

All Reason and Misunderstanding Aside

by Mazzy

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Draco's Duty

Chapter 1 of 5

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Chapter One: Draco's Duty

Snape looked down at the perfectly brewing potions and back at the pair with a glowering stare. "And how do you expect Weasley to pass his N.E.W.T.s when he can't even brew a simple Calming Draught, Miss Granger?" Disdain dripped from every syllable.

"Ten points from Gryffindor! And I think," he added, curling his lip into a sneer, "no marks for today's lesson." With a wave of his wand, both cauldrons lay empty and clean.

Neither his demeanor nor his loathing of the trio had changed since Severus Snape's brush with death. When he awoke in the hospital wing two weeks after Lord Voldemort fell, the one-time spy seemed too shocked that he was even alive to be relieved by that fact. When Minerva McGonagall filled him in on the events after the attack, he had gone pale and sickly, his own memories rushing back to him with her recount.

It was the brat and his oaf of a friend that had pulled him from the Shrieking Shack. The insipid know-it-all had performed a healing spell that was at least adequate enough to keep him alive until a proper Healer could find him.

Bile rose in his throat as he recalled entrusting his memories very private memories to Harry-fucking-wanker-Potter! He had erred in assuming death was inevitable, and now he had to face the boy on a daily basis. Realizing Potter would have shared those memories with his friends made Severus feel nothing but contempt for the trio. If possible, he despised them even more.

"Class dismissed," Snape announced. All around, students began packing cauldrons and quills back into their sacks. "Weasley! Granger! A word."

"You can go, Mr. Potter," Snape added coolly as Harry paused, looking suspiciously from his friends to his professor.

Snape sat peering at the pair as Ron and Hermione grudgingly walked up to his desk. Their dismayed faces met a look of mild delight as they approached their Potions

master.

When the last students left, he spoke. "I see no point in detention for you, Weasley, as it will only give you less time to study, serving to strengthen your already abysmal performance in my class." He seemed to relish these chances to belittle them, and it showed in every word he spoke.

With a glint in his eye and a slight curl to his lip, he added, "So for you, I will expect two feet on all calming potions, complete with specific ingredients and any adverse effects, to be handed in by next class."

"What? But that's...." Ron's voice trailed away as Snape's smile began to grow; at the same time, Hermione stepped on his foot to convey the uselessness of an argument.

"Miss Granger, you will come to my office tonight at nine o'clock for detention." And with that, he dismissed them by nothing more than returning to his essay grading, ignoring the students before him as if they weren't even there.

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"What does that git think he's gonna have you doing at nine o'clock on a Wednesday? He knows we have lessons tomorrow," Ron began as soon as they reached the Gryffindor common room and told Harry of their punishment. "Prat!" he seemed to add just for good measure.

"I hope it's something with Hagrid. Or..." Hermione began to think of past dealings with some of the beasts Hagrid considered docile, "maybe not," she finished.

"Doesn't it even bother you that he's still trying to punish us?" Ron's indignant tone was not lost on his friends. They knew exactly what he was trying to convey.

"Yeah, it does seem he'd rather have died when he found out we'd seen..." Hermione gulped and gave an apologetic glance to Harry, "...the... erm... memories." Her voice faded as she found an interesting spot of carpet to occupy her gaze.

"Git!" Harry scowled, still feeling nauseous every time he had to be reminded of that trip into the Pensieve. He shook his head as if trying to rattle the images out of it and said, "Let's just try to get some of this done. I don't want to be up all night." His voice and disgust were rising as he spoke, and his body gave a quick shudder at the idea of Snape not only being friends with his mother, but also deeply in love with her. The latter mortified Lily's son.

Hermione and Ron took his cue and set at their schoolwork. They both knew Harry needed the distraction, even if ~~it~~ was homework, and they understandingly obliged.

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N.E.W.T. year had them even busier than when they took their O.W.L.s. They barely had a second to spare these days, and Ron repeatedly asked both Harry and Hermione if they hadn't made the wrong decision in coming back to finish their last year at Hogwarts.

Things were made especially unpleasant when it was decided that Professor Snape should remain the Headmaster, since, as Minister Shacklebolt put it, *Severus Snape is exactly the kind of noble and selfless man we should want teaching our young people. He will show them how to be better citizens and to care for others without expectations of grandeur in return.*

Harry idly wondered if this was Shacklebolt's way of punishing Snape. It was no secret that Severus Snape despised the students. The Minister, having been an Auror when Snape was a Death Eater, probably felt that Snape deserved some sort of penance for his past actions, regardless of his contribution to the Order. This thought amused Harry and made him wonder if Shacklebolt had been a Slytherin himself.

Unfortunately though, that decision put the trio right back under the watchful eye of their dreaded Potions master, and there was nothing amusing about that!

The final nail in the proverbial coffin came when Snape decided that he should teach the N.E.W.T. level Potions class himself and leave Professor Slughorn to teach the rest. He explained, "Professor Slughorn has been more lenient than I would have ever dreamed, to let some of these students into N.E.W.T. level potions. It would seem that my esteemed colleague may have turned a blind eye to ineptitude in favor of flashy names and over-lavished praising. Since it is ultimately my embarrassment if they fail, it is also my responsibility to bring the less... cerebral amongst them up to standard."

Ultimately, Harry thought that Snape kept this class so he would still be able to harass him, Ron, and Hermione while possibly considering it an added bonus that he could keep a bit of an eye on Draco Malfoy. Had Snape known Harry's opinion on the matter, he would not have been able to say that Harry was wrong.

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At quarter to nine, Hermione grabbed her cloak and her bag and headed to the Headmaster's office. "Veritaserum," she said as she reached the stone gargoyle. It sprang to life and stepped aside to reveal the familiar spiral staircase. When she reached the wooden door, she knocked, and it creaked open at once.

Professor Snape was sitting behind his desk, a picture of Dumbledore sleeping in a frame just overhead. All the former Hogwarts Headmasters seemed to be snoozing, except, Hermione noticed, Phineas Nigellus Black, who was wide-awake and watching her with eager eyes.

Her stomach lurched at the thought of Black telling Snape that he had been spying on him during the lead up to the war at her request. It would undoubtedly be just the thing that would push the Potions master over the edge. Hermione irrationally wondered if Snape knew how to do a mass Obliviate and where he might stash her body.

"Ah, yes," Black drawled as she stepped in and sat on the chair in front of the desk, eyeing the picture wearily. "Isn't this one of the students that stayed with my great great grandson once upon a time?"

"It is the same, Phineas," returned Snape.

Apparently, he was just as worried about Snape's wrath as she was. And, Hermione thought to herself, the portrait was in a far more precarious position than she if he hoped to defend himself against an enraged Snape. Well, good! Even if Black was less than pleased with her actions, he wasn't going to tell Snape, and she certainly wouldn't either.

She redirected her attention to the current Headmaster only to find his black eyes boring into hers.

"Well, Miss Granger, you know why you're here. Now let's discuss what you'll be doing." Even with years of skilled espionage, Snape couldn't hide the mirth in his tone. "You will be watching over the grounds tonight."

Hermione's look of incredulousness caused Phineas to speak again.

"You allow your students to give you these looks of disrespect, Severus? Maybe the girl would be better taught with a lesson in manners! In my day I would have never allowed such insolent behavior of *children*."

Ah, there it was *Slytherin subtlety*.

"That's enough, Phineas," Snape said smoothly. "I'm well aware of Miss Granger's shortcomings. I assure you, no one need point them out to me." Snape seemed to be enjoying himself just as much as the portrait.

He leaned back casually in his chair, elbows on armrests, and eyed her over steepled fingers as he continued. "There seems to be cause for concern over Fenrir

Greyback. It is believed that he may have survived the war, and there are rumors that he is hiding in the Forbidden Forest, biding his time before trying to come in and wreak havoc on our beloved school." Hermione gasped, but Snape acted as if she hadn't made a sound. "It will be your job this evening to keep watch over the grounds and send a signal should you see anyone," he paused, a cruel grin crossing his lips, as he amended, "or should I say, *anything* coming out of the forest toward the castle."

Hermione looked horrified. He couldn't possibly expect her to wait outside, alone in the dark, watching for a werewolf to spring forth. How would she protect herself if Greyback actually did show up? The whole idea was absurd!

Both Snape and Phineas Nigellus read Hermione's look as if she had just spoken her thoughts aloud. Phineas gave a narrow eyed, soft chuckle. Snape, however, leaned forward and continued pointedly. "Should I not assume you are up for the post, Miss Granger, after all the excitement of last year? Surely with all you've seen and done while following the great Harry Potter, one lone werewolf should be of nothing to you."

The girl sat dumbstruck. He actually expected her to do this! He expected her to sit up all night and watch for a werewolf!

Snape was obviously waiting for the exact effect this announcement had created because he gave pause before adding scathingly, "Don't worry, Miss Granger, I know exactly how many others helped you and your friends on your road to glory. I wouldn't dare send you out with the notion that you could handle this on your own."

Hermione glared at him, but she was relieved all the same.

"Your counterpart is already on the grounds," Snape announced as he stood and gestured Hermione toward the door, Phineas still eyeing her as she hitched up her bag and cloak and took her leave.

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Dusk had subsided to darkness while Draco sat stone still, knees bent with elbows resting easily upon them. A misty fog had settled on the grounds, hugging the rolling scenery. But his eyes, though fixed, seemed to be taking in nothing of it.

Just as every other evening, he was lost in thoughts of all that had transpired in the passing year. His father was sent to Azkaban for six months? *Pssft, he's lucky he didn't get sixty years*, Draco thought to himself. His mother returned to their home and acted as if none of it had happened. Snape had been cleared *wasn't he there when Professor Burbage was killed, and all the others? He did nothing to help them, and yet here he was, free as a hippogriff, and revered as some sort of hero!*

Then there was his self. It was these thoughts that plagued him most of all. His own actions and what they had meant; what he had done to those around him, some of whom he held in great respect, despite what he told others. Dumbledore's gaze during his final minutes on the Astronomy tower seeped into Draco's mind's eye. He shook his head fiercely and rubbed his eyes.

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A beam of light shone across the grounds, and in a second it was gone. Someone had just come out the entrance to the castle. The sudden light blurred Draco's vision, so he couldn't make out the shape clearly. He didn't really need to look anyway. He knew it would be Snape. Often, he came out to make sure Draco hadn't fallen asleep, or at least that's the excuse he used.

Mostly, it seemed the Headmaster came out just to torment Draco. He'd remind the younger man of all that had happened *as if I needed reminding* of all that Draco himself had been a part of, and tell him yet again that this is why he would proceed to perform this needed duty for the school.

When they reached the boy sitting alone in the dark, Hermione was shocked to see Draco Malfoy. "He's the protector?" she scowled sharply. "Ha!" Draco turned to her and glared scornfully.

"No introductions needed, I see," Snape chided. "You will be sitting out here with Draco until seven o'clock. By then the sun will have risen, and any danger that may have presented itself will be gone for another day."

"I'd be safer out here by myself than sitting next to a Death Eater!" Hermione spat, glaring at the sallow faced boy in front of her.

Even Draco was surprised when Professor Snape turned on her and said in a low but distinct voice, "Draco, as you know perfectly well, given your... closeness to the situation, has proven that he no longer practices the Dark Arts. You will not," and he emphasized the word *not* with a rising tone, "say such things about him or his family again, or you will find yourself sitting out here every night... and you may just get your wish of sitting alone."

Snape's voice was sinister. Hermione knew he meant what he threatened. "Lovely," he mocked as she took a seat on the damp ground, not too close to her partner.

Draco, after shooting her one more sneering glare, faced front once again and resumed his empty stare as Snape left the grounds.

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It seemed hours had passed, and even with her bag full of books, which she had charmed with a Luminescens spell to read in the dark, the overwhelming boredom was getting the best of Hermione Granger. She chanced a glance in Draco's direction only to see his eyes fixed frontward and staring off somewhere far away.

"Humpf," Hermione sighed and went back to her reading.

"What's wrong, *Weasley*? Those books of yours not keeping you entertained?" Draco's voice cut through the silence.

Hermione glared. "What's *that* supposed to be, Malfoy? Too stupid to remember my name?"

"I thought that was your name, *Weeaaasssley*," Draco sneered. "Aren't you planning on marrying the giant prat?"

"What are you...? Ron and I are just friends!"

"Pssft! Wish all my friends snogged me like that!" Draco was getting to her and he loved it. Truthfully, he was enjoying having someone out here to talk to, even if it was Hermione Granger.

"Well, I'm sure Goyle would love the chance!" she stung back.

He glared at her and she returned it in kind. But Draco couldn't hold his look it was funny. He shook his head and gave a light chuckle as he turned away to resume looking over the grounds.

Hermione was sure it was the first time she'd ever seen him smile, and the strangeness of it caused her anger to subside to curiosity. She contemplated him for a moment, but when he didn't continue their verbal sparring, she decided there was no sense keeping up a row. They had several more hours together, and constant fighting would just give her a headache. She relaxed and returned to her book.

"So you and Weasley split up, eh?"

"What business is it of yours?" Hermione snapped. The sound of his voice instantly put her back on guard.

"Just makin' conversation, Granger. I couldn't care less," he drawled.

She didn't know which infuriated her more: the fact that he had the nerve to ask her anything personal, or the fact that he was staring forward, not looking at her as he spoke.

She decided to address the issue. After all, where was he going to go?

"So you don't look at people when you speak to them, Malfoy?" Her glare had returned, and she was speaking to him in a tone of utter disrespect. "Are those the manners dear ol' mummy and daddy Death Eater taught you?"

As the words left her lips, the slightest pang of guilt swept down her. Why would she bring up his parents? *It's bad enough he was a Death Eater. There's no reason to go over the whole damn family tree*, Hermione thought to herself.

Draco glared. "If you have something to say, let's hear it, Granger! Sure you can fight your battles without Potty and Weasley here to take care of you?" He was leaning toward her threateningly now, and Hermione was taken aback at his look of sheer menace.

It took her several minutes to regain herself, and when she spoke, it was in a subdued tone. "I'm sorry I brought up your parents."

"What?" he shouted.

"I said I'm sorry I brought up your parents, okay?" She was a little more composed now, and her voice rose with her newfound determination.

Draco pulled back to his previous position, still glowering at her. "Yeah..." but the rest of his retort seemed caught in his throat.

Not one to easily concede, Draco regained his bearings and spat, "So you're sorry another Death Eater's been locked up in Azkaban?"

"No!" she said with definition. "Look, we've got a long night out here, and all I'm saying is I'm sorry I brought it up, okay?" Hermione's voice was slightly more calm, though Draco knew it was not to be taken as surrender. He gave a sneering half nod as he turned away and returned to his thoughts.

In the moonlight, Hermione noticed the dark circles under his eyes. They did not fit with his otherwise pale features.

"I know I'm pretty, Granger, but I'd prefer it if you didn't stare." He had resumed speaking to her without so much as a sideways glance.

She began to wonder how many nights he sat out here alone, and the curiosity caused the words to escape her lips before she even realized she was speaking again. "How many detentions have you had?"

"I don't have detention," he replied without expounding on the still hanging question of why he had been given this duty.

"But why..." Her voice trailed away as he turned toward her with a look that told her she was being very thick for someone supposedly so smart.

First came her comprehension and then her anger. *This* was his punishment? *This!* It was unfathomable. He let Death Eaters into the school, tried to murder the previous headmaster, helped Voldemort start a war, and *this* was all he got for it?

Her face was contorting into an evil glare as she stared at him, all the emotion of what he had caused flashing through her memory. Draco did not miss her look.

"Oh, aren't you the perfect little hero? What do I care what a Mudblood thinks?" He was shouting again, unable to control the rage that had been stewing inside him for so long.

"Mudblood pssft! Same ol' Malfoy! At least I didn't try to murder my headmaster! At least I didn't help start a war! My friend didn't start a fire, nearly burning down the school, and get himself burnt up in the process!" Hermione fumed. Fury was filling every fiber of her being.

"Yeah, that's right, isn't it?" Draco shot back. "Your friends are fine! Your parents are safe at home! *You* didn't have to torture anybody. *You* didn't have to finish what your father couldn't. *You* didn't have to go to bed every night wondering if this was the night he was gonna come in your room and kill you in your sleep, did you!"

All the rage and fear and anger that had been inside Draco Malfoy for the past two years was boiling over. His fists were clenched, his body stiff, and his eyes were cold and glazed. He was so enraptured in emotions that he didn't even notice how uncharacteristically forthcoming he was being in showing them. "You don't have to walk around the rest of your life wearing this!" He pulled up his left sleeve to reveal a freshly scarred wound.

The scar was large and looked as if, at one time, the wound had been opened all the way down to the bone. It was only slightly distorted from the original Dark Mark that once branded his skin.

At the sight of the mark on his forearm, Hermione started and gasped. She stared at the scar with a mingled expression of fear and disgust. He tugged hard at his sleeve to re-cover his mutilated skin. Then he turned forward again, and Hermione saw that his eyes had become glassy.

Her mind was spinning with all he had just revealed. It had never occurred to her that maybe Draco Malfoy did not consider it an honor to work with Voldemort, or that just maybe, at some point, he had changed his mind about his allegiance to the terrible creature. She had always assumed he was proud that his "Dark Lord" shared the Malfoy home with him and his family.

Thinking about it now, she had never considered that just like she and her friends, he may have also had to face horrors he would have never imagined before. She thought back to when Greyback had taken her, Harry, and Ron to Malfoy Manor. *He didn't reveal Harry when he had the chance*

Looking at him more closely, she noticed that his face looked somewhat worn. He possessed the same strong features, but it was as if he'd lived ten years in two, and even the most flawless skin couldn't hide that life.

"So what happened to that?" Hermione spoke more levelly now, though her voice was still carrying coolness as she gestured to his arm with her eyes.

He shrugged before turning back to look over the grounds and avoid her gaze. "Dark magic is hard to heal," he said, also with a calmer tone. "Madam Pomfrey," he added before she could ask who mended it. "My father... the guards couldn't heal his. His arm has turned black, and he can't use it anymore."

As an afterthought he said, "Guess you think it's what he... we... deserve."

Hermione couldn't help but wonder. *Do I think that's what Draco Malfoy deserves?* She was afraid of what the answer would say about her either way.

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Ron and Harry waited by the fire in the Gryffindor common room for Hermione to return.

"It's eleven-thirty!" Ron said indignantly. "What the hell has that prat Snape got her doing anyway?"

Ron and Hermione realized shortly after they started dating that they had regarded each other as friends for far too long. They now had more of a brother-sister relationship

than that which lovers share. They decided to remain just as friends, but that didn't stop Ron from continuing his overprotectiveness of her. Even when he began dating again, he still seemed to hold Hermione in very high regard, and to Hermione's dismay, seemed to watch her comings and goings just as much as he had Ginny's before she resumed dating Harry.

"He's probably got her sorting old decayed potions ingredients or something," Harry said wonderingly.

"Well, if she doesn't come back soon, I'm gonna go find her!" Ron began pacing while taking glances at the clock.

Harry, who knew that Ron's plan would result in nothing good for any of them, replied, "Ya know, Hermione's a really smart witch and really capable of taking care of herself, mate. Snape's not gonna go and do anything mental that might get her hurt. He knows he'd have to deal with half the Order if something bad happened to any of us." He finished his statement with a deep yawn while Ron slumped back into the cushy armchair he had previously abandoned.

"Well, how're we gonna get any sleep if she's out all night?" Ron said, also yawning.

Harry took a sideways glance at his best friend and smiled. "We can go to sleep. We don't actually *have* to wait up for her."

Ron looked slightly taken aback by this statement, so Harry continued to explain. "Look, I'm just saying, Hermione can handle herself and even Snape if she has to. She won't be mad if we've gone to bed before she gets back." When he saw that Ron was beginning to look mutinous, he continued, "She even probably expects it since it's so late."

After a few more huffs and glares at the clock above the mantle, Ron conceded that Harry might be right, and they headed up the stone staircase to their dormitory.

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Hermione was trying to read again, although not really taking anything in, when Draco glanced up at the stars and then stood suddenly. "It's midnight," he replied when he saw her inquiring look. He seemed to want to keep things on an even keel now that they'd stopped shouting, although it looked as if it took great effort for him to do so. "I usually take a walk around now. Can't just sit here like a lump all night."

Draco caught Hermione's glance toward his wrist and then the questioning look on her face. "The stars," he answered dismissively.

But Hermione wasn't giving him this look because she didn't know how he'd figured out the time without a watch. She knew the stars too. She was just surprised that Draco knew them, assuming he would see the subject as too unimportant to warrant his attention.

With a begrudging sigh, he held out his hand in a gesture that was clearly an invitation to tag along. She decided to go, but opted to push herself up instead of accepting his assistance, then proceeded to accompany him across the grounds.

They walked in silence for a bit, and then Draco stopped and pointed up to the stars. "You see Orion's alignment with the moon right now?"

"Yeah," Hermione conceded warily. She was unsure if she should allow herself to drop her guard while walking next to such a vehement adversary. Draco seemed to be acting as if they were friends, which she knew they could never be.

He continued, seemingly unaware of her internal battle, "Well, that's how you know it's midnight. So, for this time of year, you can get a good idea of the time just by knowing that little bit."

"So you cheat when you look at the stars?" There was a slight accusatory snicker in her voice.

"Yeah, Granger, I cheat at everything, didn't you know?" He rolled his eyes and gave her a cocky half smirk that could almost pass for a smile.

Hermione realized as she watched him, though she hated to admit it to herself, that he really was very good-looking. No matter what she said to the contrary, she knew that no woman would exactly find Draco Malfoy unattractive.

"Of course I know the stars," he said as he began to walk again. His words caused Hermione to give a quick start because her mind had lingered on that smile. She felt her cheeks lightly flush as she fell in step, still looking up to try to mask the rose color on her face.

"I grew up in a magical household, of course. My father taught me all about them when I was younger."

Draco didn't know why he was sharing this with Hermione Granger of all people, but his mind had spent so much time locked in the horrors of the past that it felt good just to concentrate on something mundane for a change. Even his Slytherin friends seemed to want him to relive those old nightmares regularly for their enjoyment.

They continued to walk while Draco pointed out a few things he knew about the grounds and the sky, and Hermione chimed in occasionally with random facts she had read in *Hogwarts: a History*.

When they got back around to the spot where they'd began, they resealed themselves, Draco now leaning more casually against a large tree while Hermione sat cross-legged, her body turned slightly in his direction.

She decided to chance a go at the question she had asked him earlier and was still curious about. "So... how often do you sit out here at night?"

This time, he curbed her curiosity with a response.

"I keep watch three nights a week, and Saturdays; sometimes Sundays if Snape's busy, but mostly just the other four nights."

Hermione couldn't imagine trying to do all her homework, study for N.E.W.T.s, and find time to sleep if she had to stay up all night four times a week.

"How's that?" she pressed.

"What do you mean?" It was the first time all night that he was actually looking at her as they were talking.

"I mean, how do you do all your homework and study for tests and still sleep?"

She was actually beginning to feel a little sorry for Malfoy with his watchman duties but only a little.

"Well, I do a lot of my homework out here," he said and Hermione noticed his bag on the ground. He continued, "And I have some free periods, and some time after dinner to sleep before I come back out."

"So what about N.E.W.T.s? Aren't you worried you'll get T's in all your subjects if you don't study?" For Hermione, tests were of the highest priority.

"Well, I don't have to worry about N.E.W.T.s, do I?" he replied.

Hermione was slightly confused, and it must have shown on her face because he added, "What do you think, Granger, that I'm getting a job at the Ministry when I get out of school?" with another expression of looking at someone a little slow on the uptake.

"So what will you do when you leave Hogwarts then?" She was realizing as she asked this question that she was actually having a civilized conversation with Draco

Malfoy. As she was pondering this thought, she caught him saying something about gold and inheritance, and she refocused her attention on the conversation at hand.

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Hours passed, but the night sky looked nowhere near breaking into dawn. Hermione was feeling very tired now. There were at least three hours left of this detention, and she was becoming more amazed with each passing minute that Draco could keep up this watch without falling fast asleep.

She yawned and rubbed her eyes.

Scooting sideways a bit, Draco motioned toward the tree and said, "Here, Granger, I can stay awake, I'm used to it."

When she realized he was inviting her to lie beside him, she quickly replied, "No, I'm fine."

He furrowed his brow a little, and she braced herself for another row, but instead he just rolled his eyes, saying, "Come on, Granger, it's not me who's gonna bite."

She had almost forgotten the reason they were out there. Remembering Fenrir Greyback, she suddenly felt more awake. As politely as she could, given that she was speaking to Draco Malfoy, she told him she'd stay up too.

"Suit yourself." He shrugged as he readjusted himself more comfortably against the tree.

Several minutes later, Hermione was yawning again, and this time it felt like the exhaustion was taking over.

"Maybe we could each have a bit of a kip?" she questioned. "I'll stay up for a bit and keep watch, and then you stay up."

"I'm not going to sleep," he replied matter-of-factly.

It occurred to Hermione that Draco might actually be taking this responsibility more seriously than she had thought.

She stared at him for a moment before he looked at her and snapped, "Fine. Here," motioning again towards the tree.

She leaned back, not all that comfortably since they were shoulder to shoulder. Her body seemed to stiffen with rejection as it touched him.

"Don't get too comfortable, Granger. This will probably be the last time you ever get this close to something this good."

She jerked away, but then saw that he was half smiling; not in his normal sneer, but in a teasing, very un-Malfoy-like way. She returned his smile and leaned back again, this time letting herself relax.

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Hermione awoke to a bright red light flooding her eyelids. Daylight had come, and she was lying across Draco's chest. His arms were wrapped fully around her, her head nuzzled in his neck, and his lips were against her forehead. He was also asleep, having slid down the tree until he was lying almost flat against the ground with only his head elevated upon a large tree root.

*Whack!*

He was awakened sharply by a smack to the back of the head. Hermione realized at once that this was bad decision.

In one furious, fluid motion Draco awoke, reached into his cloak for his wand, and was pointing it at her face with a very dark expression. His eyes were not quite focused, but when he realized where he was and who had just awoken him so abruptly, he moved his wand down slowly.

"What the ruddy hell did you do that for?" he shouted.

"You said you wouldn't fall asleep! What if Greyback had come? You'd have killed us both and everyone in the castle to boot!" With daybreak Hermione seemed to regain her intense loathing of the person in front of her.

"I didn't fall asleep!" he began, but Hermione's accusatory look caused him to sputter on. "...It was daybreak!...I've only been sleeping about half an hour!" he finally conceded.

"And I'm supposed to believe you, right?" Her eyes were set in a cold glare, and he knew that nothing he said would convince her that he did not shirk off his duties.

"Why the hell am I explaining myself to you anyway?" he growled.

"Oh, and I'm supposed to believe it was just an accident that we ended up... the way we were, eh?" Hermione had lost her step about halfway through her retort, but now Draco realized the issue at hand.

*Touching you disgusts her.*

In his coldest sneer, looking her straight in the eyes, he replied, "I would never touch a Mudblood on purpose, would I? I'd say it was a gift if I wasn't so disgusted by the idea of you thinking about me while you're snogging your next Muggle-loving boyfriend."

Hermione flushed. Her mind was so full of vengeful emotion that she couldn't even speak. Malfoy took the opportunity to give her one last slice as he stood to leave, saying coldly, "These robes were new, and now I'll have to burn them for the stink!" He walked off toward the castle without a backwards glance.

## Noble Deeds

*Chapter 2 of 5*

Hermione sees a side of Draco she never expected.

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## Chapter Two: Noble Deeds

Harry and Ron expected to meet up with Hermione in the Great Hall.

When she wasn't at breakfast, they headed back to Gryffindor tower to check on their friend.

Entering the common room, they found Hermione sleeping on a cushy, chintz chaise by the fire. She had fallen asleep before she made it down to the dining hall.

"Oi!" Ron called as they entered.

Hermione awoke, still groggy, and gave a stretch. "He... ell... llo..." she yawned.

"How late did Snape make you stay up?" Harry inquired.

When she had finished explaining about Fenrir Greyback and the fact that she was sitting outside with Malfoy all evening, Ron was furious.

"What's he playing at? Why the hell would Snape send you out with Malfoy? For all we know that git could be out there plotting with Greyback himself!"

"I doubt that, Ron," Hermione said honestly.

Harry agreed, noting, "He'd be mental to try anything now."

"Well, it wasn't pleasant, but it's over, right? And I don't have to do it again."

Ron still looked angry, but he decided to concede, since the others weren't following him in Malfoy bashing.

Harry motioned to the large clock above the mantle. "Transfiguration starts in ten minutes."

They all left the common room, Hermione still yawning as they walked.

She'd be in bed before dinner that evening, succumbing to exhaustion and falling into a fitful sleep of dreams about werewolves and the plight of Draco Malfoy.

~&~&~

"He should at least be putting up extra wards around the boundary of the forest," Harry whispered, eyeing the Potions master sitting at the front of the class.

"Let's talk about this later, Harry," Hermione returned, casting a wary eye at their professor.

"He's right, Hermione. I mean, what's that git gonna do about it?" Ron jerked his head towards the Slytherin table as he and Harry both turned their gaze on Malfoy. "Probably would be too concerned about mussing up his hair to actually..."

"Umph!"

"Ugh!"

In typical Snape style, their teacher had descended upon them unnoticed and abruptly ended their whisperings by rapping both boys hard on the backs of their heads.

"Tell me, boys, what is so interesting that you needed to disrupt my class to convey the information forthwith?"

Snape followed the Gryffindors' previous eye line and came to rest on the smiling face of Draco Malfoy.

"Ahh, I see. Well, Potter, you can discuss Weasley's love interests after class."

Draco and Blaise Zabini immediately began snickering and chiding the redhead, blowing kisses to emphasize Snape's words.

"Aw, Weasley, I didn't know you cared." Draco batted his eyes and blew one last kiss as the rest of the Slytherins erupted into laughter.

Snape simply smirked at the redhead's indignation before announcing to the class that it was time to bottle their potions and clean up.

"And, Potter, since you feel no need to pay attention in class, you can write a three foot essay on the properties of the *oblivious Unction*, due Monday. Maybe you'll find an aptitude for self teaching and you'll no longer need to grace us with your presence."

The Potions master looked at Ron's cauldron and rolled his eyes. "Weasley, you can write an essay of equal length on the reasons this concoction calls for lacewing flies instead of black beetles."

Ron looked at his light blue potion and then over at the lavender brew of his friends' before sighing in defeat.

"Yes," Snape drawled, "it seems you can use all the extra help you can get. I will expect your parchment on Monday as well."

The three Gryffindors left the classroom just behind Malfoy and Zabini, who were still laughing about Snape's remarks.

Ron made a move towards the retreating Slytherins, but Harry caught his arm.

"Leave it be, mate. It's not worth a detention."

Draco caught the movement out of the corner of his eye and turned abruptly. "Oi! Weasley, are you staring at my arse?"

Several Slytherins began cooing and laughing again as the redhead flushed with rage.

"Bugger off, Malfoy!" Ron shouted. He couldn't do much more as Harry had an iron grip on his wand arm.

"That's exactly what I'm afraid of, Weasel," Draco sneered. "Don't get any ideas."

Blaise burst out laughing as he and Draco turned and headed towards their common room.

"Guess he's back to his old self," Hermione said, shooting a glare at the retreating backs of the Slytherins.

"When did he ever change?" Harry grumbled.

Hermione remembered Draco's halfway decent behavior of the other night (prior to his morning remarks of course). Yes, he was definitely back to his old self.

~&~&~

Ron was still furious when they entered Gryffindor Tower.

"It's Friday. What do you say we skive off these essays and have a go down at the pitch?" Harry did not want to deal with a disgruntled Ron all evening, and having a quick game of Quidditch always put both boys in a particularly good mood.

Snape had done the unthinkable this term by banning all *non-traditional* seventh years from participating in the sport. His unreasonable claim was that these students had an unfair advantage over their peers because they were all older than the more common age of seventeen.

Harry, Ron, and Draco Malfoy all held the belief that this was a personal punishment from Snape, although each for their own reasons.

The two Gryffindors would often head down to the pitch, feeling that by doing so they were openly defying their most hated professor. However, though neither boy expressed it verbally, they both knew that the headmaster had dealt them a fatal blow by not allowing them the thrill of the game.

Draco never flew.

"Sounds like a plan, mate. See if you can round up Dean and Seamus. I'm gonna go ask Romilda Vane if she'd like to have a go." Ron raised his eyebrows mischievously, his sour mood quickly forgotten.

Harry turned to Hermione, "You interested in some fresh air?"

"No, thanks, Harry. I need to go to the library and finish some of this homework. I didn't get a chance to do any of it Wednesday, and I went straight to bed yesterday, so I have quite a bit to catch up on."

Harry rolled his eyes, but smiled at his friend. He knew she was probably three weeks ahead on all of her lessons but there'd be no sense in trying to point this out to her.

"Okay. I'll see you back here for the party though, right?"

Hermione was actually hoping to get to bed early again tonight. She still felt a little sluggish from the overnight she'd had a couple days ago. The weekend common room parties had become ritual since Voldemort had fallen, but she didn't see any reason that she should have to attend every single one.

"If I get done early enough," she answered pensively.

If she could get back to the common room before the others, she could at least sneak up to her dormitory before anyone noticed, thus allowing her some much needed sleep without her friends calling her a party pooper for not participating in the festivities.

She waved her goodbyes and headed out of the portrait hole, her bag stuffed full with books.

~&~&~

The library was virtually empty, with just a couple of fifth year Ravenclaws cramming hard as usual for the upcoming O.W.L.s. Hermione liked the library on Fridays because she had the books almost all to herself.

One by one she tackled her subjects: a complicated chart of planetary movements and their correspondence with numbers for Arithmancy; one foot of parchment on water plants of Loch Ness for Herbology; and two feet on Freya, Nordic goddess of love, for Ancient Runes.

Symbols were swimming through her mind: Rhaido, a journey; Beorc, new beginnings; Tir, victory; Mannaz reversed, a man, a loss.

Hermione sat bolt upright. She had been lying slumped in her chair with her head on Runic *Translations of the Futhark Alphabet*. The library was empty and quiet. She knew it must be late.

Hitching up her sack, she proceeded out of the library and into the corridor. It too was empty.

While strolling quietly toward the Gryffindor common room, Hermione idly considered the benefits of her age. She no longer had to worry about being out in the castle after hours, so long as she had a valid reason for it.

A sense of smugness overcame her as she realized that even Professor Snape could not find fault with a student spending extra time in the library.

This thought had her smiling to herself when she came upon a portrait of an old looking wizard in a white coat. Stopping to look at the man, she wondered if he had possibly been the school nurse some time long before Madam Pomfrey.

"Early to bed and early to rise makes a witch healthy, wealthy, and wise," he bellowed, the sound echoing off cold stone.

"Shhhh!" Hermione hissed.

It was a knee jerk reaction built from years of assuming she'd be in trouble if she were found wandering the castle at night. Admittedly, those years had mostly been spent with Harry and Ron doing things they shouldn't be.

Her heart was still thumping loudly when she heard the cool voice of Severus Snape.

"What is it you're hiding from, Miss Granger?"

"I wasn't hiding from anything," she answered, trying to keep her voice from sounding guilty of some wrongdoing. She knew it was silly, but being cornered by this man, alone in the corridors, reduced her to feeling like a first year hoping beyond hope to be granted pardon.

"If you weren't *you*, and you weren't creeping through the corridors at night, I may believe that," Snape returned while looking further down the long hallway.

"Lumos."

The Headmaster looked as far as his wand light would show. "Potter!" he shouted to the emptiness. There was no sound.

He rounded again on a nervous looking Hermione.

"So, you just enjoy the night life, do you?" he sneered. "Well, Miss Granger, since you enjoy these evening strolls so much, why don't you accompany me to the grounds, and we can see how Mr. Malfoy is holding up in his duties? I dare say he may enjoy having company for another night."

"I didn't do anything wrong!" Hermione snapped. A feeling of righteous anger was returning her to the adult self that she actually was.

"You, Potter and Weasley are always doing something wrong! I've just informed you, not two nights ago, that a werewolf could be prowling the school. And here you are, out alone in the dark corners of the castle."



If Hermione hadn't known Snape as incapable of caring, she would have thought him genuinely concerned for her safety.

"As a matter of fact," he continued sarcastically, "since you seem to possess such uncanny Gryffindor bravery, to which no beast or bard should worry you, maybe two nights out on the grounds would be more to your liking?"

"I am not going to sit out there with Draco Malfoy for two nights!" She caught herself shouting and knew immediately she had gone too far.

Snape's lips curled to an evil sneer. "Well, well, how noble of you, Miss Granger. Shall we head out then?"

She didn't understand what Snape was going on about, but she knew she'd be best suited to surrender and follow him to the grounds.

~&~&~

"Mr. Malfoy," Snape called as they reached Draco sitting in his usual spot, "Miss Granger has graciously offered to give you the night off."

Hermione's eyes widened in shock as a look of utter fear crossed her face.

Draco looked from his professor to the girl, not quite understanding what was going on. "What?" he questioned when no explanation was forthcoming.

"Miss Granger here," Snape grinned viciously at Hermione, "has informed me that she needn't sit out here with you. And since she will be on the grounds for the next two nights, I have decided that, if you choose, you can have these two nights off from your normal duties."

Draco, who now understood more or less what the foolish Gryffindor must have said to their Headmaster, looked at Hermione and gave her a cold smile. She met his eyes, and her head gave a small involuntary shake.

With a larger smile crossing his lips, Draco replied, "Well, I wouldn't want to go against the lady's wishes, would I?"

He stood and slung his bag over his shoulder, all too ready to get to his common room and enjoy the Friday night party he hadn't attended all term. Leaving the bint out here alone with her fears was just an added bonus.

Hermione sat down and hugged her legs to her chest, staring towards the forest as the two men began to walk away.

Draco glanced backward to give her one more malicious glare before leaving, but he stopped. Something in the way Hermione was sitting there looking terrified made him feel a pang of guilt in his stomach.

He stood for a moment, staring at the girl while grappling with thoughts between vengeance and mercy.

"Something wrong, Draco?" Snape inquired.

Malfoy gave a deep, resigned sigh. "I'm staying."

As Professor Snape began making his way back toward the castle alone, they heard him say, "Maybe *am* able to teach you something, Draco."

~&~&~

The party was in full swing in the Gryffindor common room when Ron came to ask Harry if he had seen Hermione.

Since Harry was a little busy with Ginny, he hadn't noticed his friend's absence. However, seeing the redness rise on Ron's face at finding his sister perched in the lap of his best friend, Harry asked Ginny if she'd go check the girls' dorm.

Ginny opened the door to a dark room, but when she heard a soft breathing she assumed Hermione must be asleep. She closed the door quietly and headed back down the stairs to tell her brother the news and inform the prat that he could now sod off.

"I told him I'd come get him if you didn't find her," Harry answered solemnly in reply to Ginny's indignant look.

Ron was on the other side of the common room with Romilda Vane, and it was obvious that he had forgotten all about Hermione's absence.

"Well, she's upstairs," said Ginny, "and now that he's occupied," she glanced towards her brother, "I think we could find something a little more fun to do." She was wearing a wicked smile that always drove Harry wild. He accompanied her to a spot where they could be left alone.

Up in the girls' dormitory, two bodies breathed deep sighs of relief.

~&~&~

Hermione sat with her legs tucked up to her chest, refusing to even look in Draco's direction. A wonderful feeling of relief had flooded through her when he said he'd stay, and that, coupled with the embarrassment that he could do something she couldn't, had caused tears to well up and fall down her cheeks.

She felt sure he would at least sneer at her or make fun of her, but he didn't. He'd made the decision to stay with her instead of forcing her to face this alone, and now he was leaving her with her thoughts.

She wondered if he was actually trying to pretend that she wasn't there either.

In the silence, she could hear a quill scratching against parchment and the sounds of pages being flipped. Apparently, he'd decided to whittle away the hours doing homework.

He didn't try to talk to her, nor she to him, and that seemed to suit them both just fine.

At least she had managed to stop crying!

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At midnight, right on cue, Draco stood up without saying a word and put his hand out toward Hermione. This time, she took it and allowed him to pull her to her feet as they set out to walk the grounds.

The silence between them felt somewhat awkward now, and Hermione knew it was her who had to admit defeat.

"Thank you," she said softly.

"It's my burden," he stated blandly, not exactly accepting her attempt at reconciliation.

They walked on without another word.

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Reaching the forest, they began following the tree line, though both were mindful to keep a fair distance between themselves and the trees.

Draco, always conscious of his surroundings, took note of their positions. Hermione stood between himself and gnarled, brambly wood. This would not do.

Without loosing stride, he took one step backward and then another forward to come up on her opposite side. He'd taken a couple more steps before he realized that she had stopped.

Draco grabbed into his robes while looking towards the trees and whispered, "What is it?"

Hermione just stared at him in bewilderment.

It wasn't until he crumpled up his face into a questioning look that she wordlessly responded, shaking her head slightly as if to say that nothing was wrong.

When she was still staring at him moments later, he answered her look with a bit louder tone. "Wha..."

He didn't finish getting the word out of his mouth. A twig had snapped at the forest's edge.

With the same swiftness Hermione had seen of him before, Draco wrapped one arm around her waist, pulling her to his side, and was pointing the other straight ahead of them with his wand held firmly in his grip. His determined gaze was locked on the place where the sound had arisen.

Hermione pulled her wand in response and cried, *Lumos*, as her brain worked frantically in the realization that if she lit the way, Draco was prepared to take the fight.

After a moment's pause, she felt his body breath a deep sigh of relief as he slowly released his grip on her. A curious thestral foal was standing just inside the trees watching them.

Draco's arm slid away as Hermione stepped forward to get a closer look. But his fingers caught again when they reached her wrist, silently telling her *that's close enough*.

Feeling the light tug, she turned toward him, smiling. Her beaming face made the corners of his mouth give a little twitch.

"They're really quite fascinating, aren't they?" she asked, looking back at the little thestral.

"Um, yeah, they're okay," Draco answered. He really didn't understand what she found so appealing about these creatures of death. They certainly looked the part with their skeletal frames and leathery wings. "I'd kind of rather I couldn't see them," he added sheepishly.

Hermione gave the tiny creature a slight frown. "I guess most of the castle can see them now."

Both seemed lost in thought as they stood, staring after the foal for another minute. Then they turned and continued on their way.

The silence was palpable now.

Hermione was grappling with the recognition that Draco Malfoy had just displayed several chivalrous acts. Did she truly not know this boy in front of her?

Worse, now that the danger was gone, her thoughts couldn't help but linger on how good his body felt against hers.

Draco was thinking about how she had felt against him too, but in a slightly more lascivious way.

She looked at him, not knowing exactly what to say, but needing to break this strange silence.

He was staring into the distance, eyes hazy, and he was wearing a curiously devilish grin.

It was Hermione's turn to ask the question. "What?"

"Nothing," Draco answered quickly as he met her eyes, her voice bringing him back to his surroundings.

She shrugged, slight disappointment hitting her, and she began to walk again. The smile faded from Draco's face as he continued on too.

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She wanted some topic to talk about, something to take her mind off these new thoughts she was having. The last thing she wanted for herself was to fancy Draco Malfoy. Not to mention that he had a girlfriend. Although, now that she thought about it, she rarely saw them together these days.

Nothing good could come of it, she told herself unconvincingly.

Draco felt his brow furrowing in concentration, trying to push away the intimate thoughts that were sneaking into his head *She's a Mudblood!* He didn't really care. *She's a know-it-all*. He enjoyed her intelligence. *She's kind of pretty. Damn it!*

He realized that Hermione had blossomed into a rather attractive woman. Her hair was smoother now (although not like the silkiness of Pansy's), and her straightened teeth gave her a very nice smile.

What impressed him most about her was the way she stood up to him and his friends. It always gave him a reluctant feeling of respect for her. And now, to have watched her jump in to help rather than scream and cry when they may have been in great danger, he couldn't help but garner a little admiration for the witch.

As they rounded on the lake, they paused to look out over the water.

"So, you and Weasley ended it then?" Draco began nonchalantly.

This was not the topic Hermione had in mind.

"Yeah." She tried not to sound so offended that he had brought this up, even though experience told her that any time Malfoy mentioned Ron it was likely to end in insult.

"Couldn't handle having to speak in single syllables all the time, eh?" He didn't fail to disappoint.

Hermione scoffed at him and made to stomp away, but Draco grabbed her wrist as she turned and quickly added, "Okay, I'm sorry. Truce, Granger," then threw in, "for now," with a half smile.

She relaxed her face, but kept her guard up.

"So, what about you and Pansy?" There was a slight bite in her words.

"What about her?" he asked in a tone that suggested he had no idea why Hermione would associate the two of them.

"Well, I haven't seen her clinging to you like the Giant Squid lately. I just wondered if she got sick of pretending you were interesting?"

He knew it was coming; he did enjoy her quick wit.

She was right, in that Pansy was just a blubbering sycophant, always appeasing him rather than standing beside him as his equal. She was a toy a toy he admittedly enjoyed, but certainly not his equal. And it was by her own choosing, which made him feel doubly superior to his plaything.

He decided to answer honestly and keep things even between them, rather than starting another row. "She does what's expected of her."

He realized when he saw the disgruntled look on Hermione's face that honesty really wasn't the best choice.

"What's *expected* of her? So you treat your women as you treat your house-elves, do you?" Her eyes blazed as she scolded him.

"That's not what I meant!" he began defensively.

"Oh, I know *exactly* what you meant."

"You don't know anything!" he retorted, but then he caught himself, and his voice calmed slightly. "Look, I'm just saying she knows she's expected to be with me, and I know what's expected of me too."

"So you want to have a wife that just scurries about your hems, always at your beck and call at the snap of your fingers?" Her brow was still furrowed, and her tone was only slightly less venomous.

"I never said Pansy was going to be my wife, did I?"

Hermione paused for a second, contemplating this. Why the hell was he so good at skirting questions? Was he dating Pansy or not?

"She doesn't want to marry you?" she asked, but realized she must have chosen her words poorly when Draco glared at her.

"You think I don't know how to keep a woman happy, Granger? Maybe you think her skin should crawl at the thought of touching me, is that it?"

Dawning recognition followed these words. She had hurt his pride, questioned his prowess. She began to laugh. This did not help his demeanor.

He stepped toward her, purposely trying to intimidate her. "What the hell are you laughing at?"

She stood her ground and continued to laugh despite his now towering presence. She couldn't help herself. The thought that this man, so attractive, and seemingly oozing confidence, instantly assumed she was questioning his masculinity just seemed preposterous to her.

"Draco..." she giggled.

He was taken aback when she called him by his first name and even more so when she rested a hand on his chest just for a second but she didn't even seem to notice it.

"No, it never occurred to me that you couldn't take care of her *needs*." With a sly tone and a light roll of the eyes, she finished, "I'm sure the other Slytherin girls were all too happy to help you practice."

He let out a sigh, half smiling, and Hermione noticed that he stood a little taller as he turned back towards the lake. She still wondered if he and Pansy were dating.

After a short pause, he asked, "So, what about you?" He didn't look at her, slightly embarrassed by his own question.

"What about me, what?" she asked.

"Well, did you and Weasley... *practice*?" He didn't know why he was so interested, but he certainly wanted to know. He just hoped that this wouldn't lead to her shouting him down again.

She contemplated him for a moment, and he braced himself for the attack.

"Hmm," she began a little sarcastically, crossing her arms in front of her and resting the fingers of one hand on her chin as if she were trying to retrieve the answer to a particularly difficult test question.

"Let's see," she started ticking her answers off on her fingers, "we were in love, we are of age, and we dated for months. Gee, Malfoy, guess you'll have to figure that one out on your own."

She was back to calling him Malfoy. *But at least she isn't yelling* he thought. Although realizing the answer to his question left him with a little sinking feeling in his stomach.

They continued to walk and talk about random things. Both of them found the setting strange, and both felt as if they were watching it from afar rather than being willing participants in this odd truce that had commenced between them.

~&~&~

When the night broke into dawn, Draco found that he almost didn't want Hermione to go. She was packing up her books and brushing off her robes, obviously ready to be rid of him and get back to her real friends.

"Well, I guess I'll see you later," she said with a half smile, but there was a hesitation in her departure.

"Yeah," he answered, not meeting her eyes.

She stood awkwardly for just a second longer before taking her leave.

Draco sat for a few more minutes, stealthily watching her walk to the castle. When she was out of sight, he fell back to lie against the cool ground.

What the hell? You're losing it, Draco.

Well, a quick shag would rid him of these ridiculous thoughts, right?

Wondering where Pansy was, he got up and headed back to his dormitory to clear his head.

A/N: The potion (complete name) *Dr. Ubbly's Oblivious Uncction* was chosen from the HP Lexicon amongst the long list of potions found there. I chose this one because, according to the Lexicon, the Latin name translation could be "able to forget," and I figure that is what Snape wants most of Harry these days to forget what he learned in the Pensieve in DH. :)

Enemy Tendencies

Chapter 3 of 5

In the light of day status quo reigns. But revenge is sweet - or is it? Draco and Hermione may find that they don't want to remain 'enemies as usual'.

A/N: Extra special thank you to my beta CharmedForce. Without her, this story would not be fit for public consumption. :)

Chapter Three: Enemy Tendencies

Draco sat on the edge of his bed, leaning back on his elbows, watching the girl kneeling before him, kissing and nipping at his bare chest. She moved lower and lower, licking, biting, teasing his senses.

He just stared at her scowling.

"Take off your shirt."

She complied immediately, never stopping her ministrations.

Closing his eyes, he reached out to latch onto a silk covered breast. "Yesss."

The bed dipped as she made her way upward once again, hovering over him, licking, nipping, suckling his flesh.

If this were the woman he had firmly pictured in his mind, he would be running his hands all over her body instead of only cupping her breast. If this were the woman he wanted in his bed, he would be claiming her mouth, her neck, her body, while he gloried in her building desire.

If this were the woman he craved, he would not have been so pissed when she shattered his fantasy by speaking.

"Mmm, Draco. Do you want me to suck you?" It was only a whisper, almost purred into his ear.

It might as well have been a scream.

Pansy.

Fuck!

He didn't want her here.

He'd refused to touch her hair because it was smooth and short and nothing like well, he didn't want to think about that. His hands weren't roaming over her body because her slender frame and subtle curves were nothing like the more voluptuous form he was picturing in his mind's eye. He wouldn't kiss her because her too familiar taste would tell his brain that this was Pansy Parkinson, and not...

He just needed to keep his eyes closed. Needed to concentrate. Needed to find release and be done with these absurd thoughts.

She playfully whispered again. "Draco, tell me what you want."

He wanted her to shut the hell up!

Why had he even bothered with Pansy again? He'd been brushing her off for weeks, trying to end things once and for all. Still, how was he to begrudge himself such a willing partner? Even Perfect Potter would have a hard time turning away a girl who so often came to his rooms, naked and wanting, asking nothing more than to give pleasure and receive it in return.

Yet he didn't want her. And in the long run, she was asking for so much more.

He let out a deep sigh and fell flat against the bed, throwing an arm up over his eyes.

"Enough! We're done."

"It doesn't feel like we're done," she teased, running a hand over the firmness still concealed under his trousers.

He lifted his arm slightly to give her a disgusted sneer. "Well, I'd get the same effect if I rutted against this duvet, wouldn't I?"

"You're a bastard!" she screeched, jerking away from the bed. "Maybe I'll just go find someone else to take care of my needs!"

"You go do that, Pansy." His tone held no hint of concern.

The slamming door signaled her departure.

Fuck!

Well, at least he was alone.

Warding the door to his private room, and mentally thanking Snape for that one favor, he headed to the shower to find his release alone.

~&~&~

It was almost noon when Hermione awoke in the empty dormitory, an incessant knocking pulling her abruptly from her slumber. She grabbed the terry cloth robe that her mother had sent to her and headed toward the door.

"You okay, Hermione?" a muffled voice called through the thick wood.

Opening the door revealed Ginny, Harry, and Ron standing there looking rather worried. The boys were sporting their brooms over their shoulders, leaving Hermione a little miffed at the idea that she had been awakened just to go down to the pitch and watch them fly.

"Err, yeah?" she asked when her friends just stared at her.

"Are you sick? You've been sleeping for a long time." Harry said.

"No... I haven't," she replied with a yawn.

Her anger ebbed a little when she realized how worried they all looked.

"Come in."

Ron and Harry both blushed.

"There's no one else in here," Hermione said, a little exasperated.

They all took seats on the abandoned beds as Ron asked, "So, what's going on with you?"

"Well, the shortened version is that I had to spend another night on Greyback watch."

"What!"

"Calm down, Ron. Let her tell us what happened." Ginny rolled her eyes at her brother. "I think we might need the long version, Hermione."

"Well, I went to the library like I told you, Harry." Hermione nodded her head towards her friend. "But I must have been more tired than I thought because I fell asleep while I was doing my Ancient Runes homework."

"That wouldn't be hard to do," Ron interjected.

Hermione huffed. "So, *anyway*, it was late, and on my way back to the common room, I ran into Professor Snape."

At the mention of their Potions professor, Harry and Ron exchanged glares.

"He rambled something about beasts and bards I don't know, and then said that since I seemed to have so much Gryffindor bravery, I could spend the next two nights watching the grounds with Draco."

"Two nights!" Harry and Ron both shouted at once.

"Draco?" Ginny questioned, eyeing her friend quizzically.

Hermione ignored the look and the implied question. "It's only two nights."

"It's two nights of sitting with Malfoy," Harry said, disgusted.

"It wasn't that bad actually," Hermione confessed.

Ron and Harry exchanged incredulous looks while Ginny continued to look at her in a way that was making her very uncomfortable.

"So, do you think Snape really believes Greyback is in the forest?" Hermione queried, more to guide the conversation away from Malfoy than anything else.

"Well, he must think something's out there or he wouldn't have people keeping watch, right?" Ron questioned.

Ginny thought on it for a second. "I don't know. It would be just like Snape to say there's a werewolf in the forest and threaten those detentions to keep the students in line." Ginny was very perceptive to the internal thoughts of others a little too much so at times, Hermione thought.

"Well, if he is in the forest, only having a couple students keeping watch isn't going to keep Greyback away from the school," Harry reasoned.

"Oh, Harry," Hermione sighed as she rolled her eyes. "I think we've all done enough to warrant some time off from saving the school."

She felt irritable at her body's nagging for sleep, and she had only brought it up to get off the Malfoy subject anyway. She already didn't like where this conversation was heading either.

Harry, Ron and Ginny all looked around at each other and then back at Hermione, apparently surprised by this out of character tone she had taken on.

"I'm sorry. I'm just still a little tired," she said apologetically. "I'll get dressed and get something to eat, and then I'll feel better."

"By the way, why are you two carrying your brooms?" She looked from Harry to Ron.

"We couldn't get up the bloody staircase!" Ron snapped.

They all laughed, leaving the dormitory to let Hermione get dressed.

She met them at the bottom of the stairs a few minutes later, and they headed to the Great Hall for lunch.

~&~&~

At the Gryffindor table they met up with Neville Longbottom and made plans to head to the Quidditch pitch after lunch.

Neville, who had come back to finish the partial school year he'd missed because of the war, was enjoying only having a half schedule of classes. This allowed him time to pursue his passion of plants more thoroughly.

"...haven't seen them around here for at least seventy years," Neville was saying about some new weed that had sprung up by the pitch. "I'd like to see if Professor Sprout will let me replant some in the greenhouses so I can study the magical properties more thoroughly."

Hermione decided to tag along to enjoy what was probably one of the few remaining nice days before the chill of winter began creeping in.

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The weather outside was glorious. Sunny with a slight breeze and bright blue skies as far as the eye could see. It seemed the entire castle had taken to the grounds to enjoy it.

"Finnigan," Ron bellowed, seeing the fellow Gryffindor talking animatedly to a couple of girls by the lake.

Seamus looked over at the group to see Ron holding out his broom in silent question. He nodded to the redhead and then sprinted back toward the castle, presumably to grab his broom.

Ron glanced at the retreating figure of Seamus, then back towards the girls, catching one's eye and giving her a flirtatious wink. "Oof!" And ran straight into Harry, who had stopped abruptly in front of him. "What the bloody..."

Harry was standing stone still, staring malevolently across the grounds.

The group shifted their attention toward the direction Harry was staring to see Draco Malfoy leering over a second-year Hufflepuff. Nobody noticed Hermione begin to fidget.

Luna Lovegood, who had joined them at the Entrance Hall, spoke first. "That's awfully nice of him to befriend the younger students," she said dreamily. "When I was new to Hogwarts, the seventh years somewhat intimidated me."

"I doubt he's asking the kid for a game of Exploding Snap, Luna," said Harry, still sneering at his nemesis. He made to stomp off toward Draco when Hermione grabbed his arm.

"Harry, just let it go," she pleaded.

"No way, Hermione, he's up to no good."

As per usual, Harry considered it his personal quest to battle the Slytherin at every turn. All of his friends, at some point or another, had told him to let it go, but to Harry, that bastard of a Death Eater deserved any hardships he could bestow upon him.

Ron, being the ever-supportive best mate, chimed in. "Yeah, what's wrong with you, Hermione? You know Malfoy's always badgering first and second years. You're acting as mental as well, you're acting like you don't know what a complete git he is!"

Hermione rolled her eyes, feigning nonchalance. "We don't even know what's going on, and I'd rather enjoy the day than spend it arguing with Malfoy." Somewhere in the vaguest recesses of her mind, she knew that the last thing she wanted to do with this boy was argue.

Ginny gave her another curious look damn the insightful witch!

"Don't know what's going on?" Harry stated incredulously. "Look at him!"

It was obvious to all that Draco was barking at the kid. He certainly wasn't helping Hermione's case.

She gave up her efforts and fell in step when the rest of the group began following Harry towards the scene. This was not going to turn out well.

"Oi!" Harry yelled, getting the Slytherin's attention.

Hermione shuddered imperceptibly when Draco turned and caught her eye. She began to feel trapped.

"What are you doing now, *Malfoy*?" Ron called as soon as they got within earshot of the blond. "Picking on someone twice as small as you to make you feel twice as big as you really are?"

"If I wanted to do that, Weasel, I'd just start a row with you, wouldn't I?" Draco scowled. "Why don't you mind your own business?"

"Leave the kid alone, Malfoy!" Harry yelled back.

"Or what, Potter?" Draco's voice was filled with disdain.

"You're not with all your little Death Eater cronies, Malfoy," Harry said threateningly Hermione flushed and looked to the ground "and we all know your lot can't fight without being surrounded by your minions, all hiding their faces like the cowards you are!"

There was silence and Hermione looked up to see Draco looking unsettled, his knuckles white against the shaft of his wand. Strangely, the word *Death Eater* seemed to completely break his stride of retorts.

Apparently having nothing more to say to the Boy Who Lived, Draco grabbed something from the hand of the second year still standing beside him and pushed the kid to the ground before he turned to stomp away.

As he departed, he met Hermione's eyes one more time and gave her a vicious sneer before leaving them all behind. She felt ashamed.

"Well, that was pleasant," Ginny said to her friends as she helped the small Hufflepuff to his feet.

"It's typical Malfoy though, right?" Ron replied.

But the truth was, it wasn't typical these days, and Hermione knew it. She hadn't seen Malfoy bullying first and second years all term, and she couldn't help but wonder if there was something more to it than what they had seen.

All of her friends would certainly assume the worst of him, and even she felt a pang of betrayal for the part of her that was giving him the benefit of the doubt, but something inside her was telling her that he had changed from that arrogant boy he used to be.

Hadn't she seen the other side of him just last night? He had protected her, albeit against a thestral foal, while planning to put his own life in danger. He was even kind of charming when he wanted to be.

She could have let cooler heads prevail and actually asked him what was going on instead of letting her friends berate him, but she didn't. And there was that twinge of shame again.

~&~&~

The Gryffindors came back through the portrait hole late that evening: Ron, Harry, and Ginny carrying their brooms over their shoulders and Neville with smudges on his face and robes from digging in the dirt all afternoon.

They all took seats around the fire while Ginny grabbed butterbeers for them, and they settled in to enjoy the Saturday night party that was already beginning in the common room.

Hermione definitely wasn't feeling festive, so she decided to go get some books from the library to idle the time away during her last night watch something she was now dreading. She went up to her dormitory, grabbed her bag, and then left her friends behind as she slipped back out the portrait hole.

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"Could you tell me where I can find *Magical Symbols: A History of the Written Word?*" she asked Madam Pince.

"Row 27, in the back, by the corner," the librarian instructed, eyeing Hermione suspiciously. She didn't trust any student with her precious books.

Hermione put her bag and other books down on a table and headed toward the back rows where the more ancient books resided.

Row twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six; she rounded the corner to aisle twenty-seven and froze.

There, sitting on a chair facing her direction, was Draco Malfoy. Pansy Parkinson faced opposite, straddling his lap. He was slouching lazily in the chair with his hands resting lightly on her hips. His eyes were closed, and his head was lolling lightly to the side, while Pansy pulled at his collar, kissing and licking at his neck.

From Hermione's perspective, Malfoy looked quite bored with the whole matter, but was still letting Pansy kiss him while he rolled his head around complacently to give her easier access to her target.

For a second, Hermione felt rooted to the spot, unable to move for fear of being noticed. But then, without turning around, so as not to cause even the sound of a breeze, she took one step backward to begin her retreat.

Draco opened his eyes.

When he saw Hermione, he gave a quick start. Pansy, feeling his grip tighten on her hips as he jerked, just thought he was caught up in the moment and continued, even more eagerly, on her quest.

Draco just stared at Hermione, keeping his original, non-committed posture, while letting Pansy continue uninterrupted. It was as if he was trying to decide on the best course of action to take against the girl standing in front of him.

It only took a minute for him to form his plan as his eyes narrowed on the Gryffindor, and he gave her an evil grin.

Pulling his body up to meet Pansy's, he began kissing her neck ferociously, his gaze still firmly locked on Hermione.

He wrapped a hand around Pansy's waist and let the other slide up her back into her hair where he clutched her locks and pulled her head to the side, kissing and sucking, pulling soft skin into his mouth as he went. His eyes never left the stunned Gryffindor.

He wanted to make her feel ashamed and humiliated like her friends and that stupid second year had made him feel earlier. He had a talent for making others feel bad, and he was going to use all of that talent now.

He grabbed Pansy's hips and jerked her body more tightly against his, grinding into her as she moved. His smile grew even more vicious at Hermione's shocked expression.

Going in for the kill, at least by his perception, he tugged down Pansy's collar and made an over exaggerated motion of running his tongue thickly from her collarbone up to her ear, taking her lobe into his mouth and pulling it lightly with his teeth.

Hermione felt locked to the spot, staring into Draco's eyes, but as she heard Pansy whimper (a rather fake whimper in Hermione's opinion), she snapped out of it. The shock drained from her face and was replaced instantly by disgust.

Draco knew she was about to bolt and gave Pansy one last wide mouthed, sloppy kiss on the lips just for good measure as Hermione fled the aisle.

Dangerous Games

Chapter 4 of 5

As Hermione spends her last night outside, the battle of wit and sarcasm between herself and Draco continues. This time however, both of them may find that their school yard bickering can lead to very dangerous ground.

A/N: Special thanks to CharmedForce for doing such a fantastic job betaing this fic. I am truly grateful for all her help and support.

Chapter Four: Dangerous Games

He knew it was almost nine o'clock and wondered if she would even show up tonight. Embarrassing her had felt so good earlier, but now it felt like a hollow victory. He didn't even know if he wanted to face her.

The look she'd given him just before she'd left the library had shaken him. If he hadn't used kissing Pansy as a pretense to pull his gaze from Hermione, there's no telling what she would have read in his features. He couldn't describe those feelings himself.

Before he could consider these things, she was there.

Hermione strode past him without so much as a sideways glance. She took a seat, not too near him, and immediately set at her homework.

They were apparently making a ritual of starting these long hours in silence.

Her mere presence was niggling at him, annoying him. Why the hell had she come?

Draco sneered at her.

She didn't look up.

He glared at her.

She kept reading as if he wasn't even there.

He expected her to scold him, sneer at him, hell, even rage at him.

Still she sat ignoring him.

He wanted her to yell. Yelling was normal. Fighting with her was..*normal*.

She was acting as if she didn't care about what she had seen in the library. Pretending she didn't even care what she thought she had seen on the grounds!

Maybe she doesn't care.

Something was grumbling inside him

"Why are you here, Granger?" he spat, voice raised, pushing to start the fight he wanted so badly.

"I'm *supposed* to be here, Malfoy," she snapped.

He wanted her to go away. Part of him wanted her to stay. He really just wanted to yell at her. She was the reason he felt this way.

"Did it ever occur to that arrogant, frizzy head of yours that Snape sending you out here was *my* punishment, not yours? Why don't you sod off?"

At his insult, he again registered just how attractive he actually thought she was.

"I came tonight because you stayed last night," Hermione huffed. Really! She was doing him a favor, right? He didn't need to be such a prat.

Draco took in her words like a shot.

She's staying out here so I won't be alone.

A look of shock flitted across his features, but he schooled them back to indifference before Hermione could notice. After seeing him with the second year and with Pansy, she was still willing to stay out here with him.

Unfortunately, this did not make him feel better.

"I don't want your bloody pity, Granger!"

"The only person I pity is Pansy Parkinson!"

Draco laughed derisively. "I'd hate to see what you and Weasley do together if you don't even know what a good snogging looks like."

"I would hardly consider that *good*, Malfoy." Hermione returned to her book, seemingly expecting that to end their argument.

What the bloody...

"I practically had to pry her off me!"

Without looking up, Hermione stated sardonically, "I wasn't talking about *her*, Draco."

Oh, she'd definitely hit her mark.

He sat dumbstruck for a moment, gaping at the girl who was still barely acknowledging his presence. "What's that supposed to mean?"

She smirked.

"What it *means* is that it wouldn't be a very good snog if I was doing everything short of shagging the guy and he was just sitting there bored."

"I wasn't...." he began, but seeing her cocky expression, he realized denial was futile. She looked so fucking smug.

"Well, Granger, you think you're so talented, why don't you show me what you've got?"

She did not expect this. A challenge. Hermione was determined to win.

She shut her book with a snap, stood up, and stepped to him, sitting back down mere inches away, purposefully invading his personal space.

Her chin was raised in defiance when she spouted, "Fine, Malfoy, what are you gonna do if I call your bluff?"

She was daring him to continue, and Draco almost laughed out loud at her attempt to play a game on him. She was way out of her league.

Thinking fast, he leaned in toward her with the quickness of a Sphinx, stopping only millimeters from her mouth.

His lips felt like a feather tickling hers when he all but whispered, "What are you gonna do if I call yours?"

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Draco wanted to kiss her. Her strong will and quick wit excited him. She wasn't like the Slytherin girls who threw themselves at him without an ounce of self respect. Rival or not, she was his equal, and it made something inside him burn with desire.

He was so close to her that even with only moonlight he could see the amber flecks in her deep brown eyes and could smell the scent of lavender and sweat pea from her hair. He was yearning to reach out that last step, not even a breath away, and taste her.

But that would give too much away. His Slytherin upbringing would never allow him to display such weakness. Kissing her would only give her something to hold over him, to manipulate him with later. He had to show her that he was the one in control.

His eyes flashed as he ever so slightly brushed his lips across hers. A tease; not a kiss, but *touch*. Then he pulled away.

Hermione regained herself (was that a shudder in her breath?), shrugged, and gave him a *you lose* look before scooting away and returning to her book.

~~~

Draco sat for a moment, looking at her out of the corner of his eye. He had wanted to kiss her, he wanted her, even now, to want to kiss him. He thought he'd heard her breath catch, but he couldn't be sure, and now she acted as if she was completely unaffected by their almost kiss. This didn't sit well with him at all.

He tried telling himself that it was just to get one over on Weasley, to snog the prat's girl. Or maybe it was simply boredom? Snogging her would sure beat sitting out here in silence for the next several hours, right?

Regardless, if he couldn't at least keep her attention, then it wouldn't matter what his reason. He couldn't very well just pounce on her. The chit would probably hex him.

With nothing to really say to her, he did the only thing he could think of and gave a noticeable sigh.

"What now?" she smirked.

Success.

"I'm bored."

Hermione looked slightly affronted at this proclamation, and her look gave Draco's ever-present ego just the tools needed to get back on track.

With a cocky smile and a raise of one eyebrow, he added, "Got any ideas how we could pass the time, Granger?"

He would have gotten the message when she rolled her eyes, or even when she sighed with exasperation, but the bint seemed to think he was as thick as Weasley. He certainly *didn't* need the snide comment that followed.

"Yeah, Malfoy, you pretend I'm not a Mudblood, as you call me," his smile grew "and I'll just pretend that you're not... well, *you*," and then quickly faded.

"Come on, Granger... last chance..." he taunted, pretending her statement didn't bother him at all.

Hermione rolled her eyes again and decided a change of subject was definitely in order. "What were you doing with that second year anyway?"

Draco's brow furrowed, due both to the new subject matter, and at the fact that he had been so easily brushed aside.

"None of your business," he answered heatedly.

"Oh, come on," she pushed, "I'm just trying to give you the benefit of the doubt."

"It's none of your business, Granger! And I don't need any kind of benefit from you!" He was scowling at her again, the momentary calm between the storms seemingly ebbing away with every word.

~~~

She wanted to know. She wanted to confirm that her instincts were correct and that she hadn't betrayed her friends (even though only in her mind), for the silliness of a smooth talker and an attractive smile. It was time to show this boy in front of her that she wasn't to be trifled with.

With a flash of her hand inside her robes, she displayed her wand and pointed it toward Draco's chest. "I could just hex it out of you."

His shock was obvious. "You'll be expelled!"

It was a lame argument for trying to avoid being hexed, but she had caught him off guard, and that was the most threatening thing he could come up with on the spot.

"We are in very different positions, Malfoy." Her tone was light, but held a trace of something menacing. "I will have a job at the Ministry whether I graduate from Hogwarts or not."

The bloody tart! He certainly didn't have to explain himself to *her*!

He shrugged. "I saw the kid standing there and decided it'd be fun to give him a fright."

For a second Hermione faltered, believing her instincts really had failed her. But then she remembered who she was speaking to and how easily he had answered, and she saw this feeble attempt at dismissal for what it was.

She allowed her wand to flick lightly between her fingers and immediately saw his eyes widen, and more interestingly, his hand grab at the front pocket of his trousers under his robes.

"Well, then I guess you really are the git everyone thinks you are," she replied, hoping to sound like she took the bait as she withdrew her wand.

"Yep," was all he said.

~&~&~

Draco's eyes swept over the grounds while Hermione sat beside him reading or at least pretending to read her book. She was forming a plan.

If she could just get him to believe her actions were genuine, the battle would be as good as won. Besides, she thought to herself *what good is having feminine wiles if I'm not going to put them to good use?* The hardest part was going to be forcing herself to go through with it if she got the chance.

Yeah, *force herself*. She almost scoffed out loud at that. He was gorgeous and unattainable and... and truth be told, when he'd moved in to kiss her earlier, she had wanted to hurl herself at him. To straddle him, push him to the ground, and have her way with him. She had felt like some giddy fourth year with a crush, and it was only the knowledge that he would undoubtedly hold it against her that allowed her to maintain some level of control.

Now was not the time for such silly schoolgirl fantasies. There was purpose to her plan. It was probably just the excitement of a boy's interest that had her feeling that way anyway. It had been a few months since her and Ron had split. Draco could have been any boy. Those feelings certainly weren't specific to him. And she was only about to do this to get the answers she wanted. It wasn't because she wanted to snog Malfoy. That idea was ludicrous!

Mustering her courage, Hermione shut her book and tossed it aside. She leaned back casually on her hands and looked to the blond beside her.

"Something I can help you with, Granger?"

"It really is boring out here," she answered, trying to bring them back to an earlier conversation.

Draco, being very intelligent himself, was not lost on this subtlety. He raised an eyebrow and looked at her skeptically.

"I mean," she plowed on, scooting a little closer to him. She had to lower her eyes to disguise her trepidation and the flush rising in her cheeks. "If there was some way we could... erm... pass the time for a couple of hours..."

He gave a hearty laugh. "A couple of *hours*, Granger?"

"Should I expect less from the great Draco Malfoy?" she teased.

~~~

For a second, he felt a hormonal urge to reach out and pull her to him. He quickly squashed that though and instead contemplated his situation. Why was she doing this? What was she going to get out of it?

Then he remembered the second year. She was trying to get him to talk. Well, he thought, two can play that game! *I'll push this as far as she's willing to go.* He'd never reveal his secret.

He raised his chin, raking his eyes coolly down her form and back. Surely that would show her just how little concern he had for the matter. After all, it was only boredom that had caused him to want her earlier at least he wanted her to believe that and maybe himself as well.

~~~

The look he gave her almost turned her stomach. He was sizing her up and, even without words, seemed to be telling her that under the circumstances, she'd do.

It was disgust, not nerves, which now fueled her desire to give up this farce. Wouldn't it be nice though, to give Draco Malfoy a kiss he wouldn't soon forget? That would shut him up if he had spoken that is.

In one quick motion she settled herself between his parted legs, sitting on her knees with her hands on the ground at either side of his hips. "Well, I guess if you don't find me attractive..."

Draco swallowed hard, a slight panic coming over him. She was really going to do this! Just to get him to talk!

Or maybe, *maybe*, that wasn't the only reason.

Revealing nothing, he gave another cocky quirk of his lip and raised a hand to brush away one of her stray tendrils. The truth was he found her very attractive and getting more so by the minute.

Boldly leaning forward, Hermione caught his lips for a soft kiss.

It took Draco a moment to respond, not actually believing that this was going to happen or that it was happening right now.

Hermione wasn't moving. Almost frozen to the spot and feeling more mortified with each passing second that he wasn't kissing her back. She'd been a fool to do this. She should have just hexed the blighter!

She made to pull away, but at that moment Draco seemed to find his bearings. He reached a hand behind her neck and finally pushed back lightly against the force of her lips.

They were both moving slowly cautiously as if gauging their enemy before an attack.

Draco caught her bottom lip, sucking in lightly, and was rewarded by Hermione opening her mouth to deepen their kiss.

Tongues slid and tangled, a passion they hadn't expected entangling them both.

Draco's mind was confirming what he had always believed. Her pouty lips felt luscious under his touch.

Hermione may not have been thinking at all when both her hands left the ground to snake around his neck. She fell fully against him with a hard thud.

"Oof," was the simultaneous response.

She giggled and whispered, "sorry," against his lips as Draco quickly replied with a, "s'okay." Their kiss resumed instantly.

Feeling emboldened, Draco clutched her hair, pulling her head back to kiss and suckle her neck.

He heard her soft moan oh yes, it was definitely a moan and it gave him the courage to press onward. Pulling lightly at the neckline of her robes, he began planting soft kisses on her collarbone. He knew he had her.

Hermione was losing all rational thought with his kisses, but at the moment she couldn't give a care. His broad shoulders and hard chest, even through his robes, were fascinating her. She'd always thought he looked too thin, but that was definitely not how he felt.

The way he nipped at her collarbone and neck was stealing her breath. Ron had never given so much attention to those parts of her body that weren't directly connected with sex. This was the way a man touched a woman.

A man. He was no longer a schoolboy, he was a man, and he made her feel like a woman. It was an odd thought, that. Draco Malfoy had grown up. *Draco Malfoy.*

The fog slowly started to recede from her mind.

Draco Malfoy was the man kissing her. It was Draco Malfoy's arm that was wrapped firmly about her waist, pulling her tight against him. Draco Malfoy's hand was buried in her hair, bending her to his will and she was allowing it!

No! This wasn't right. She had a plan... some plan.

A vision of Draco grabbing his front pocket flitted through her mind.

She had come this far, she wasn't going to be distracted now. She certainly wasn't going to give in to these bizarre feelings for him. *At least not until I know for sure... no wait what?*

Regaining her focus, while still kissing him soundly, Hermione slid one hand down his chest and stomach, to rest just above his waist. She felt the buttons on his robes and quickly slid her hand between the gap.

Draco moaned into her neck, feeling her hand resting just above the snap on his trousers. He yanked on her collar, rather forcefully, and began trailing kisses as low as the impeding clothing would allow.

For a second Hermione began to feel guilty. Was she leading him on? Her *plan* hadn't really taken into account how he may react to having a woman drape herself against him, especially with said woman now arching into his touch, pushing her breasts suggestively against him in the process.

She needed to distract him. If he didn't think he was going to get anywhere with this, he would probably just forget about her and go find Pansy in the morning. He'd still get his shag, and obviously Pansy had nothing to complain about. Hermione could now attest to that! Everyone would get what they wanted, right?

~~~

The hand around Draco's neck slid to his jawbone, bringing his lips back in contact with those full, robust beauties belonging to his... his what? She certainly wasn't anything.

Hermione.

He decided he may just have to make her his after this.

He felt her hand sliding slowly downward, almost touching his now full erection, but instead she moved to the side, resting her hand in the crook at the top of his thigh. That was okay. He liked her innocence well, *almost innocence* he corrected. He audibly grumbled at the thought.

No bother. He couldn't be concerned with such things right now. Those delicious little fingers were roaming again, sliding up toward... his pocket.

His pocket?

Then they quickly dipped inside to clutch the contents within.

Draco jerked away. "What the fuck are you doing?"

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He screamed at her as he pushed her away.

His face looked angrier than she had ever seen it, and she grasped the tiny paper tightly in her hand, more out of fear and concealment than because she had any further desire to see it. He was beginning to really scare her.

"Give it to me, Granger." His jaw was clenched, and he spoke with an eerie calm, but rage blazed in his eyes.

Hermione's eyes were wide with fear. How could he get so mad over such a little thing? She shook her head and scooted away. She didn't actually care what the paper was anymore; she just didn't want to get close enough to give it to him. She shook her head again, even though he didn't repeat himself, and scooted back a few more feet.

"I'm not toying with you, Granger; give it to me." Even more steel calm grated his voice, and this time, he wasn't going to wait for an answer.

Draco lunged forward, and Hermione screamed as he wrapped his fingers around her wrist so hard that she knew she would have bruises. He yanked her fist forward, and she looked at it as if it didn't belong to her body. The paper was still clenched in a vice-like grip between her fingers.

He held her wrist in one hand while he peeled her fingers back with the other. His steel grey eyes almost burning holes in her brown ones.

"I guess there really isn't anything a Mudblood won't stoop to," he spat. "Do you always behave like a Muggle whore to get what you want?"

His words were so cold Hermione gasped at the shock of them. Still staring into his eyes, hers welled with tears as her fingers went limp and he grabbed the paper from her hand.

She stood and turned away with a feeling of overwhelming shame and disgust. She had to leave there, to leave his sight, and so she ran off into the distance of the grounds.

Draco spat at the ground as she fled. "Filthy Mudblood," he said to himself and the silence at large.

He began to think about his father's words. *'Mudbloods are worthless, Draco. The Wizarding world would be better off without them.'* Maybe he'd been right all along.

Yet, it wasn't anger that clearly shone on Draco Malfoy's face as he watched Hermione vanish into the distance.

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Draco's head jerked round at the sound of rustling beside him. Looking up through the whirl of black fabric, his eyes met the scrutinizing glare of Severus Snape.

Snape's Interlude

Chapter 5 of 5

Snape gives Draco some much needed advice.

A/N: As always, thanks go to CharmedForce for her talented betaing skills.

Chapter 4.5

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The headmaster looked around for a moment before he spoke. "What happened here, Draco?" His eyes probed the boy.

"Nothing," Draco said dismissively.

He assumed that it must have been Hermione's screech that alerted Snape, bringing him to the grounds any other explanation being just plain creepy.

"Obviously, that is not the case. You are here, and Miss Granger is missing. So, I will ask you again, what has happened here tonight?"

"She's out there." Draco jerked his head towards the vast grounds.

He futilely hoped this explanation would be enough, not wanting to go over the events that had just transpired. Especially with Severus Snape, close friend of his father, and Draco's own supposed warden while Lucius was... away.

Draco still didn't understand how the two men remained friends after the war. What he did know was that Snape's testimony kept his father from spending the rest of his life in Azkaban and kept him from going at all.

Draco had heard the two men talking the day the Aurors came. *Do not worry, friend. I will look after the boy while you can not be here to do so yourself!* Snape had said. Draco knew what this meant. Any wrongful deeds would reach his father's ear, forcing him to answer to both men in turn. Each confrontation posed its own difficulties, and each needed its own unique tactics to prevail.

"Draco." Snape's voice brought him back to the problem at hand. "Why would Miss Granger want to walk the grounds alone? Somehow, I don't think her Gryffindor bravery extends to werewolves, do you?"

"What are you asking me for?" Draco snapped. "Why would I know anything of some Mudblood's bravery?"

Snape's eyes narrowed at the comment, but he kept his voice calm. "As unpleasant as her company no doubt is, I'm quite sure Miss Granger does not deserve the petty, bigoted name you are placing upon her."

Draco scoffed, shooting his own glare toward the headmaster and then out onto the grounds. "She deserves anything she gets."

At this statement, Severus furrowed his brow and contemplated the boy. He'd known Draco since his birth, knew he wasn't easily unnerved. There was more to this than mere anger over some childish row.

He made a decision, conjured two chairs and a small table out of thin air, and motioned for Draco to sit. When the younger man reluctantly took the proffered chair, Snape conjured two glasses and a pint of Firewhiskey. Draco eyed the drink for a second, then allowed his lips to break into a small grin.

"I have chosen Firewhiskey because you are of age, and I believe you are mature enough that we could have a drink amongst men. Am I wrong?" Snape looked at him suspiciously.

"No, sir," Draco answered.

"Good." At this, Snape filled the two glasses on the table and lifted his own in toast. "To... a pleasant life... of women, money, family, and friendship."

Draco raised his glass as well and allowed some of the amber liquid to flow down his throat, giving him a slight burning sensation before warming him with a feeling of contentment.

The headmaster eyed the boy over the rim of his glass. "So... what is it that has transpired here tonight?" And with Draco resting his hands on the table, Snape noticed the small piece of paper clutched in his fist.

"Maybe she was playing with fire and she just got burned," Draco answered secretively.

Knowing that Snape was an accomplished Legillimens, Draco pointedly kept his gaze at the glass in his hand.

"Or maybe she was playing with *you* and she just got burned?" Snape questioned. They seemed to be playing a strange verbal game of chess.

"Maybe it's not your business, or that of my father, as to what I play with," Draco spat, not realizing that Snape had just put him *in check*.

"Am I to assume that whatever went on between you and Miss Granger is not for your father's ears?" Snape was cool and calculating with each sentence.

Draco realized he had given something away and chose not to answer.

"Draco, you are a grown man...still an adolescent in some respects," Draco glowered at this statement, but Snape just held up his hand in recognition of the boy's feelings and persisted, "but a man all the same. I believe your father has taught you the value of confidences amongst men. What kind of example would I set if I was to betray yours now? If you do not wish me to speak of this to Lucius, he will never hear it from my lips."

Draco glanced up at the man in silent request and was answered with a curt nod.

"However, as I am willing to treat you as a man, I expect you to act like one. Why is Granger out by the lake crying?"

Draco looked at Severus curiously, wondering how he knew where Hermione was, and that she was crying, but then quickly returned his eyes to his glass.

After another moment's consideration, he reluctantly answered, "She wanted something that was mine."

"Is that 'something' what you're holding in your hand?" Snape motioned to the tiny paper clutched in Draco's fist.

With a sickened look on his face, Draco nodded lightly and handed the paper to the headmaster.

Snape looked at it for a moment and then lowered his head, rubbing his hand along his brow. With a deep sigh he asked, "Where did you get this?"

"Some little git gave it to me earlier today."

"And did Miss Granger see it?"

"No! Why would I show her that?" Draco's anger was rising again just thinking about what had transpired.

"So?" Snape questioned.

"So... what?" Draco responded, glancing at the older man.

"So," Snape snapped, a little more angrily than he had wanted to, "I find it hard to believe that just because you told Granger she couldn't look at your things, she became so overcome by emotion that she had to leave your presence and have some kind of slobbering fit down by the lake."

Draco knew he had to tread lightly. This was where he was going to get into trouble. "She tried to take it from me."

A sense of loathing overtook Severus as he considered what the boy may have done. "And did you stop her from taking it?"

Draco paused. He didn't really want to tell Snape that she had gotten it from him, or more importantly, that she had tricked him. "No," was his only reply.

"I see." Severus was trying to remain patient. It was one of the many things he never envied Albus: dealing with children and their games their lying, and their feeble attempts to cover their tracks.

"So, if I am to understand this situation correctly, somehow Miss Granger knew you had this, but didn't know what it was. And somehow she took it from you, against your

will, yet never managed to see it. Am I correct thus far?"

"Yes," Draco answered cautiously.

"My questions then, Draco, are: what made Granger realize you had this 'something' that she just had to see, how did she get it from you, and why would she not look at it after she had taken it?"

The younger man let out a deep sigh. He knew that Snape would not suffer much more of this skimming around the truth. "She knew I had it because she saw me on the grounds today taking it from a second year, and she never saw it because I grabbed it out of her hand as soon as she took it from me." He conveniently left out the 'how' of Snape's questions.

"Well, I believe that just leaves the question of why she is crying then. So far, nothing you've said would seem to warrant such an emotional outburst. Unless..." Severus had a bit of disgust in his tone when he asked, "Did you harm her in some way, Draco? A punishment, perhaps?"

Malfoy looked up, confused for a moment, but then Snape's accusation sunk in. How could his own godfather think him so lowly? He wasn't beyond hexing, but physical violence against a woman, even the Granger wench, was beneath any proper wizard. He wasn't raised by Muggles!

"No," he shouted, disgust evident in his own tone as well. "Look, she took something from *me*! She tricked *me*! All I did was grab her hand and take it back."

Letting his emotions best him, Draco didn't realize that he had again given something away.

"How did she trick you?" Snape inquired.

Check.

Draco dropped his gaze, admonishing himself for his slip. Anger began welling up in him. He had done nothing wrong! "She... hurrpmf," he growled. "She..." He furrowed his brow and sneered at his glass, shaking his head with the recollection of his own stupidity. "She got close enough to reach in my pocket and grab it," he finally confessed, hanging his head in shame.

This time it was Snape who glared out into the darkness. "She tried to seduce you then?"

"Yes, sir," Draco replied with his head still bowed.

"Miss Granger's actions will be dealt with accordingly, I assure you. Now, if you would just explain why she is crying, maybe I could forget these infantile games you two are playing and go to bed."

"What the hell did I do?" Draco spat, snapping his head up to meet the older man's gaze. "She's the one that took something that didn't belong to her. She's the one that tried to use sex like some filthy Muggle whore!"

Draco was furious that he was being reprimanded. There was no reason he should have to sit here and explain the wrongdoings of some little trollop! So what if he'd wanted to snog her? At least his actions were genuine. He hadn't tried to use trickery, and he certainly didn't try to take what wasn't being freely offered.

Snape, however, was looking right into the boy's eyes with a calm, cold stare.

Checkmate.

"Did you call her a whore, Draco?"

"No," Malfoy responded adamantly.

"Did you call her a 'filthy Muggle whore'?"

Draco did not answer.

"Calling a woman a whore is certainly not going to get her to fancy you, Draco. No matter how above her station you've convinced yourself you are."

"I don't fancy Granger!" Malfoy shouted.

Snape smirked. "It's a pity that's all you've chosen to take from what I've just said, Mr. Malfoy. Although I find Miss Granger incessantly annoying, I have to assume she has at least some decent qualities as well. I'm sure you would be most benefited to allow those qualities to rub off on you."

Draco began to deny Snape's accusations again, but the headmaster cut him off.

"I am not going to argue with you about what I know to be true," he said, tapping his temple. "Instead, I'm going to give you a bit of advice, man to man."

He paused for a moment, waiting for Draco to look up and give him his full attention.

"If you feel that this woman is worth the trouble it would undoubtedly cause for you two to... consort, then I suggest that you apologize for what you've said. I'm sure there will be a bit of groveling," then added snidely, "there always is with women."

"But if you don't feel that the hardships would be worth the gain, then you should let her be. Miss Granger may be a strong witch, but I don't believe she would fare well against you in matters of the heart, and it would be best not to ruin her chances with another who would probably treat her far better than yourself."

With these words, Snape stood, waiting for Draco to do the same. He then flicked his wand over the table, chairs, and ale and they all vanished. "Good evening, Mr. Malfoy," he said, and he strolled back toward the castle.