

Hypotheticals

by Jenwryn

Hermione is studying late at night in the library and finds herself have a very strange conversation with Draco Malfoy. This oneshot is set during one of the later years of their schooling at Hogwarts. Quietly shippy.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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As always, a big thanks to my lovely beta, Lady Laurelin.

Hermione sat in the library at a table piled high with old books and watched him surreptitiously. It was very, very late at night, and the walls seemed to breathe in the silence. There was barely a sound except for the soft whisper his hand made as it moved across the parchment he was reading and – outside, beyond the window – the subtle noises of the night. Sometimes one of the lamps would murmur softly into the shadows, but that was all.

It was strange to see him here. Malfoy wasn't really the studious type. She supposed that if there was something he wanted researched, he would simply send one of his lackeys off to do it for him. That is, if he researched at all. She had a suspicion that he based most of his academic success upon his naturally quick wit, because, say what you would about Malfoy, you couldn't accuse him of being stupid. In fact, Hermione had a theory that he was much smarter than he would like to admit, but preferred people to believe that he just fell into his success.

Unless, of course, he did.

He looked up and caught her gaze across the tables between them, and she glanced hurriedly back down and attempted to focus upon the scrap of parchment in front of her. *The revolts were primarily in 1402.* No, that wasn't right. She scrubbed at her notes furiously with her quill and felt irritated with herself. The worst thing about Malfoy's sudden appearance in the library was how distracting it was. Which was irrational, of course; he had just as much right to be here as she did. But it was affecting her oddly to see him like this, alone, without the usual raucous band of boot-lickers, his blonde head bent studiously over his work...

He's probably studying the Dark Arts, her catty inner voice sniped, but she pushed it away. For some reason she doubted it. There was such a concentrated look on his face, and he had this odd little crease between his eyebrows that she kind of liked. Actually, the library suited him surprisingly well. Okay, so he played Quidditch, but that didn't really make him the outdoors type. And that pale face of his, here in the flickering light and surrounded by centuries of ancient knowledge...

She noticed suddenly that she was staring at him. Not only that, she realised in mortification, but he was looking right back at her. Hermione felt herself crimson, and she expected him to make some caustic comment, but to her surprise he glanced around the library, the raised his eyebrows and mouthed, "What, me?"

She shook her head in rapid embarrassment, and he shrugged and looked back down at his parchment.

Hermione struggled to pull herself together. What on Earth was she doing staring at *Malfoy*? If his cronies had been here, that would have been the end of her. She'd have had to leave. As it was...

Oh. She'd forgotten to look back down at her notes. His eyes glanced up and met hers again. This time, though, he didn't say anything, just pushed back his chair and sauntered slowly over in her direction. To her astonishment, he half-sat, half-sprawled in the chair opposite hers and asked in a low voice, "Bit late, isn't it, Granger?"

She looked at him, then shrugged, and decided that if he was being civil, so could she. "I've a paper due tomorrow and somehow it didn't get done." Which was the truth. It was a mystery to her how it had happened, but somehow she'd never put it on her to-do list and had completely forgotten about it.

He nodded. "What's it on?"

She paused and glanced back down at her notes, suddenly incapable of remembering. "Er – history. Troll rebellions. It's not all that fascinating but–"

"–useful to know."

She blinked at him and wondered suddenly if perhaps he'd been hit on the head and was suffering a mild concussion. Then she managed to nod. "Yes. Exactly."

He reached over and picked up her notes without asking for permission and glanced quickly down along the list. "The bottom two are wrong," he commented smoothly and then handed the scrap back.

"I noticed the bottom one was wrong, thanks. That's why I scratched it out." Then she paused. "Oh." He was right. The other one was wrong too. "Um, thanks, I guess." A small thrill ran through her despite her better judgment. She was right. He was smart.

"Distracted, were you?" He gave her an inscrutable look, and there was an odd timbre to his voice. He's flirting with me, she thought absurdly, and blinked again.

He passed her notes back to her, and his hand brushed against hers and then came to rest beside it. She was staring at him openly now, completely baffled, but the feel of his skin made her heart beat faster. For a moment, they just looked at each other. A breeze came in the window, and the flickering light danced shadows across their faces.

"Have you ever considered," he asked in a low voice, "what it would have been like if you'd been put in Slytherin?"

"I couldn't be," she reminded him softly in an equally low voice. "Amongst other things, I'm Muggle-born."

He shrugged that aside for the moment and watched her piercingly, "Have you ever wondered?"

There was a strange sound as Ginny reappeared with a pile of books and dumped them down on the table with a loud *blump* and a pile of dust, then stared at Malfoy in astonishment. He gave Hermione one last odd look and then stood up and sauntered off as if they'd never even spoken.

Hermione gazed after him, then avoided Ginny's expression and attacked her notes in a frenzy.

No, she'd never wondered what it would have been like if she'd been put in Slytherin.

But she had wondered what it would have been like if he were in Gryffindor.