

The Broken Road

by Britt1975

Hermione's Christmas doesn't go quite as she planned.

Chapter One

Chapter 1 of 1

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Authors Note: This was written for the 2005-2006: *Celebrate the Season with Draco and Hermione fic exchange* at the DMHGficExchange on Livejournal. My prompt can be found at the end of the story. My lovely betas were SnarkyWench and Bunney and God bless them for putting up with me.

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The snow fell thickly, muffling the sound of the slamming door as she escaped from the brightly lit holiday hell that equaled Christmas with her parents. Rather than the fluffy stuff of clichéd Christmas movies, though, this snow was cold and wet and sticky, clumping dirty and gray in streets already littered with the detritus that came naturally with the holidays.

"Even the weather isn't cooperating with me tonight," thought Hermione as she pulled up her collar and trudged toward home.

Christmas with her parents had been a bad idea from the start, but her loneliness had overruled her common sense when she'd gotten Ron's last owl. As the Cannon's Lead Publicist, he spent a lot of time on the road with the team. Hermione normally didn't begrudge his time away from home. He was doing something he loved, and she rather enjoyed the quiet peacefulness that reigned over their shared flat in his absence. Besides that, her job as a Curse Breaker for the Ministry kept her busy and out of town almost as often as Ron. Not to mention that she had plenty of company when she wanted it. In the years since the war, she'd kept in close touch with a number of Hogwarts alumni whom she called friends, even if that hadn't been the case at school.

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The war had changed a lot of people, and following the events of sixth year, many truths had come to light, not the least of which was the vow that Snape had made to protect Draco, and the lengths that he'd been forced to go in order to fulfill it. In the heated days and weeks that followed Dumbledore's death, Aurors had searched fervently for the ex-Potions master and his charge. The headquarters of the Order had been moved from Grimmauld Place to Hogwarts in the event that Snape decided to lead Voldemort to their door. Hourly reported sightings of the fugitive duo had had members of the Order Apparating all over the British Isles at rates that proved to be detrimental to their magical health. It hadn't been until almost a month after Dumbledore's funeral that Hedwig had arrived with a tattered roll of parchment clutched in her talons. Rather than deliver the missive to Harry, she'd landed in front of Hermione and bowed her head, hooting a tired greeting. Hermione had taken the letter, a look of puzzlement settling over her features. The handwriting had been immediately recognizable, having spent six years in a classroom following instructions written in that distinctive hand.

*Hermione had looked up at the Order members that were crowded around the table. "It's from Professor Snape," she'd said, voice trembling. "It says, 'Check his Pensieve.'"*



Draco definitely hadn't wanted the life of a Death Eater, not after he'd seen what it had to offer. A little distance and a great deal of time spent with Snape had opened his eyes to the truth. Voldemort's followers were nothing more than pawns in his ploy to gain immortality and cleanse the wizarding world of all those he considered inferior. While Draco had been on the run with Snape, he had spent more than one sleepless night trying to understand why all the best families in the wizarding world had chosen to follow a megalomaniacal half-blood dictator who casually placed pureblood wizards in the line of fire and nonchalantly ordered the torture and death of any of his supporters who displeased him. How could the pureblood Death Eaters be the pinnacle of the wizarding world when they were bowing and scraping before their half-blood master? The answer that had come to him in the bleak hours before dawn haunted him. Everything he'd been raised to believe, everything that his father had taught him, had been a lie. But however grateful he was to escape that future, however aware he was of the truth of the matter, it didn't make it any easier for him to swallow his pride

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Hermione shrugged and tilted her head as she studied Draco's attire. "Why are you in Muggle London?" she asked suddenly, ignoring his question. "And what on earth are you wearing?"

"Nothing," Hermione said, tilting her head to the other side and enjoying the sight of Malfoy in Muggle clothing. "Who do you know in Muggle London?"

Hermione made a "pfft" of denial and ducked her head, hoping that the darkness would hide the flush on her cheeks, or that Malfoy would attribute it to the cold, if he saw it. After all this time, Hermione should be used to Malfoy's appeal; she could usually resist his harmless flirting and suggestive comments with ease. However, there were times when he would turn the full force of his smile on her, and she would see something in his eyes that made her wonder what might happen if she were single. It didn't help that the time of the year, coupled with loneliness, was making her even more susceptible. She lifted her head and tried to focus on what Malfoy was saying.

"Maddox?" Hermione queried back at him, causing Malfoy to throw up his hands.

Hermione laughed and nodded. "I'm sorry. My brain is short circuiting from the cold. Didn't you say that you had other plans for Christmas Eve? Some hot date? I didn't realize you and your hot date were going to Maddox's party." Hermione looked around. "Where's your hot date?"

Hermione shook her head and glanced down at herself. "I'm not really dressed for a party," she said, spreading her coat open. "I get the feeling that the attire for Maddox's party is a little more posh than jeans and a jumper, not to mention the mud that's smeared all over my boot."

Hermione laughed at him and shook her head again. "As much fun as that sounds, Malfoy, I'm going to take a pass. I just want to get home and snuggle up with a good book and wait for Ron. Maybe he'll decide to Apparate home after all." She reached out and squeezed his gloved hand with one of hers. "Thanks for the offer, though. Happy Christmas, Draco."

Hermione rolled her eyes and gave a quick wave before she disappeared with a sharp crack.

[illegible]

Hermione was happy that she'd run into Draco. He'd definitely lightened her mood and made her feel a little more at ease with spending the holidays alone. She'd been tempted to throw caution to the wind and go to the party with him, but it didn't seem fair. Ron was stuck working the holidays, and it wouldn't look good for his girlfriend to be seen out and about with a man whom he was well known to loathe.

"*Dissendium!*" she whispered before moving cautiously into the opened doorway. What she saw caused her to drop her wand and cover her mouth as a gasp of hurt surprise escaped.

Hermione stood frozen for a bare moment. Shock, fury and grief coursed through her in equal measure as she reached down and snatched up her wand. Giving a sharp stab towards the lights that were twinkling merrily on the Christmas tree, she then swished her wand in a violent twist towards Ron and shouted, "*Incarcerous.*"

"Bloody hell!" Ron shouted, trying to disengage from the woman beneath him without the use of his hands, which were now bound to his body. For her part, his tart was struggling to get away from him as well. It didn't help, however, that he was floundering around like a fish that had been well and truly netted.

Hermione silently Accio'd the woman's clothes and wand to her hands as she stalked further into the room. She wadded the witch's belongings together and tossed them at her as the woman cowered in front of Ron.

"Get out of my house!" Hermione demanded, pointing to the still open doorway.

"Come in!" Sonia had exclaimed, grabbing Hermione by the arm. "What do you think of the display?" she'd asked, gesturing wildly as was her habit. "I finished it up just in time for the Christmas shopping season!"

"NO!" Hermione straightened her spine. She wasn't going to sit around and feel sorry for herself. She was going to do what she should have done a long time ago. She'd spent too much time playing games of 'what if' and 'I wonder.' Draco's comments and actions over the years had inspired many a heated fantasy. She'd always been attracted to the blond, but ties of loyalty and love had kept her with Ron. She still loved Ron, she always would regardless of what he had done. But she had to wonder how long it had been since she'd really been *in love* with him. If Hermione was honest with herself, she would admit that there hadn't been a spark there in a long time. She may not have taken the final steps that Ron had, but she had looked elsewhere, as well. Looked at the man who never failed to show her attention no matter what she was wearing or how her hair looked. And she'd looked his way more than once. Tonight, she was going to find out if there was more to Malfoy than charm and flirtation.