactly poor, but they certainly were not wealthy and had little interest in the typical pure-blood forays into high society or politics. They were naturalists and practiced the traditions of the Old Magic. One would think pure-bloods would not have found fault with that, but as we all know, pure-blood society is nothing if not progressive."

There were several sniggers around the table at that statement, and Severus hid his smile behind his wineglass before continuing. "In any event, rumour had it that her family disavowed her when she married Xenophilius."

"Disavowed?"

Draco turned his head to look at his fiancée, surprised that she was paying attention to the conversation, not to mention that she had deigned to participate. He looked at Astoria more closely; she was pale, and her fingers were trembling as she brought her glass to her lips. He glanced at Luna, but she was focussed on Astoria, her eyes soft and filled with some sort of understanding.

"Yes," Luna said, her tone dreamy, as always. "My father doesn't like to speak of it, but she was disavowed."

Draco was stunned by this revelation; he and Xenophilius had discussed his marriage, but the wizard had said nothing about disavowal. Disowning a son or daughter for behaviour deemed unacceptable by the family was a common occurrence. It simply indicated that the child would not inherit. Disownment could be...and often was...enacted and withdrawn at the whim of the head of the family. But disavowal meant that the family denied any connection or responsibility for the child...it was as if that child had never been born ... never existed. Once disavowal was invoked, it could not be taken back, and as such, its use was extremely rare. More commonly, families threatened disavowal in order to scare a wayward child back into the family fold.

Surely Solange's family would have informed her of the consequences of continuing her relationship with Xenophilius. That she had been willing to accept disavowal to be

with the wizard she loved spoke volumes. Draco could not think of single instance when disavowal had been chosen when the option was given. It was simply unheard of. If Severus had not just proclaimed Solange to have been a Slytherin, Draco would have been even more certain than ever that she had been a Gryffindor; what she had done had required a great deal of bravery.

"Are you certain?" he heard Astoria say, her voice shaking. He frowned; what was wrong with the witch? And why did she care about Xenophilius and Solange Lovegood?

Luna nodded, her large, grey eyes staring directly into Astoria's ice blue ones.

Astoria's face had paled considerably, and she wrung her trembling hands, then hid them in her lap. "But how could she have accepted that...to be cast aside? She sacrificed her family...she sacrificed *everything*."

"Some people believe that love is worth any sacrifice."

All eyes flew to Adrian Pucey; his gaze was focussed on his pudding, his knuckles turning white as they gripped his spoon, his entire body seemingly frozen.

"Yes, and Solange did sacrifice much," Severus replied, redrawing the attention of the room. "From what I recall, her disavowal was not something she took lightly. Those of you familiar with the practice know how difficult a decision that must have been for her."

"Yes, of course," Astoria said softly, almost as if she were speaking to herself. "I was taught that family supersedes all else. I suppose that's why I find it so incredible that she would have chosen to go against her family's wishes."

Draco nodded in agreement; after all, he had been brought up in a very similar household, and the decisions he had recently made had been based on those very beliefs.

Luna lifted her head, her gaze fixed upon Draco...he couldn't help but look at her...but her words were aimed at his fiancée. "I suppose one could look at it that way. But really, Mum didn't see her sacrifice ... only her gain. She often said that she never regretted her decision for a single moment ... because she knew she would have never been truly happy without Daddy."

And with that, Luna returned to her pudding, but her words echoed in Draco's mind.

"I'm curious," Neville said from the end of the table. "Who was her family?"

Severus' glanced at Luna, but she seemed disinclined to answer as her mouth was filled with pie and custard. "I believe you know the family well, Mr Longbottom. When I met her, she was known as Solange LeStrange."

Astoria's gasp was so loud it echoed throughout the room. Draco agreed with the sentiment; Solange Lovegood had been lucky that her family had allowed her to live...the LeStranges were the sort of pure-blood family that was likely to permanently rid themselves of a disobedient child rather than merely disavow.

Low murmurs filled the room as the guests discussed this latest bit of information, but Draco remained silent, his thoughts in disarray. He and Luna's mother had so much in common that it was almost frightening: they were both Slytherins from wealthy, powerful, pure-blood families and probably had been raised with a very similar set of beliefs, only to find themselves at odds with those beliefs as they grew into adulthood. To her credit, Solange had overcome much more difficult obstacles in her quest for love and happiness than Draco would have needed, had he chosen to forgo The Plan. Whilst the Malfoy family was in shambles, the LeStranges had still been a powerful force when Solange had made her decision to live her life as she'd seen fit. But she had done it. She had lived and loved ... and been happy, even if it had been for such a short time. Recalling the way her portrait had reached out for her husband, Draco knew that had he been able to ask her if it had been worth it, Solange Lovegood would have given an unequivocal "yes."

And wouldn't he have, if he'd chosen Luna? He glanced at the witch who was still eating her pudding as if nothing of import had just occurred. Twenty years from now, wouldn't he have looked back and regretted nothing? Wasn't she worth every sacrifice?

He didn't even have to ponder the answer to that question...of course she was worth it. She was worth everything.

Pucey had been correct: love was worth every sacrifice.

And if he were honest with himself, was it that big a sacrifice to give up that which would confine him to a miserable existence? If nothing else, the past few months had shown him that he no longer fit into the Malfoy mould set down by his ancestors and learnt at his father's knee. Yet he'd put on the mask every day, loathing every moment, and for what? The approval of an imprisoned, embittered man who was all but certain to ridicule and revile him no matter what he did? Why couldn't he build a new legacy for the Malfoy name? One that would invoke respect and honour instead of fear and hatred. He was the heir, the last Malfoy standing...with Luna at his side, they could create a new era.

And what of Luna? Regardless of her ... stranger than usual behaviour that evening, he knew that she loved him and that she did so with the same exuberance, the same zeal with which she did everything. Perhaps he was unworthy of her, perhaps he didn't deserve her, but by Merlin, he was selfish enough to want her despite his shortcomings. If his father or anyone else had a problem with it ... well, he didn't give a flying fuck!

He smirked; perhaps there was a bit of Malfoy left in him after all.

Draco dropped his spoon in his pudding and was about to proclaim his revelations to all and sundry when a loud sob emitted from with the witch sitting beside him...his fiancée. He supposed he should speak to her first ....

"I'm so sorry, Adrian!" Astoria wailed suddenly, drawing everyone's attention. She pushed away from the table and stood, the chair teetering on its back legs before righting itself. "It was all my parents' idea ... I didn't see any other way. I love you! Please, I'm so sorry ...."

To say that Draco was shocked was a vast understatement. He'd never seen Astoria display any emotion but disdain and boredom. And then her words registered. "You're in love with Pucey?"

Astoria nodded, tears trailing down her cheeks as she looked pleadingly at the wizard, who remained seated, his eyes seemingly focussed on the table. "My parents forbade us from marrying, and when Draco ... became available, they threatened to disavow me if I didn't stop seeing ...." Another sob escaped her throat, and Pucey closed in his eyes as if pained by her words. "I didn't want to do it, Adrian, I swear it! My father said..."

Pucey's hand hit the table with a loud thud, garnering more than a few startled gasps, and then he leapt his feet before leaning over the table, his expression thunderous. "Enough! I have been a very patient man, but this has gone on for far too long. I've sat by and watched for months as you pursued another man, and I am done! You say you love me? Prove it!"

With a small *pop*, Adrian Apparated from one side of the table to the other, reappearing behind Astoria. She gave a little jump as she turned in surprise to face the agitated wizard who immediately took her in his arms, clutching her to him as if his very life depended on it.

"Come with me, Astoria," Adrian pleaded, then pressed a kiss to the witch's temple. "We'll go to Gretna Green tonight and get married. By the time your parents find out, there will be nothing they can do. You and I both know they love you too much to actually go through with the disavowal. But even if they do, wouldn't you rather be with the man you love than one you don't? We'll be all right as long as we're together, darling, but I can't...I won't...live without you."

Astoria peered up at him through damp lashes, and then a miracle happened ... or at least Draco thought it was miraculous. The ice queen seemed to melt before his very eyes, and in her place was a lovely, young witch whose smile lit up the room. Pucey grinned and pulled her even closer before turning on his heel and Disapparating them both ... ostensibly to Gretna Green.

The entire room sat in stunned silence, and all eyes were on Draco, waiting for his reaction to the scene that had just played out in front of all them. No doubt they were waiting for him to display his infamous temper, or perhaps they expected him to be saddened by the loss of his fiancée. If so, they would be sorely disappointed.

"Well, that was ...." Neville snapped his mouth closed and scratched the back of his head, his eyes drifting from Luna, who had finished her dessert and was now licking her spoon as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened, to Draco. "That was definitely ... erm ... unexpected?"

Draco couldn't have stopped it if he'd tried; he burst into riotous laughter.

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Luna breathed a sigh of relief as dinner finally concluded and the party moved back into the sitting room. She quickly excused herself, needing a few minutes to breathe. Her plan had gone without a hitch; Adrian and Astoria were now together, and Draco had taken everything in stride, thank Merlin. She had been quite worried that he might be upset with her for interfering and would think he'd been right to end things with her. Luna smiled at her reflection; he hadn't been angry at all. He'd laughed...quite enthusiastically, actually...and then devoured his pudding.

And Severus! She hadn't planned on using him in such a fashion...she had intended to relate her parents' story herself...but she'd realised that Astoria would have been much more likely to listen to her former Head of House than a loony witch from Ravenclaw. Thank Merlin he'd caught on quickly. She would have to send him a basket of Nargle-resistant mistletoe for his potions work to show him how grateful she was for his help. Given all the things that could have gone wrong, she was very relieved that everything had worked out in the end.

Turning on the water, she quickly washed her hands and smiled at her reflection. Now she could concentrate on convincing Draco that they were meant to be together. It might take some work on her part, but she was certain that she was up to the task. As she turned off the tap, she recalled her decision the morning Draco had taught her to play *Heart and Soul*; she had planned to do whatever was necessary to win Draco's heart. However, once his motives had become clear, she'd been so happy that the prophecy was finally coming to pass...albeit in an unusual way...that she'd been too caught up in watching things play out to interfere. Whilst she knew Draco loved her, it was now painfully obvious that she had needed to take a more active role. Even then, things might have gone down the same path; after all, she could lead a ferret to a Hippogriff, but she couldn't make him be eaten. But that no longer mattered, because now she was taking the Hippogriff by the beak. Prophecy or no, she loved Draco, and she couldn't be without him any longer.

Happy with her intentions, Luna exited the loo, only to run into Hermione and Pansy, who had obviously been waiting for her in the hallway.

She rushed to the two women who were her dearest friends and threw her arms around both of them, squeezing tightly before releasing them. "Thank you so much, both of you. It worked perfectly, didn't it? I'm so relieved. I know you thought it would help, Pansy, but Adrian kept trying to hold my hand, and I was so worried that he was already over Astoria, and that would have been just awful. They're quite a lovely couple, don't you think?"

Pansy shook her head slightly, as if attempting to clear her head, and opened her mouth, then closed it. She tried again but then looked questioningly at Hermione.

Hermione sighed and turned to Luna. "Dearest, I believe what Pansy would like to know is ... what the hell are you talking about?"

Luna blinked and tilted her head to one side. "The plan. It worked just as I'd hoped. Now that Astoria is with Adrian...as she should, because she really does love him, you know...Draco won't feel beholden to his engagement." The two witches merely stared at her, their expressions blank. "That was the idea ... wasn't it?"

It was Hermione's turn to imitate a fish, her mouth opening and closing as she searched for something to say. Luna was at a loss; had she missed something?

Finally, Hermione found the words, though they were slowly spoken. "We thought you were going to make Draco jealous. Adrian agreed to help ... to make Draco think you were dating again."

"Oh. *Oh!* Well, that explains the hand-holding, I suppose." Luna smiled widely. "Thankfully it all worked out."

"Did it?" Pansy asked, finally finding her voice. "Adrian and Astoria are happy, that's true, but what about you and Draco?"

"Oh, I was about to go speak with him..."

"He's gone," Pansy interrupted sharply, but then softened her tone as she reached for Luna's hand. "He left a few minutes ago. I'm so sorry."

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The party wasn't nearly as much fun once Luna learned that Draco had left, but she stayed to celebrate the engagement of her friends. It was after midnight when she finally said goodbye. After giving her best wishes to Neville and Susan, she Disapparated directly to number twelve, Grimmauld Place. Opening the gate, Luna slowly walked up the pavement to the front steps. She disliked being the sole resident...she was ever so lonely...but the house reminded her of her time with Draco, and she'd been unable to bear the thought of leaving.

She entered the house with a disappointed sigh; she'd wanted to resolve things with Draco that evening, and now she would have to wait. She supposed she could go to his house, but maybe he needed a bit of time to process things, too. That would be understandable...it had been quite an evening, after all. She'd give him a bit of time to himself, but first thing the following morning, she was going to Malfoy Manor. She refused to spend another minute without him.

Or perhaps she ought to wait until after breakfast...it was the most important meal of the day.

Tired from the long, emotion-filled evening, she closed the front door and headed towards the stairs, intent on getting a full night's sleep before...

She paused, one foot still on the floor, the other on the bottom step; someone was in the house ... and he was playing the piano.

Her mouth curved into a wide smile as she listened to the familiar chords repeat again and again, as if waiting for her to complete them. With her tummy swooping in excitement and anticipation, she raced up the stairs to the drawing room.

Coming to halt just outside the room, Luna lingered in the doorway as she watched him play. His back was to her, but she could see that he'd been busy whilst she had been at the party. The room was filled with candles, their warm glow casting flickering shadows against the walls. He had changed his clothes, ridding himself of the formal dress robes and slicked hair that had once so defined him. Now, he wore the Muggle jeans and jumper he'd worn on their first date; his feet, she noted, were bare, and his hair swung loosely about his face. This wasn't the Malfoy heir or the pure-blood prat or the womanising aristocrat; no, this was *her* Draco...the man she loved.

Luna entered the room, haphazardly dropping her cardigan along the back of a chair before walking to the piano, ignoring it when it slid onto the floor. She smiled as she noticed that he was seated to the far left of the bench...leaving room for her to join him. Standing behind him, she was temporarily mesmerised by the movement of his hands as they pressed and released the keys. She knew that she could happily watch him play for hours, but the missing melody called to her, and she couldn't help but move around the bench, sliding into place beside him. She didn't play...not yet...but merely sat next to him, their arms touching as he continued the repetitive pattern of chords.

"You looked beautiful this evening," Draco murmured, his eyes focussed on the keyboard.

Luna smiled. "Thank you. You were quite handsome, as well...although I really didn't care for your hair. I much prefer it this way."

He snorted, his lips twitching into a small, amused smirk, but said nothing.

"Are you very pleased? Your plan turned out quite well," Luna said after a few moments.



His hands faltered on the keys, but then he caught himself and continued playing. After clearing his throat, he asked, "Plan?"

"Mm, yes. You know, the one where you dated me for awhile to improve your image so you could marry someone worthy of the Malfoy name. That plan."

The music stopped, and he angled his body to face her. His expression...eyes wide, mouth hanging open...clearly registered his surprise. "Luna..."

"Please, don't stop."

He stared at her and then turned back to the keyboard and resumed playing. "How long have you known?"

"Almost from the beginning. It did work out well, don't you agree? It was a very clever plan."

His brow furrowed in confusion, his eyes darting back and forth between her and the keyboard. "Why did you ... how could you ... and you still ...?" Shaking his head, Draco muttered, "I don't deserve you."

"Probably not," she agreed, her heart swelling when he chuckled softly.

"I love you," he said, turning to face her, his eyes dark with longing, with love, his fingers never pausing as the harmony of the four repeating chords continued to fill the room.

There was much more that needed to be said, but for now, his heart-felt words were enough to be going on with. Smiling, Luna lifted her hands to the keyboard and began to add the familiar melody, and at long last, the song was finally whole.

"I love you, too."

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*Heart and soul, I fell in love with you*

*Heart and soul, the way a fool would do*

*madly*

*Because you held me tight*

*And stole a kiss in the night*

*Heart and soul, I begged to be adored*

*Lost control, and tumbled overboard*

*gladly*

*That magic night we kissed*

*There in the moon mist*

*Oh! but your lips were thrilling, much too thrilling*

*Never before were mine so strangely willing*

*But now I see, what one embrace can do*

*Look at me, it's got me loving you*

*madly*

*That little kiss you stole*

*Held all my heart and soul*



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A/N: All that's left is a short epilogue, which should be out later this week. Thank you so much to all of you who have read and reviewed and PM'd me about this story. Writing a pairing other than my OTP, not to mention such a rare one, has been a daunting task, and I am so grateful for your patience in waiting for updates to this story.

A huge thank you to my fabulous betas, DeeMichelle and Subversa, and to my lovely Brit picker, LettyBird. I also owe a huge debt of gratitude to my friend, GinnyW, who put up with a lot of whinging on my part. I love you all!

You can find pictures of Luna's dress at my LiveJournal. The link is in my profile.

Finally, an explanation for one of Luna's sayings, "... throw a Bundimun in her plans." According to HP Lexicon, an infestation of Bundimuns can destroy a house, as their secretions can rot the foundation. So when Luna uses this phrase, she is worried that Adrian's flirtations could ruin the very foundation of her plan.

# Epilogue

## Chapter 10 of 10

A prophecy says Luna and Draco will one day fall in love. That was six years ago, and Luna is tired of waiting around. It's time to take matters into her own hands. Unfortunately, Draco has a plan of his own. First Place in Draconian Measures at the 2007 OWL Awards; Runner Up for Best Fluff in Round Three of the Quill to Parchment Awards.

*Disclaimer: JKR owns it all. I'm just having fun.*

### Epilogue

*Two months later ...*

Draco scratched the back of his neck and stared blankly into Luna's earnest face. The story she had so quickly relayed rung in his ears. "So ..." he began, drawing out the word as he contemplated the ramifications of what he'd just been told, "you're ... *not* ... a Seer?"

Luna shook her head, jostling the wreath of ivy that had been precariously placed atop her crown. He had been preoccupied when she'd explained its purpose, but if he knew Luna—and he did—it was probably some sort of Nargle repellent; he had refused inoculation, and Luna was quite diligent about protecting him from infestations.

Draco rubbed his chin as he noted the uncharacteristic wringing of the witch's hands. He ran his palm across his mouth, hiding his grin; she was adorable when she was nervous. It was such an unusual sight that he wanted to enjoy it while it lasted. "And the whole thing with Hermione and Severus ...?"

"Oh, it was a true prophecy," she was quick to insert, "just ... not given by me. But someone had to help them see they were meant to be together! What if she'd married Ron instead?" Her widened eyes displayed her horror at the thought.

Swallowing back a chuckle, Draco arched an eyebrow. "And there was one about us, as well?"

"Yes," she admitted, then hastened to add, "but I'd love you anyway, with or without it."

"Good to know," he said, his lips quirking as he attempted to rein in his amusement. "Are there ... more?"

She shrugged, her expression guileless.

"Right." Draco wasn't certain what to make of that. How many prophecies could she have in that head of hers? And how many involved people they knew? Merlin.

"Are you angry?" she asked, tilting her head to one side, causing the ivy to tip askew.

Lifting his hand, Draco righted the wreath and then tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear. "No."

Her eyes narrowed as she searched his face for any sign that might belie his denial. She must have been satisfied with what she found, because her eyes quickly returned to their normal, wistful state. "All right, then."

"All right? Does that mean you'll—?"

"*WACKAWOO! WACKAWOO!*"

Her eyes widened in surprised delight, and Draco groaned, knowing exactly what was about to happen. Merlin's beard, did these creatures mate *all the time*? Luna's mouth curved into a mischievous grin before she turned and began to run, the sound of her footfalls muffled by the snow. "You should hurry!"

Shaking his head at her antics, he chased after her, much as he had the first time they'd visited the forest. "Oi, are you ever going to answer my question?" he called out, grinning like a fool when the sound of her laughter floated back to him.

She skidded to a halt at the edge of the forest and spun to face him, her eyes sparkling as he caught up with her. Her chest heaved with her exertion, but she said nothing, seemingly happy to do nothing more than look at him.

"Well?" Draco said, arching one brow.

"Yes." Luna grabbed his hand and stepped out of the forest, into a small clearing.

"Yes, you'll answer the question, or yes, you'll—" Draco's muttering came to an abrupt stop, his jaw slackening as he took in a sight that few had ever seen. "Merlin's left hairy toe. It's the Grifflback Snorflunks."

"Yes."

Slowly, he looked away from the short-legged creatures, who were stomping their feet, searching for any signs of edible foliage beneath the snow. "Yes?"

She nodded, her eyes glazing over as she stood up on her toes and briefly pressed her mouth to his. "Yes, I'll marry you."

And then it was his turn to kiss her, and as he did, Draco knew, standing in a snow-covered Scottish clearing with the call of so-called mythical creatures filling the air, that she had truly captured him, heart and soul. Life with Luna would never be boring ... and he looked forward to every moment.

"*WACKAWOO!*"

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*A/N: And that's the end! Luna just couldn't keep her secret from Draco—she had to tell him. :)*

*A huge thank you to my beta readers, DeeMichelle and Subversa, and to my Brit picker, LettyBird. I am so lucky to have these ladies in my life.*

*Thanks again for sticking with me!*