

# To Conquer Her

by sapphire\_phoenix

What will Hermione Granger do to escape the Marriage Law? What will Draco Malfoy do to get the girl?

## Prologue

Chapter 1 of 25

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~~Prologue~~

*Draco,*

*As expected, everything has been completed as designed. It will be announced in the morning paper. Be sure I do not regret this.*

*Your Father*

Draco Malfoy looked down at the parchment his father's owl had just delivered and smiled smugly to himself. The Marriage Law had passed, and with it would come a new era. Of course, with Malfoy influence in the mix, it had been amended exactly as Draco had desired—Hermione Granger would be his bride by the end of the week.

It had been amusing to watch her research in the library stacks as she fought to keep the law from passing. She had done a good job of it, too. However, Draco knew that little would stop his father when he was truly determined, and Draco had made sure that his father would deliver Granger to his side.

Draco and many of his friends were secretly relieved and excited by the Marriage Law. With but a few exceptions, they did not want to go through with the arranged marriages their families had aligned. This would be their chance to take the witches they really wanted. Draco was pleased to know he would not have to marry Astoria Greengrass, since he found her voice and personality to be extremely grating in every dynamic.

Instead, Draco would get Hermione Granger. She was the best, and Malfoys always got what was best. She was an oasis in the desert. Draco had always known, even within their first days at Hogwarts, that she was without rival. It had been clear from the very first time she'd outdone him in class. It had been Charms. She'd received fifteen points for Gryffindor. Her face had lit up with joy and excitement and pride. She had been glorious. He had been watching Hermione ever since.

Draco had sneered at her and said something unpleasant in the hall after class. When she'd turned her attention to him, Draco had felt like everything in his world was right, even if she had been scowling at him. Draco had been looking forward to singling her out even further when Potty and the Weasel had swept in. He hated how they tried to protect her and how she would smile at them. Draco wouldn't let them stand in his way, though. Always, he could find a way to distract her from them.

Hermione Granger may be a Mudblood, but she was *his* Mudblood. He had made sure that everyone in Slytherin knew she was not to be touched unless he said so. In the early years, Draco had used his influence to keep people away from her. He wasn't a Malfoy for nothing. Then, after fourth year, the year of the Yule Ball, when Hermione had shown just what beautiful mettle she was made of, Draco had been forced to put a little pressure on his friends to keep them away. Of course, with the rise of the Dark Lord, Draco had made it known that she was off limits due to her unfortunate breeding and that if he found out anyone was after her or any Mudblood, it would mean their end.

It had been a convenient ploy. Even as he had worked for the Dark Lord, he'd insinuated his obsession in the most delicate way possible. Eventually, as his ranking rose, and with the help of his father, Draco was able to ensure that if she were captured, she would be his. He would still have had to marry Astoria, but he could have had Granger on the side. That boon had been a delightful and inspirational gift from the Dark Lord.

None of that was of any concern now, though. The war, thank Merlin, was over. The 'good' guys had won. The Malfoys were free and as powerful as ever. Best of all, Draco would get the girl of his dreams.

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Unending thanks to my betas, olgameisterfunk and literarybeauty, without whom I wouldn't even be here.

## Desperate Times Call for Drastic Measures

Chapter 2 of 25

"You really are blind, aren't you, Ferret? Hermione doesn't do anything she doesn't want to do. She never accepted your proposal, it was forced onto her. She's hardly affianced to you," Ron said in a mocking tone and snorted softly.-- THIS STORY CONTAINS NON-VIOLENT RAPE. It does so very subtly, and many find it to be HOT. Some don't. If you have a strong negative reaction to situations including non-consensual sex, this is a fic to skip.--

"Well, well, if it isn't the newest Lady Malfoy."

The words echoed through the hall that intersected where Hermione Granger was patrolling. She groaned inwardly, dropping her head in a silent prayer to any god that this was just a bad dream at the end of a nightmare of a day.

This morning had opened on a very low, very sour note as the headline of the *Prophet* flashed MANDATE PASSED: All Pure-bloods Required to Wed Half-bloods and Muggle-borns. The story below had touted the Ministry for fining suspected pure-blood supremacists and forcing them to breed with non-pure-bloods. This would increase the gene pool exponentially and repopulate Wizarding Britain. Of course, the Ministry thought nothing of mandating compliance from said Muggle-borns and half-bloods, who would just jump at the opportunity to do their 'civic duty.'

Hermione knew better; it actually meant that Muggle-borns and half-bloods were for sale, and to the highest bidder. She had spent every spare moment since the bill had been introduced researching and fighting it, but she, along with the others who had worked tirelessly, had lost. It had only been six weeks since the fall of Voldemort when the bill had been proposed. That had been five months ago, and instead of preparing to retrieve her parents from Australia and having a regular family Christmas, she was getting ready to execute her escape plan. If her travels with Harry had taught her anything, it was to always have a plan B.

Hermione flicked her wand over herself, casting a silent *noceo impedemere*. It was a good spell to use around school, as it protected from mischief without being offensive. Steeling herself, she declared, "You must be mistaken, Ferret, since there is only a Mudblood in this corridor, and she most certainly isn't getting married, especially to you."

Hermione's voice rang clear at first, but she grumbled the last bit, unsure of whether or not she wanted to provoke him.

Hermione hadn't slowed her patrolling for him, so she was very surprised to feel his hand, firm but gentle, on her shoulder. When had Malfoy ever touched her without malicious intent? Hermione tried to shake him off; she was unsuccessful. Draco gently pulled her into what might have been a casual embrace, had they not been at best bitter rivals but really bitter enemies for the last six and a half years.

Draco smiled softly and smirked as he licked his lips and looked her over. "You will make the loveliest bride in years, and our wedding will be the talk of the wizarding world for seasons."

Shocked by his insistence, Hermione made no move, but stared at him as if he was thicker than two short planks nailed together. "Malfoy, listen carefully, because I'm not going to repeat myself: I am not marrying." Hermione tried to keep it simple since he was acting so dimly.

"Winter weddings are unusual, right?" Draco carried on as if she hadn't spoken. "People are always going for spring or summer for the weather or flowers. You don't have to bother yourself, though. It's nearly planned...colours are navy and crème, which is better than white for your skin tone...the fitting is this weekend. Do you prefer fairy lights or candles?" Draco asked seriously.

Hermione smiled indulgently before trying to pull away. "Whatever your little black heart desires."

"I can't wait for our wedding night, when I can break your maidenhead and finally make you mine," Draco said, leaning closer to her as if he were sharing his deepest secrets. "Shall we save it? I know a book of spells..." Draco whispered to her.

Hermione was put off, to say the least, and tried to pull his hands apart behind her back. "Are you high, Malfoy?"

Draco pulled her closer, completely unfazed. "High, Granger?" He turned their bodies toward a little alcove and pressed her into it, leaning against her gently. She was so soft and small before him. If it weren't so unseemly, he'd snog her here in the hall.

"*On drugs?* Potions? Firewhisky?" Hermione dug her heels into the stone floor and bobbed out from Draco's embrace. She'd been so exhausted that she'd let her guard down a little and was now furious with herself.

She was only made more frustrated when Draco got aggressive and pulled her roughly against him as he turned and leaned on the wall. His left hand was caressing her hair now, and she could see he ached to run his hand down her cheek. Hermione could feel the protection spell tingling now, as if it, too, was unsure of Draco's motives.

"No. Just relishing my prize," Draco said softly, trying to keep his temper. He had known she would resist; it was part of the fun. He liked her spitfire nature. He liked that she out-performed him in courses. He liked that she was a challenge, his unicorn, his Holy Grail, his uncatchable Snitch. Every time she earned points, or surpassed him in any way, it made the chase that much better. Now, she was his.

"I'm not your bloody prize, Malfoy." Hermione gritted her teeth and stomped rudely on his instep. Draco jumped, and Hermione scurried down the hall. Draco turned to follow her; he could hear her heels clicking on the stones. She turned to shout back at him before taking the moving stairs, "Leave me alone, Malfoy. I'm not marrying you!"

"What are you going to do? Break the law? Give up your wand? Miss the N.E.W.T.s?" Draco stopped and called after her. When she was out of sight, he disillusioned himself so he could follow her covertly. He made himself perfectly silent and smiled as he enjoyed this little bit of snake and mouse. Draco smiled and shook his head as he watched her muttering angrily at herself for letting her guard down and cursing the Ministry and ferrets. He followed her up to Gryffindor Tower, where she lived in the Head Girl's suite. Of course Hermione was Head Girl; she was the best and certainly deserved a room to herself at the end of a long day.

Before Hermione went into her room, she looked around to make sure she hadn't been followed, but Draco followed her in anyway, as he had done every night since the beginning of the year. Each night, he'd watch her study, read, or sleep until it was very late. Then he'd retreat to his room and wait for the next night.

Tonight would be different. He would mark her tonight. He had almost held off in talking to her. Hermione would see the announcement in the paper tomorrow morning, and Draco was interested in her reaction, as well as everyone else's. Ultimately, though, he wanted to see her face, touch her, stake his claim in person.

Draco watched as Hermione cancelled some spells in her room and got ready for bed. She pulled the covers up under her arms and set about reading, her face slowly relaxing as she forgot about him. Hermione was so beautiful when she wasn't scowling. Once she was engrossed in her book, Draco lifted his wand and cast a spell that made Hermione drop the book in her lap in bed and fall into a deep, magical sleep.

He moved to sit next to her and began stroking her arms. His hand ran over her breasts, gently petting them before adjusting her so she lay properly in bed. Draco pulled her hair out from under her and spread it across her pillow. It was so soft underneath, and he loved to see it fanned out on her pillow. When Draco had especially bad days, he would brush her hair while she slept. He would never touch her too much, though, because he didn't want to disturb her sleep. However, between the time in the hall and excitement that she'd be his soon, he was already ready to fuck her. He stood up and adjusted his erection before taking several deep, cleansing breaths with his eyes shut.

Draco knew he wouldn't be able to stay as long as he would have liked; instead, he would head straight to his room and wank, making a mental note to grab today's knickers from the hamper. However, first Draco wanted to mark her. He positioned himself on the side of her bed, his wand hand behind her neck. He began to chant softly, and he could feel the tattoo on the left side of his chest heat and sting. The ancient magic coursed through his arm, and soon his palm began to tingle and burn a tiny reproduction of his dragon onto the nape of her neck.

Hermione whimpered beneath him. Draco took his free hand and soothingly stroked her face, cooing softly to her for a moment until she quieted. He smiled as he finished the chant and carefully lifted her head up to check his work. It was perfect. For now it would just mark her as his; no other wizard could touch her. When they were married, it could bind her to him, and Hermione Granger...soon to be Hermione Malfoy...would never be away from him unless he permitted it.

Draco adoringly stroked her hair for a few more minutes before summoning her knickers and making his exit. As he strolled through the hall, he almost felt like whistling, but settled instead for fingering her cotton underthings in his pocket.

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Hermione woke up with the sun the following day. She stretched and sighed, completely unaware of her hair perfectly placed on the pillow below her or of the mark on her neck. Her mind was already on to the day's business, and she was feeling melancholy about having to do this so soon. However, she was not about to marry Malfoy or anyone else. Hermione felt she deserved a little more from wizarding Britain than to squirt out blond ferrets for the rest of her days. Of course magic was primal, but did wizards have to be so sodding primitive?

Hermione would give Malfoy one chance to rescind his petition. If he didn't, she'd launch her protest. She'd already set it up with Colin Creevey to record the whole thing for posterity. After last night and the way Draco had acted, she was sure he wouldn't leave her be, so she'd better look good for Colin and their latest media barrage. Hermione brushed out her hair and twisted it into a great pile of ringlets with her wand. She put on a little make-up and pulled on her uniform, making sure her tie was straight and smooth and her shoes were highly polished.

Digging into the back of her wardrobe, she grabbed a backpack that she'd made up for this very event. Hermione had made sure it appeared identical to her school bag, but filled it with what she thought she'd need after breakfast. During her free period yesterday, she'd verified everything and set it aside, knowing it was only a matter of time until someone tried to buy her.

Fortunately, Hermione's friends all knew what she was about to do. They'd all talked tearfully about it last night before patrols. This was probably what put her off her guard; she was intellectually, emotionally, and physically exhausted. Fortunately, Draco had been playing nice last night. Hermione guessed it was because he thought this was a done deal.

She scoffed. He wanted her maidenhead? *Ha! Only if you've got a Time-Turner, Ferret Boy, and a gallon of Felix Felicis.* He thought she was such a goody-goody that she would let the government sell her to him so he could impregnate her repeatedly. As if this was what the brightest witch of her generation should be doing with her life.

Hermione shook her head and took one last long look around. After breakfast, everything would be different. She was a little sad, but also thrilled by what she was gearing up to do. With that thought as a beacon of hope in her heart, Hermione went down to breakfast.

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Draco watched her come in looking especially pretty. He almost choked on his porridge when he caught sight of her gorgeous ringlets and beautiful doe eyes. *If only she'd put this sort of effort into herself every day!* He couldn't wait to give her the clothes she deserved, clothes in the finest fabrics made by the best tailors. Draco's delight was lessened when he saw her idiot friends make space for her, each giving her a tight squeeze before she could completely sit down facing away from him. That wouldn't be happening by this time next week. He smirked and looked up for the post, anxious for it to come so everyone would know she was his.

Draco unconsciously rubbed his tattoo while chewing on a bit of bacon. Watching her, he noticed Hermione's hand come up to scratch the back of her neck. He quickly pulled his hand away. He didn't want her to touch his mark until after the post came. Draco let out a sigh of relief when her hand dropped down and she began eating again. Hermione appeared to be really tucking in, and Draco was glad she had a healthy appetite. She'd need to be strong to produce his heir.

Finally, the post came! He watched stupid Potter pay the *Prophet* owl and look through the paper to see if Hermione had been listed yet. The headline directed him to page six, and he folded the paper to show to Hermione. Hermione nodded and kept eating. She hardly said anything at all. Ron leaned over and kissed her cheek, looking sad. *That's right, Weasel, you certainly couldn't afford anything half as fine as Granger; you should feel very sad.*

Draco smiled, feeling that it was about time to enjoy his victory. He stood up from his bench and strode over to stand behind Hermione, picking up one of the perfect ringlets and playing with it gently. "See, Granger, I told you we'd be wed."

Potter turned to scowl at him. "Hands off."

"I don't think so. A man is well within his rights to enjoy the charms of his affianced, Potter." It was all Draco could do to keep from sneering at the Boy Who Lived... Twice. However, such were the times, and he supposed he could be civil for Hermione's sake. For now.

Hermione crammed one last delicious piece of bacon into her mouth, trying to shake her hair out of his hand. Beside her, Weasley snickered. "You really are blind, aren't you, Ferret? Hermione doesn't do anything she doesn't want to do. She never accepted your proposal, it was forced onto her. She's hardly *affianced* to you," Ron said in a mocking tone and snorted softly.

Draco rolled his eyes and, seeing that Hermione was done with breakfast, moved to help her stand. Hermione brushed his hand away, pulling her bag up on her shoulders. This was the signal for Colin to start rolling film. "Malfoy, if you don't retract your petition, I'll be forced to do something drastic."

Draco smirked. "That's impossible, Granger. That petition is legally and magically binding." He looked over her lazily, smug smile in place.

Hermione nodded at him sadly and fished out a fine copper-coloured necklace from the pocket of her robe. She flicked her wand at it, and it coiled around her neck. Finally, she stepped up onto the bench behind her to announce, "I, Hermione Jean Granger, do hereby renounce the Marriage Law, and the Ministry who approved it. In protest, I am leaving the country and breaking my wand!" Hermione held her precious wand over her head with one hand on each end and began pressing the ends together.

Draco's look of delight turned to utter horror. He was frozen in terror. She wouldn't. She couldn't! But she was, and she did! And when her wand finally splintered and broke, a great clap of thunder sounded, and Hermione screamed in great pain, her back arching as the magical force ripped through her body. At first, all eyes were locked on her, but then a louder, deeper moan echoed in terrible harmony with hers as Draco experienced her pain through his tattoo.

Finally, as the magical force was completely expelled, they both slumped to the floor. Hermione reached up, touched her necklace, and whispered, "*Portus*." She felt the hook and pull as she was transported through space-time. Upon landing rudely on hard ground, she cried, "Asylum!" before falling into a coma.

## We Meet Again

### Chapter 3 of 25

"You're mine, Granger. How dare you make me chase you?" --THIS STORY CONTAINS NON-VIOLENT RAPE. It does so very subtly, and many find it to be HOT. Some don't. If you have a strong negative reaction to situations including non-consensual sex, this is a fic to skip.--

Narcissa Malfoy had her usual stately look while she sat by Draco's bedside at St. Mungo's. This was the third day that he lay unconscious, but she knew it wouldn't be too much longer. When she had arrived via the Floo on the first day, Draco had been completely hairless, and his fingernails and toenails had fallen off. The healers had said it was a result of conducting so much magical force. Narcissa had wondered to herself why none had experienced such a thing at the end of the war, but she had kept that thought to herself.

Now her son had the perfect toe and fingernails of a newborn. She was oddly sentimental about such things, but since Draco had been her only child, she could easily remember such tiny details. His hair was dusting along his scalp even blonder than it had been before, if such a thing were possible.

Narcissa was reading a special afternoon edition of the *Prophet* and considering what had happened in the last few days. Lucius had pushed the law through, ensuring that Draco would get the girl he'd dreamed of. It had left quite a bitter taste in their mouths when she and Lucius had discovered Draco's desires, but the Mudblood was clearly a powerful witch, and her connections could be great enough to overlook her unfortunate birth. Besides, it wasn't as though there would be any true purebloods left within a generation. Narcissa sighed softly.

Then, there was the snapping of the girl's wand, by her own hand no less! Narcissa huffed...the cheek of that girl! This had put everyone on hold. The Ministry wasn't interested in having Muggle-borns riot, especially this soon after the demise of the Dark Lord, but having a record of a recent wand-snapping available to everyone definitely cooled the rebels' heels and kept them from repeating the action. A wand-breaking was a horrible thing to see, and any time she thought of it, Narcissa would shiver.

She was carelessly flipping pages when Draco finally began to stir and let out a low moan. She called for her husband and took Draco's hand, squeezing it gently.

"Draco, darling, I'm here."

"Mother? Wh..."

"Shhh. Rest." Narcissa soothingly ran her hand over Draco's scalp. This was the wrong move, as Draco had not expected his hair to be so short.

He jerked his hands up to his head and let out a louder groan. "She said she was going to do something drastic, but my hair! My hair! And all that business about protesting the law! By making me bald?"

"That is quite enough, Draco." The firm but warm tone of his father's powerful voice calmed Draco almost instantaneously. Father and son would both admit just between the two of them that Draco was, for lack of a better phrase, a Daddy's Boy. His mother could coddle and spoil and reprimand, but Draco knew his father had the power, and he always used it to nurture his son. Lucius Malfoy adored his boy and did everything in his power to be all that the boy needed.

"Take a deep breath and tell me what happened before your affianced snapped her wand."

Draco paled, remembering now all that had happened. He couldn't help but take it a little bit personally that Hermione had snapped her wand instead of marrying him. Although, as he thought about it, it was certainly not him, but that she was forced to marry that was the problem.

He thought of her little speech; it was the law and the Ministry that shouldered the blame. He remembered holding her in his arms while they had talked and became determined to woo Hermione properly.

Draco looked up when his father cleared his throat and began his tale. He relayed how the night had gone, and how the morning started out, careful not to belittle Potter and Weasley with words, but his parents knew his meanings. By the time he finished the story, his audience was looking at him with moderate incredulity.

"Where'd she go, Draco?" Narcissa whispered.

"I don't know; I saw her slump and then disappear. The necklace she put on must have been a Portkey. I'm sure they know," he said, tasting something bitter at the thought of asking her friends for help. Despite everything, Draco seemed unconcerned, as though his father could just bring Hermione through the door for him. Surely Potter knew where she was, and then they'd retrieve her, and they'd be wed, and he'd woo Hermione properly.

Instead, his father passed him a newspaper. The headline read: *Potter Claims Secret Contingency Plan a Holdover from the War*. As he opened to the article, Draco read about how the Golden Trio had made a pact to always escape. Each had a series of Portkeys on their person anytime they went into battle, and they all went to different locations unknown by the others. In this way, they knew that if one fell in battle, the others would escape.

"You were connected through the branding, which is why her 'drastic measures' affected you. Fortunately, that will hold, even if the law doesn't. We simply have to find her. We shall look after you've completed your N.E.W.T.s," Lucius explained, his tone ripe with disgust. He had to admit, the girl had brass, but all this effort for a Mudblood? She had better give him many grandchildren for this, even if they were only half-bloods.

"Father...six months?" Draco barely kept himself from whining. It felt like just moments ago she was resting so peacefully under him in her bed, and now he had to wait six

bloody months? "That bitch!"

Draco threw himself back on the bed, feeling as though he'd merely had a good night's sleep instead of having been in a coma for three days. He pouted for a moment, then looked up into his father's impatient gaze. After one last harrumph, he pulled himself together in a manner befitting a Malfoy.

When Lucius felt his son had gotten his thoughts in order, he finally got down to the meat of the matter. "We'll have them release you, and I'll put some researchers on it. Where do you suggest they begin?"

"Places with libraries. Locations with ancient magic. Countries that won't let us extradite. Anywhere that is hard to get to," Draco said with absolute certainty as he thought about what his fiancée would do to get away from the law.

"Excellent. Now get dressed, it's time we departed," Lucius instructed as he swept out the door.

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Meanwhile, deep in the Andes ....

Hermione wheezed as she felt her ribs sewing themselves back together. Landing the way she did had left her body cracked and shattered, especially after such a magically traumatizing event. She knew she wasn't actually hearing her bones being put back together cell by cell, but each fusion seemed to echo through her skull in evil sounding snicks and sizzles. It wasn't as bad as Crucio, but it was close.

Hermione took deep breaths and willed the pain away, a neural Occlumency that was a little bit like Lamaze. She'd learned it from Snape, and she felt a deep pain of sorrow that he had not survived the war. A cool breeze wafted through the room, and Hermione shivered, noticing for the first time that she was nearly bald. She clapped her hands to her head in a moment of panic. Hermione only kept herself from hyperventilating by tuning into the voice that had begun to speak to her.

"You made quite an exit, as well as quite an entrance the other day, Ms. Granger," a kind sounding man said as he got up from a chair in the shadows.

"You know my name?" Hermione was shocked. This was one of the most remote, least known locations of an ancient magical culture she had heard of. Not the most remote, but it was close.

"We do get a paper or two every now and again."

The man tossed a paper into her lap. The headline read: *Malfoy Heir in Coma as Heroine Flees. Is the Cause a Broken Wand or a Broken Heart?* Hermione scoffed.

"We can offer you asylum from Britain, but not from him," the man continued, looking uneasy. "If he comes, we must let him in, and you will have to see to him."

"I don't understand," Hermione said quietly, trying to be as unassuming as possible. She had read about this colony and knew initiates had to be very submissive.

"You were engaged to be married."

"Yes."

"You accepted a mark from him?"

"What? No. We barely speak."

The man nodded and passed her two old mirrors that looked to be from ages ago. "The back of your neck."

Hermione couldn't stop herself from looking at her face; she had faint eyebrows and eyelashes and tiny coils of hair starting to grow in. She took a look at her face and decided maybe she didn't need long hair to look feminine. She had nice bone structure and clear skin. Hermione had had long hair since before she could remember...she would try a shorter style from now on.

Finally turning her focus to the back of her neck, she found a Celtic dragon coiled around in an incomplete circle.

"That filthy, sneaky, bloody bastard ferret, I'm going to fucking kill him when I get my hands on his no good, conniving, sneaking neck." Hermione knew that this was a new ... desecration on her neck. Ginny had been playing with her hair the Sunday before the law had passed. It hadn't been there then. Nothing Monday, and then the confrontation with Draco Tuesday. The little bastard must have snuck into her room! She had felt funny all year long, like someone had been in her room with her, but she could never place it and always chalked it up to paranoia from the war. What was the old adage? Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't watching you.

"You did not do this voluntarily." It was hardly a question, but it was required.

"No. I have no desire to be bonded. I would not knowingly drag such a disruption to your doorstep."

The man looked at her, seeing the energy in her eyes building up fast. The magic was strong in her; she could quickly be trained to move away from a focus object. "Very well. Your quarters are with the other initiates. You will begin tomorrow."

"Is my sheath dress appropriate? The pictures I had for reference were very, very tiny."

The man smiled. "As always, you came extremely prepared, Ms. Granger. Now, you must rest." The man nodded and moved back to his chair as Hermione fell into a deep sleep at his suggestion.

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Hermione had been meditating since the summer after first year at Hogwarts. It had been quite a year, and she found that only meditation could keep her focused. Now, six years later, she was extremely practiced at clearing her mind and keeping it clear. This was the first thing that propelled her through the initiate training.

It had been a little strange at first to bunk with the six other initiates, two of whom were boys, and all of whom were children. The Incan mystics started training very early, and in many ways it was more thorough than what she had learned at Hogwarts. Of course, she had better mental control than her eight-year-old counterparts. However, she could not summon the elements as they could. Hermione had to unlearn all of her training with a focus object before she could even dream to master magic the Incan way.

It took three solid months before she successfully cast her first wandless spell. This was especially surprising, as she had known wandless spells already. However, there was a great difference in being wandless and trained for a wand, and being wandless and having to essentially make her whole body act like a wand.

When Hermione mastered a new level, she would change her quarters to be with the other initiates at her level. It was a crash course in ancient magic as well as a whirlwind tour of the colony. After she got her magic flowing again, her abilities caught on like wildfire. About the time that she would have been graduating Hogwarts, she was ready to matriculate into the community as a Mage.

She stood in a cool room made of limestone with intricately carved frescos along the wall, being fitted for her Mage's robes. Hermione's training had consisted of serious manual labour as well as daily calisthenics, and her once-toned body was now ripped with the extra work and a new diet. Her hair had grown back darker, and the curls coiled tighter. She was a golden brown, and while not as dark as the natives, she certainly didn't stand out as the pale Brit these days.

Hermione still had on her copper necklace; it was charmed as a universal translator. Her Mage's robes were a pale lavender, and her sandals had moulded to her feet so

well that they felt like second skin. Altogether, she'd guess she was an impressive sight, except that there were no mirrors here for her to verify with. Complete immersion into this world made her almost feel like everything before that a distant dream sometimes. Still, when she pressed her thumb into her DA Galleon at night, she'd get a round of greetings and an inquisition about how she was doing.

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Lucius was livid. His best researchers had been working six months, and they had two dozen possible locations for the girl. He'd initially only pulled three people to work on this project, but he'd ended up doubling the workers twice. Twelve of the top wizards and witches in Britain couldn't narrow down her possible locations to under twenty-four! How could she have studied for N.E.W.T.s, kept up with her classes, fought the law, and crafted a back-up plan? It couldn't be humanly possible!

The pulsing in his brain was getting to him. Lucius knew that Draco had certainly chosen the best available witch; he couldn't fault him for that. Still, graduation was a week away, and he was unsure of where to travel first. She wouldn't be in Europe, that much was certain. Additionally, Britain's foreign relations were such that if she'd fled anywhere, any nation would have kept her, partly out of spite, and partly because she was so powerful.

Lucius had never really considered how vast the world was until he went to find a needle in a haystack. Was she in India? China? Japan? He didn't think that she'd go to the Middle East, although she could easily hide in a burqa and no one would be the wiser. Polynesia? The American Southwest? Mexico City? The idea of South America made his stomach churn. There were a dozen locations in South America alone. Africa was a long shot, considering how she'd stand out, but there were still a couple places that would harbour the little fugitive.

He did have to admit that reading the reports about each proposed place proved to be interesting reading. Lucius hadn't really ever given second thought to magic outside of his Eurocentric worldview. Well, it wasn't a first for firsts; he'd never thought he'd be seeking out the Mudblood to be his only son's bride, either. A lesser man would have let his head flop wearily on his desk. Luckily, Lucius Malfoy was not a lesser man.

Lucius rubbed his temples. He was approaching this the wrong way, of that he was certain. He now knew a good deal about Ms. Granger. She came from a surprisingly upper-middle class background. Her parents were learned professionals, even if they were Muggles. She was an only child. She was a Gryffindor. She was righteous. She had convictions. She had broken her wand.

She had no wand! Lucius put all of the reports in a neat pile to be reviewed with hopefully a new approach. He now knew that wands were less commonly used in equatorial communities. He siphoned out any of the communities that were too far north or south. Next went any that were patriarchal; knowing that Draco had branded her in addition to fleeing the law, she would want something egalitarian, if not matriarchal. There were only thirteen left.

If he were an eighteen-year old single witch who had just survived a war, where would he go? Sure, it wasn't really a fair question to ask, since Lucius had been a grown married wizard so long he couldn't remember much else, but it begged asking. *Granger likes adventure; Granger likes new things, likes discovery, likes freedom.* Lucius threw out any that were on an island. Not only would it be possible that she might get bored on an island, it would make escape only viable by Portkey. He knew, now, that she would always have a Portkey on her, but she would want to be able to flee by land as well.

That took his pile down to five locations, and he finally felt his head begin to clear. Colchis, Mexico City, Mesa Verde, and two unnamed locations, one in Brazil and one in Peru. For the first time since Draco had come out of the coma, Lucius had a plan. It made him feel so much better. A goal was always a good thing.

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Draco felt a little strange out of his customary robes. He had woken up the day after graduation with his trunk packed for travel and a Turkish style robe laid out for him. Today his father would take him on a hunting expedition for his bride. Draco hadn't really ever considered traveling the world. Why bother, when he was already so well connected in Britain? France was nice, of course, and Spain was good when he wanted someplace warm. They had a villa in Greece for when one really needed to get away, but he rarely went that far. Now they were going to Colchis, where they would look for Hermione. He hoped she'd be there, as the Americas seemed so... unpleasantly *nouveau*.

Calling a house-elf to take his things downstairs, he Apparated into the foyer to kiss his mother goodbye. From there, Draco grabbed the Portkey, nodded quickly to his father, and they set out upon their tour.

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Hermione woke up with a jungle cat in her bed. Well, not any jungle cat, it was her jungle cat. Crookshanks, being half kneazle, had been large. However, this cat was just over a meter long from shoulder to rump, her tail just as long, and easily weighed five stone and was only half-grown. The cat had come to Hermione when she'd matriculated.

She'd gone on a spirit quest. She'd eaten a variety of mushrooms and smoked a huge bowl of 'sacred herbs'. Hermione had been high as kite in an ancient sauna. Of course, after a few minutes, she'd passed out, sprawled in her plainest shift, as her mind went through a great journey without her body.

Immediately, a large cat like the one that lay in the curve of her body had begun to walk with her as she made her travels. She'd had this cat, and at the end of it all, they'd walked to a great bonfire. Fearlessly, she walked into the towering blaze, and after a moment, she burst into flames, but instead of pain, she felt rebirth. Hermione knew she wasn't a phoenix, but it was the only way she could think of explaining it.

Now that she was a grown-up in the community, she had work to do. Stretching languorously on her hammock, Hermione rubbed the belly of the beast beside her. This cat's name was Acara, and she certainly had the bearing of a queen. Acara opened one eye a tiny bit and looked at Hermione, only to close her eye once again.

"Well, if you don't want breakfast..." Hermione chided and pulled her hand back. Acara growled, and Hermione lightly smacked her belly, laughing when Acara's tail swept around and thumped Hermione's leg. "Lazy beast."

Hermione reached to the shelf on the wall and pulled a torque onto her arm, pressing her thumb on the Galleon in the centre, and letting her friends know she was up for the day. She rarely got more than a warm response back, but today it burned hot as soon as she set her thumb to it.

*DM/LM trvling-HP.* It was from Harry.

*Bloody Fuck!* Hermione thought and stomped her foot. Why couldn't they just leave her be?

*WHERE??*

*Mid East*

*Colchis...* Hermione had thought of going to Colchis, but had decided it was too close, too populated, and ultimately, not safe. She was a little concerned that they had started out on such good footing. If she had been in their position, she would have started there, too. Colchis was still nearby-ish, and it was a reasonable choice.

*idk*

*np. ty.*

*u ok?*

Before Hermione could respond, Acara twisted around her legs. Right...Hermione had work to do, and breakfast.

*yes, h, xo*

u sure?

YES

xo's, W's too

send love

Hermione sighed when the coin finally cooled and she could put her armband back on. She was glad it was Harry 'on the line'. Ron couldn't write a letter to save his life, but had thousands of words when trying to write on a coin. Also, Harry knew about computers, texting, IMing, and shorthand. It made things a little easier. Hermione was rubbing a little wetness and some sleep out of her eyes when she felt Acara pushing on her backside.

"Yes! Breakfast. I remember!" Hermione laughed as she turned on the cat and picked her up, draping her over her shoulders like she would with Crooks. That this cat was at least five times the size of her kneazle didn't seem to faze her at all.

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Surprisingly for Draco, Colchis had been fascinating. Of course, he and Lucius hadn't just walked up to the head of the government, demanding his Granger back. They had had to ingratiate themselves first. That meant tourism and a fair amount of commerce. They'd been to two great libraries. Draco had never seen one that was better than the Malfoy library, though Hogwarts' was almost as good. Both of these libraries had books he couldn't imagine, and he'd forgotten himself there on a couple of occasions. His father had smirked at him, then.

While taking lunch one day in Colchis, Draco had discussed with his father what could be done with the brand. Since no Malfoy had ever had to wait so long between a branding and marriage, Lucius wasn't entirely sure, and the two of them began researching.

Lucius had actually been the one to find the first two books. Draco devoured them. They spoke of controlling one's dreams and then extending them out into a collective subconscious. It had taken him several days to train his conscious mind to take effect in his subconscious, and another week before he had had his first dream with her. Hermione looked just like she did that fateful morning all those months ago: perfect ringlets, perfect tie, shoes shined. She was lying on the grass in the Quidditch pitch at Hogwarts. When she noticed him, she'd scowled. Nothing new there. Draco approached her, but she did nothing but look up at the stars.

He knelt and then crawled over her. Still nothing. Draco stroked her cheek softly. Nothing. He kissed her lips softly. Nothing. He deepened the kiss. Nothing. Draco grabbed her breast. Nothing. He was sure that he could do something to get Hermione's attention, especially in his own dream! Draco pulled out his wand and Vanished her clothes. Nothing. He took off his robes so he was down to his shirtsleeves and trousers, shoes off. For a moment, he just looked at her. Hermione was perfection in the starlight, her body lain out on the grass. Then he knelt over her and peppered her whole body with little kisses.

After a few minutes, he knew he was starting to get somewhere. As his lips went lower, Hermione's legs began to spread. Draco was smiling to himself in the dream when he was confronted with natural bush and swollen pink quim. Just as he was about to put his lips to it, his body ejaculated, and he was jerked out of the dream. He cleaned himself up and went back to sleep extremely frustrated. It wasn't until he was taking lunch the next and final day in Colchis that he felt the fingers tracing the tattoo on his chest.

This was the first time she'd ever touched it for more than a passing of her hairbrush. Draco told his father, and they smiled together, knowing that this was just the beginning.

Draco thought he might take Granger to Colchis for their honeymoon.

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Hermione had had sex dreams before, but none like this. First of all, the Quidditch pitch? Not that sex outside was gross or anything, but the Quidditch pitch? She'd had sex in a field of wildflowers in a dream once, and also on a grand canopy bed in a garden that appeared next to Big Ben. That one had been weird. Hermione shivered, remembering the one and only time she'd thought of Harry as anything but a brother. The morning after that dream, she'd also sworn off spicy food after ten at night.

Hermione's hand touched the back of her neck absently...she had been on the Quidditch pitch with Draco. He'd been kissing her softly all over. Hermione had wanted to just ignore him and hope that the dream would pass, but once his lips were on her nipples and the undersides of her breasts, she had to reconsider this approach.

Even in the dream, Hermione knew she should fight Draco. She couldn't, though. His lips went lower and lower, and eventually her starving libido had spread her legs. Hermione could almost feel the tickle of his soft pale blond hair on her belly as she lay awake in the predawn hours. His large hands had been warm against her body, and he'd looked at her with such... puzzled intent.

Hermione slid one hand down to her quim. She was surprisingly wet. Thinking about Draco between her legs, Hermione began rubbing her clit with practiced ease. She hadn't masturbated in so long. Hermione pushed three fingers of her other hand into her cunt and fucked herself quickly and thoroughly. Her orgasm came fast, her back arching as her breath strangled out his name.

When Hermione caught her breath, Acara was looking at her from the other end of their hammock knowingly. *Shite!* Hermione had just frigged herself thinking about Ferret Boy. She was sated as she hadn't been in many months. Still, she was disgusted with herself, and angry. She had never dreamed of Draco before now, unless it involved him denigrating her, as was his usual. Something was up, and Hermione would have to get to the bottom of it.

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Ten nights later, Hermione found herself at Malfoy Manor with Draco. He was lying in an enormous bed, Slytherin green silk pants resting low on his hips. Hermione was watching him. He lay motionless for a while, a perfect statue of Malfoy characteristics.

Draco was watching her, as well. Hermione looked down at herself: she was made up like some cartoon Godiva, her hair covering her breasts, and nothing covering her crotch. Even in the dream, Hermione felt wretched, like a whore on display. Could one vomit in one's dreams?

Draco's hand pulled out his cock from under his pants. He looked at her and spoke to her like she was a badly behaved child. "See what you do to me? What you've always done to me, you fucking Mudblood." His cock was hard, and he was jerking it. "Pull your nipples."

Hermione's hands obeyed, and in dream-clouded fascination and horror, Hermione's subconscious played along, too. She tossed her long curls behind her shoulders and began pulling her nipples so Draco could see.

His eyes lit up with possessive pride. "Perfect." He pressed his hand over the head of his prick and gazed at her. "You're mine, Granger. How dare you make me chase you? Pinch your nipples." Hermione did, whimpering. "You like that? It's supposed to be a punishment, you slut. Pinch harder." In the dream, Hermione did; she pinched so hard that she woke. Her nipples were throbbing. This was the fourth dream, and each time she would wake up nauseated and aroused.

Flicking a finger at the lamp near her bed, she began writing in her dream journal. Remembering as many details as she could: Draco's hard cock, his intense gaze, his instructions.... Hermione was torn between wanting to continue playing with herself, well on her way as she was, and wanting to jump in the coldest bit of the nearby river and wash his vile, insidious suggestions out of her mind. She shivered.

Hermione would review the dream with Marcela from the council in the morning. Then they could analyse it and look for clues. That would be later, though. It was still dark as pitch out, and Hermione had to clear her mind. Just for research's sake, she pressed her middle finger into her quim. Right...juicy and ready. Draco could slide in and pound her thoroughly, if he were here. Hermione was so aroused that she almost wished he were.

# More of the Same

## Chapter 4 of 25

Draco stood when she finally met him and took her hands gently in his own. ..."I'm so glad you could join me for dessert."

--THIS STORY CONTAINS NON-VIOLENT RAPE.--

--It does so very subtly, and many find it to be HOT. Some don't. If you have a strong negative reaction to situations including non-consensual sex, this is a fic to skip.--

Exactly one week later, Hermione found herself in the most extravagant dream yet. The first thing Hermione felt in her dream was the wind blowing through her long hair. It was the first clue she had that this was a dream from Malfoy. She reached up and felt a mass of tumbling curls and loose braids sweeping around the back of her head. As the scenery filled in, she found she was standing on elegant marble steps that led out to a white sand beach. Beyond the sand lay an infinite ocean of impossibly blue water. Between her and the water was a remarkably long, formal dining table with a chair at each end. Seeing that one of the chairs was occupied by a man's silhouette, Hermione let out an exasperated sigh.

She began to move forward ready to get the dream over with, when she felt smooth, cool satin undulate around her legs. Looking down, Hermione found herself in a satin dress the colour of the ocean. The skirts were full and flowing, and the neckline split the snug bodice. It started at the fullest part of her cleavage and finished in a high collar that showcased the delicate lines of her neck. She knew this combination would make her look extremely feminine in a sophisticated manner. Truth be told, it was a little too seductive for Hermione's comfort.

She began walking again, feeling the warm sand press through her toes as she approached the table. Draco stood when she finally met him and took her hands gently in his own. He placed a kiss on the back of both. Hermione ached to whip her hands away from him, but couldn't do anything but watch as Draco pulled her hands gently away from her body and took a long look at her in the dress.

"Sublime," he commented, a true boyish smile gracing his features. "I'm so glad you could join me for dessert."

Hermione heard someone thank him kindly. It was Draco's Hermione doll, the one whose eyes she looked out through in these dreams. What a farce!

Draco dropped one hand and led her to stand in between his chair and the table. However, he did not sit. Instead, he pressed his hips against her, which forced her to perch awkwardly on the edge of the table.

"I'm going to have you tonight, Granger." Draco's voice was quiet, but not a whisper. It had determination and drive behind it. "I'm going to have you, and you are going to like it. I'm going to have you begging in short order."

Hermione thought his approach was like that of a man getting ready to defuse a bomb. She looked him over. He wore a satin shirt in a darker shade of blue than her own. His cut emphasised his broad shoulders and tapered torso. His grey eyes looked silver, but there were also flecks of sparkling blue. The way he looked over her put her on edge. His gaze was unfamiliar without the malice from when they'd been at Hogwarts.

Finally, Draco leaned forward and kissed her exactly between her eyebrows. "Beautiful, Granger." His hands slid up her satin covered arms, shoulders, and neck before stopping to gently cradle her head. His thumbs rested in front of her ears. It felt very secure, and that sense of security set off all of Hermione's alarms.

Draco dropped his head, bumping her nose with his before pressing his lips down the left side of her jaw. His right hand traced the neckline of her dress, his fingers brushing over her belly before taking a firm hold at the bottom of her ribs.

"You wasted yourself pining for Weasley. It was obvious to anyone who thought about it for two seconds," Draco whispered against her neck before nipping it and pressing his soft lips over it. He switched sides, dropping his left hand to her waist as well and lifting her up so she could sit on the table.

Draco insinuated himself between her legs and licked her right ear, scraping it gently with his teeth. "You would have been wasted on nearly any bloke." His tongue entered her ear in the most delightful way. Had she had the ability, Hermione would have swallowed at the sensation that mixed with the contempt she felt for him.

Draco's thumbs began gently stroking the undersides of her breasts through her dress. In the dream, the Hermione doll arched her back just barely, and Hermione's thoughts were assailed with the sensations of Draco's teeth and mouth on her increasingly exposed neck. In the waking world, Hermione's body began to writhe gently in her bed as she slept in her hammock.

"You know, if you'd stayed at home, you might have been pregnant by now." Draco kissed her collarbone as his hands began to stroke the curves down to her hips and up again. Hermione was pleased; that was just the thing she needed to hear to keep her resistance up. She needed it as his tongue swept lower and lower, following her neckline. "If we'd had our babies right away, by the time they were done at Hogwarts, you'd still be a young, lick "beautiful," lick "brilliant witch."

*Shite.* That was not going to help her keep her head clear. Of course Draco would say anything to get his way. Hermione just had to keep that in mind. This became extremely difficult when he palmed both of her breasts and squeezed firmly. From somewhere, the doll moaned, and Draco's smile beamed with a smug backlight.

"I would have brought any Master to the Manor so you could still apprentice, Granger." He pulled away enough to look her in the eye for a moment. "I had one lined up for me to do Potions. He's still in queue, but this little..." Draco's gaze became annoyed and he twisted her nipples for a moment, "...jaunt has delayed my plans." Draco leaned forward and pressed his mouth against her ear again. "You think I'd let that brain of yours rot for the rest of our lives?" He nipped her ear rudely before massaging it with his lips. "I want a wife, not a whore." Draco's hand began to work all the buttons down the front of her dress. As each was undone, the sliver of flesh that showed became wider and longer. The last one, just below her navel, opened, and Draco snaked his hand inside and around her.

Hermione could feel his strong arm behind her. Her mind was whirling with the things he was saying. Then she felt a breeze across her bare chest, and her attention was brought back just as he said, "Well, I want you to act like a whore sometimes." His smirk pressed into her nipple, and then she felt him suck as much as he could into his mouth.

The doll moaned, and Hermione hated that she might have had to agree at the moment. Draco was pulling her dress off of her shoulders, one hand supporting her. Slowly and gently, he scraped his teeth over her areola and nipple before turning his head to assault the other breast in just the same way.

When he was done, Draco laid Hermione down on the table, her top half bared. The dress was pushed down to her hips, and if it hadn't been a dream, she might have been uncomfortable on the wrinkles of fabric. However, all she could do was watch from inside the doll as she panted and writhed. In her hammock in the waking world, Hermione's body was doing the same.



Draco stood and pushed both hands through his hair, captivated by the image in front of him. Hermione, half naked, laid out on a beautiful dining table for his consumption. "Time for dessert," he muttered distractedly. Draco stepped back and sat in his chair, looking like a king on a throne, and pulled himself into the table.

He grabbed Hermione's thighs and pulled so that her arse came to the edge of the table. She felt her skirts caressing her thighs. Draco pushed the fabric up onto her belly, exposing her bare cunt. Hermione could hear a low growl, which made her wish that she could sit up and see just what he was doing.

"Stay."

The command was followed by Draco spreading Hermione's legs. Quickly, he pressed two fingers through her labia, unfolding them so he could see her quim. Two fingers from his other hand immediately penetrated her, thrusting into her.

The doll moaned in delight, her back arching. Hermione's focus was lost now that Draco was massaging her in such a way.

"You won't be cumming. I won't have any early departures tonight," Draco informed her before he pressed the flat of his tongue at the very bottom of her slit and began lapping the whole distance slowly again and again. It was delightful, but it was also torturous. Eventually, he moved both of her thighs over his shoulders, using his tongue to fuck her slowly.

She was delicious, which didn't surprise Draco one bit. He could think of no better place to be than between her thighs. Soon her rolling hips matched the rhythm of his tongue, although it seemed like her drive was a little more frantic than his. To Draco, it didn't matter that he wasn't actually *tasting* her. Simply knowing that some part of her wanted more from him was a sweet enough reward.

Hermione looked out at the dreamscape, her muscles twitching gently. She knew she could easily cum, and it would really take very little effort on his part. She also figured that he knew as much and was keeping her near the precipice on purpose.

After what seemed like an eternity of his gentle tongue fucking, Hermione felt his hands slide up her thighs. Her gaze lolled over to him, and soon he was standing, only her feet resting on his shoulders, and his hands stroking her legs.

"I'm going to fuck you now." Draco clenched his fingers around her calves for a moment before continuing their firm massage. "It's a shame that I can't actually fuck you, Granger." Draco scowled down at her for a moment. "A bloody shame. But after tonight, you'll know. All you have to do is come home." Draco paused to position his cock at her entrance. "And you can have as much of this as you want." With that last thought, Draco pushed his cock in all the way.

They both moaned loudly. Draco didn't move. That feminine voice whimpered piteously, and Hermione could feel her hips rolling, trying to encourage him to proceed.

"Beg."

Hermione could hear the voice begin to plead, complimenting his size and telling him how good it felt. The only thing that achieved was a slight shift. Draco was reaching forward to grip her jaw firmly but gently.

"One day, Granger. One day you will beg." Draco pulled his cock back slowly. He began fucking her so slowly, infuriatingly, maddeningly slowly. The worst part was the way he pinned her there with his gaze. Hermione felt like her will had crumbled to dust.

Draco began speeding up, the desire to take his time destroyed by the hormones of being a teenager. He couldn't help himself now that he was *in*. He never broke his gaze, though. "One day." His free hand moved to stroke her clit, and Hermione was lost to a wave of sensation.

He was fucking her harder and harder, deeper and faster every second. Finally his thumb brushed her clit in just the right way. Her body, in the dream and in her hammock, arched up, and the pained cry of her glorious orgasm rang through her cottage.

The cries lasted even after she was awake, the seconds seeming like aeons, until her body was left with aftershocks. As her body came down, and the waves of elation settled, Hermione felt her heart plummet. Draco had fucked her and she'd loved it. The thought of fighting harder flickered through her mind, but she dismissed firmly. She had no control over these dreams, none at all.

That didn't prevent the remains of her dinner from churning in her stomach. She rolled to the end of the hammock, getting her head over the edge just in time to vomit all over her floor. The gentle sway of the hammock didn't help. Once everything had settled, she reached for the flannel in the bowl and wiped the sick from her mouth. With a flick of her wrist, the mess on the floor was gone.

Hermione rolled back into the centre of her bed and curled up into herself. Acara bumped Hermione in the knee, and soon the girl was cuddled around her beast, unable to make heads or tails of her situation.

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Time passed. Hermione was on her second period since Harry had told her that Draco and his father were travelling. She didn't know how to feel about this. Most days she thought of it not at all, but sometimes, lying in her bed at night after she dreamed of him, she would. Tonight was like that. Acara was sprawled across her torso, purring, while Hermione stroked her. She was the best hot water bottle ever, and Hermione's cramps were nearly gone now. Hermione's other hand traced the brand at the back of her neck, Draco dominating her thoughts.

Up until three weeks ago, two weeks after he'd left Britain for Colchis, she'd spared him less than half a thought. Now, she dreamed of him every night. It made her think of Harry and Voldemort, Draco giving her these dreams. Or was he just dreaming of her? Most of the time, the dreams were sexual, and twice now she'd woken up in the middle of an orgasm that the dream had brought on. Gods, but the Arse was a Beautiful, Sensual Arse. His hair was a little longer than hers, now that she was keeping it cropped around her chin. She wondered if he'd lost all his hair, too, and laughed at the thought of him bald.

Other times, the dreams were just nice. Once, Hermione was lying against Draco on an oversized chaise lounge. She was reading to him while he played with her hair. The dream was sweet and perfect, but as always, she woke up feeling disgusted with herself. The sodding prick had changed laws to buy her, for Circe's sake! She'd broken her wand because of that!

Of course, Hermione would never give up this life. She had planned to come here and surrender her wand to train and maybe, maybe one day become an elemental mage. From the first time Malfoy had uttered the word Mudblood, and every time after, she had dreamed of a place where her magic would simply be accepted. That place certainly wasn't Britain. In some ways, Malfoy was the centre of this whole thing from the beginning. Hermione wished she could escape him, but this dragon on her neck prevented that. She stroked her cat and her dragon brand and wondered what would come of all this.

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Draco had the hardest erection of his life. She was playing with the brand, and every touch she made was translated onto his chest. It would be so easy to close his eyes and imagine her here, under his arm, toying with him. He wouldn't wank now, though; he'd wait until he saw her in his dreams.

Draco was lying in a posh establishment in southwestern Colorado. Initially, he'd hated the bloody States and wasn't sure why the Brits had come here in the first place. He'd nearly AK'ed numerous Muggle children as they scampered around him in the disgusting Muggle ruins. Fortunately, his father had kept him grounded, and when they had Disillusioned themselves and had gone down a path for "employees only," Draco had been glad he'd not committed any Unforgiveables.

While the Muggle ruins were mildly interesting because they were built into the mountainside at such a height, they were pretty disgusting as they were simply mud condos. On the interior of the mountain was the polar opposite. The condos were lavish grottos. Some were whitewashed while others were dyed with colours from the native plants. Everywhere, fine goods were available like Draco had never seen in Diagon Alley. He was almost sad that they wouldn't be staying longer, but Hermione was certainly not here, so it was time to move on. In the morning, he and Lucius took a Portkey to Mexico City.

Hermione was at a ball. It was a masked ball. She looked down and saw a mask that looked a little like Acara's face in her hand. She moved to put it on her face, but a pale hand reached out and stopped her. Hermione looked up as Draco swept in behind her.

"No more hiding from me," Draco whispered into her ear before he pulled her earlobe in between his lips. His mouth was hot and wet, and Hermione could feel her skin tingling in response.

"But, good sir, it's a masked ball." Hermione heard the words that were supposed to be coming from her. Preparing for Draco's mind to play with his Hermione-doll, Hermione's own subconscious was working on trying to see as much as possible so she could analyse it in the morning.

"Ah, yes, but you see, it is my masked ball," Draco said against her neck from behind as he slid Hermione's dress off her shoulders. She looked down at his hands and saw that a trumped-up version of her dress from the Yule Ball was being pressed to the floor. Hermione looked up again and saw that the other people in the room were beginning to literally vanish. Hermione was able to look about, and she saw the vaulted cathedral ceilings and royal blue and burgundy parquet floor. "I love dancing with you, Princess. You do feel like a princess, don't you?"

The Hermione-doll replied in the affirmative. Hermione looked to see Draco smiling at her with possessive pride in his eyes. She wished she could do anything more than play along in these bloody dreams, although she had found through reviewing her dreams that it seemed to be increasingly easy for Draco to manipulate them. Hermione wasn't sure who to be angrier at: Draco for doing this in the first place or herself for losing her will to resist so quickly.

The next thing she knew, Hermione, and the doll that she always was in the dreams, were pressed against luxurious burgundy velvet curtains, held in place by Draco, who was also completely starkers.

"Where are you, Princess?" Draco whispered as he cupped her breasts and pressed his lips over her forehead. He was being gentle, trying to lure Hermione into acting consciously inside of his dream. She had noticed this trend a couple nights prior. He wanted her to respond so they could end this wild goose chase. Draco rolled Hermione's nipples, and she shivered.

"I'm right here," the doll replied. This was very different from the sputtering oaths and hexes Hermione's mind wanted to add, but she was impotent here; she could only receive whatever Draco wanted and wait impatiently to wake up.

Draco pressed his hard cock against her belly, and they both shivered, looking into each other's eyes. "Don't you want me to give you this?" He reached down and teased his finger in between her labia until he found her clit. "I know you want to take my cock, Hermione. You hardly even resist anymore."

It was true; without even realising it, Hermione found herself with her arms around Draco's neck and her nose in his neck, just below his Adam's apple. She was breathing heavily. Her belly moved against his cock, and Hermione knew she was getting wet.

Draco moved them to lay down on what was now a bed with burgundy velvet sheets. Hermione found her hands to be tied above her head. They were clasped together just as they had been around Draco's neck. He was kneeling beside her, one hand jerking his cock while the other fingered her pussy, as now her legs were spread wide. Hermione felt his gaze roll over her body, and she couldn't keep her hips from rolling as his fingers began to thoroughly work into her. Hermione was mostly thrilled; apart from the disgust of not really wanting The Ferret to use her like this, he was doing a splendid job, and Hermione knew that she couldn't sleep through an orgasm. As soon as she came, she'd be out of here. It was getting two birds with one stone.

Her legs spread shamelessly; Hermione closed her eyes, unaware that the doll had as well, as she was feeling the tides of her orgasm building. She also didn't catch it when, as Draco abruptly pulled his fingers out of her pussy as she broached the precipice, her unfulfilled whimper matched that of the doll, almost as if they were the same being.

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Draco watched Hermione's face as he moved the fingers that had just been in her cunt into his mouth. Her mouth opened into the sexiest little pout of disappointment. Her arms were secured over her head, so she had no recourse for what he knew would be a dire need to cum. He wouldn't allow it, though, as she had yet to sleep through an orgasm, and he was nowhere near done with her. Draco had taken a sedative before bed; he wanted to sleep through his orgasm so he could really enjoy Hermione for as long as possible.

"Now, Granger...Hermione..." Draco said as he licked the last of her juices from his hand. He may not know what she tasted like in reality, but the dream said she was good, and the very premise of suckling her juices made him hard. "I can't let you cum because then you'll go away. I'm not going to let you go away anymore, if I can help it." Draco looked down at her chest for a moment and knelt lower to rub his precum on her darkened nipple. Feeling the soft, uneven texture of her nipple on the head of his penis made Draco shiver, and he nearly came right then.

He looked up into her face and saw that she was staring at his cock on her breast. "You want my cock, Hermione?" Draco held her chin and pressed his cock to her lips. "Lick it, Princess." Hermione's little pink tongue slid out and went around his sensitive head a few times. "Yes, Princess, just like that."

Hermione was getting aroused again, in a slightly different way. Draco's breath was getting ragged, and she loved when she could shut The Ferret up. The power of finally seeing him lose his damned smirk was thrilling.

"Your mouth looks so good near my cock, Princess. I can't wait for you to suck it outside of our little dream world. You're going to beg for my cock when we meet again." Draco looked down at Hermione, her eyes closed as she sucked on his cock. Her cheeks caved in just a little bit, and again, Draco started cumming. He pulled out of her mouth and watched as he coated her lips and neck. When looked down at her heaving chest, he let out a shaking breath and wiped his half hard cock on her breasts.

Her knees were bent up, her feet trying to find purchase on the bed. "Look at me," Draco ordered. Hermione turned her eyes to his. She was starting to catch her breath. "Where are you, Hermione? Tell me now." Draco slid his hand over her mound and two fingers stroked her cunt for a moment. Hermione closed her eyes and arched back into his hand. Suddenly, she felt his hand slap her pussy. "I said, 'Look at me.'" She did. He slapped her quim again. "Where are you, Hermione?"

Hermione threw her legs wide open, arching into his hand, which was now spanking her cunt in a steady rhythm. Each time, Hermione's walls would clench, his fingers and palm smarting her quim in the perfect way. She was so close. Draco's gaze was sliding from her face to her quim, which was so juicy for him; Draco knew she wouldn't be able to hold out much longer.

Draco looked up into Hermione's face and saw her eyes clear. It was that moment when she broke through whatever was keeping her climax at bay and came. As her body began the beautiful agony of her orgasm, she yelled, "NO!" and woke in her little cottage. Hermione was panting heavily. Out of a newly formed habit, she reached over to a bowl of water with a flannel in it. Wiping herself clean, she moved straight to her dream journal and wrote down as much as she could.

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Draco had woken up when Hermione had yelled at him. He was groggy from the sedative, but he couldn't keep his mind from turning over Hermione's face at the end of the dream. It was as if she'd just come out from under the Imperius Curse. Her eyes shone like they had when she'd smacked him in third year. Had their subconsciouses connected? It was an acceptable consolation to her sudden departure.

Had she really cum because he'd spanked her quim? Would she do it again in their marriage bed? Draco had... dabbled in pleasurable pain, as it seemed part and parcel with his desire to dominate Hermione completely. His mind's eye flashed the image of Hermione's mouth, chin, and neck covered in his seed, and Draco let out a contented sigh. He would find out soon enough.

# Getting to Know You, Getting to Know All about You

Chapter 5 of 25

"She let some *Muggle*..."

Draco loved Mexico City! It was sort of like Colorado, but more Spanish, and with a denser magical population. Most importantly, that was where he'd gotten *the* book. There was a gypsy woman in Mexico City who had told him this was the book that would bring his mind together with Hermione's completely. From what he had read, he was certain she was correct. They had only been in the city for four days when Draco made solid connection with Hermione. He knew, because the dream did not go as he had planned.

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Hermione and Acara were walking through a busy plaza in a city. This was why she was so surprised to be met by Malfoy. Acara was never in the dreams about her and The Ferret. That was how she knew that they were his dreams and not hers. Acara was *always* in her dreams.

Draco smiled in a soft, genuine way that she only ever saw in his dreams. "Finally."

"Sod off, Malfoy." Hermione moved to push through him, knowing it was her dream, so she could do as she pleased. Only she didn't pass through a Malfoy-shaped vapour, but pressed against his broad muscular chest. "What the...?"

Draco was about to wrap his arms around her when Acara growled. They both looked down, and Hermione smiled, stepping away from him slightly.

"We meet again, darling." Draco leaned in to touch her hair. This was his marker that she was actually here. In his dreams, she always had hair like she'd had at Hogwarts, light brown curls down her back. Now her hair was cropped at the chin and deep chocolate brown; it was amazingly fetching.

Hermione bobbed away from his hand and sucker punched him in the gut. "Leave me alone."

"Merlin's balls, Granger," Draco wheezed as he curled over himself. "What the bloody fuck was that for?" The girl could probably take out Goyle with a punch like that. He had been so distracted by actually meeting her that her increased muscle tone and strength had gone completely unnoticed.

"Unless a girl says 'yes', Ferret, the answer is 'no'." Hermione opened and closed her fist, considering hitting him again and again, once for each dream he'd sent her. Hermione looked at him viciously. She leaned down and scooped up Acara and draped the cat across her strong shoulders. "Go home, Malfoy."

Draco looked up at her. She was a goddess. "Am I to understand that you haven't liked my gifts?" he grunted, moving to kneel in front of her as his lungs filled back in.

"Gifts!" Hermione screeched incredulously. "You mean branding me without my knowledge, let alone consent? Or trying to buy me from the Ministry as if I'm just an incubator for your seed? Or maybe you mean berating me for six years because of your prejudiced views?"

"I mean the dreams, *Princess*." He paused to really look her over, savouring the way her face flushed under that nickname and the new image of her body in lavender mage's robes. She certainly wasn't the girl he'd been dreaming of lately; she was even better.

"Oh, you mean using me sexually without my permission. I would have to say, no, I didn't like your bloody *gifts*," Hermione sneered at him.

Draco looked into her darkened eyes, and he continued, "I could give you books, and jewels, and more orgasms than any woman could want. Tell me you haven't woken up with your tight, virgin cunt aching for me. I know I have for you."

Hermione couldn't dispute his claim, unfortunately. As loath as she was to admit it, part of her had enjoyed the dreams. However, another part of her wanted to ask Draco Malfoy about his virgin cunt. Instead, she just smirked at him and said, "Oh, Malfoy...I hate to burst your bubble, but I haven't been a virgin now *for years*." Hermione felt an evil delight in watching his face fall as he understood what she was saying. She almost laughed when his face clouded over and his grey eyes promised a violent storm.

"Potter? Or Weasley?" Draco ground out through his teeth, his fists clenching at his sides. Acara began to growl in return.

"Oh, no, not Harry or Ron, silly. A nice *Muggle* boy from my old neighbourhood. We used to play football together. He was *very* fit." Hermione finally laughed out loud, remembering how good it had been after the first couple times. Acara slithered down her arm as she bent over in mirth.

Draco stood up, barely controlling his rage. "You let a *Muggle* defile you?" He couldn't hide his disgust. "You let some *Muggle* prick take what was mine?" Draco's nostrils flared, and his eyes took on a look of great menace.

"I'm not yours, Malfoy! Go home!" Hermione was unimpressed by his behaviour. *Classic Malfoy*.

Draco couldn't take it anymore. He lunged for her, thinking only that he had to shake some sense into her. Hermione didn't even flinch, except when Acara jumped up into Draco's chest, knocking him onto his back. Her jaws slid over Draco's neck, and she held him there, growling lowly.

"Tell me, Malfoy, if Acara kills you in our dream, will you really die? Do you care to find out?"

"Granger, pl-lease," Draco whispered, unwilling to literally risk his neck by speaking too loudly.

Hermione liked hearing Draco ask nicely. That was certainly a first. She knew that if she yielded now, Draco would become even more relentless, but she couldn't risk a killing in cold blood. Hermione had seen more than enough blood to last her a lifetime. "Acara, come," Hermione whispered and knelt down to receive her. Acara slowly pulled off of Draco's neck and backed away, turning to pounce on Hermione and lick her face. That's how Hermione woke up, with her cat licking her face and purring lovingly.

It was the pitch black of extremely early morning, but Hermione knew she wouldn't be sleeping any more tonight. First thing, there would need to be a councillors' meeting. They would have to plan out how to welcome their impending guests.

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The morning after her dream found Hermione kneeling on the doorstep to the councilor's home. She assumed Draco was in a comparable time zone because the dream had ended in the middle of the night. When she first started having the dreams, she'd awoken well before midnight and could go to sleep without worry of another dream. Waking up more toward the morning had to be an indicator of his proximity, Hermione was sure.

Hermione was in deep meditation when the door cracked open. Marcela, the standing Earth Mage, opened the door and yawned deeply. Hermione was relieved, as she

had been confiding her dreams to Marcela from the beginning. Hermione stayed perfectly still, kneeling with her head bent.

"You dreamed?"

"Yes, ma'am, they are coming."

"How will we recognise them?"

"Unless they use a disguise, which is unlikely as he gives himself away all of the time, they will stand out. They are blond giants." When Hermione first got to the colony, she'd been a little surprised to find she towered over the women, none reaching five feet tall, and finding the men only three or four inches taller than she. Draco was easily six and a half feet. Lucius, she was unsure of, but he had to be over six feet as well.

"Fine. We will announce it at midday. Then, my girl, you will have your work cut out for you."

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Draco woke up on the wrong side of the bed. His mood was thunderous when he met his father for breakfast. Lucius folded his paper and looked cautiously at his son. This was by far the greatest amount of concentrated time he'd ever spent with the boy, and he was surprised at an even higher level of closeness than they had had at home.

"It did not work?"

"No, Father, it worked. She is... stunning now." Draco sighed.

"You are terribly melancholy this morning."

"*Muggles*." Draco hated Muggles more than ever. They were nothing. They were ants. They were barely human. Now this.

"Elaborate, please."

"She let some Muggle..." Draco trailed off and looked sternly at his father.

Lucius wasn't sure at first what was meant by this, but once he realised, he could see how this would put his boy in a mood. "This is why we like to keep the blood pure, son." Lucius did not look at his son but around the beautiful courtyard where they were taking their respite.

"She is an oasis, Father." Draco pouted over what he would describe as a Mexican pancake. The flavour was slightly different, and it was coated in spices and sugar. Draco really enjoyed them.

Lucius ignored his boy's mood. He had watched Draco mature in these scant few weeks. He was not amused to find this version of his son across the table from him.

"Shall we go home, then?" Lucius hoped not; quitting was not what he'd instilled in his son.

There was a long pause as Draco savoured his morsel. Finally, he said, "Of course not."

Lucius beamed proudly at his son, and they finished their breakfast in companionable silence. Afterward, they strolled through the markets. It was nearly lunch when Draco paused mid-sentence and rushed into a stall and began interrogating the shopkeeper.

"What is this animal? Where is it from?" Draco smoothed his hand reverently over a pelt.

"It is a jungle cat from Peru. I have many more, much finer examples, if you like." The shopkeeper smiled broadly and nodded slightly in encouragement.

Draco looked at the pelt and smiled, but said, "No. Thank you. You've been most helpful." He threw a large wad of bills on the counter before racing back to his father. "She's in Peru. I'll explain in the hotel," Draco said before Disapparating his father away to pack their things.

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It was two nights later before Draco had the courage to reach out to Hermione as they slept again. She didn't know that he was half a day's travel from her now. It was like the night after the law had passed for him, again. Draco's adrenaline was running fast, like he was flying high and fast on his broom, the Snitch just a hair's breadth away.

This time, he set his dream to a hillside outside of Colchis before he reached out to her. When she appeared, she was not in her mage's robes, which had clung to her delightfully. This time, she was in heavy canvas shorts dyed an olive green and a linen shirt. She looked a little like a Muggle on safari, but he would not complain about that...her shapely legs were on display. There was one problem: that damned cat was with her. They were sitting on the hillside a little bit away from him, the beast's head in her lap as Hermione pressed her hands into the scruff at the back of the cat's neck.

Draco walked over to Hermione and knelt behind her. "Does puss follow you everywhere, Granger?" he asked with his head beside her left ear. Draco wanted to start out light, knowing he had lost major ground last time when he'd let his temper go. It had been so long since he'd even really seen his little spitfire, he'd almost forgotten how she was.

"Yes, and unlike with you, she's appreciated." Hermione leaned her body away from him. Well, she tried, but his hand came to her arm and held her gently in place.

Draco fought the smirk off his face as she berated him. He'd thought she would give him the cold shoulder. He looked at her, smiling. She returned his gaze with a neutral face, and they stayed like that for many moments.

Finally, Hermione lost all patience. "What the bloody fuck are we doing here, Malfoy?" She whipped her arm around, and he lost his grip.

Draco's smile broadened, and he lay down on his side casually, as if they had been old friends and lovers all these years. "If I can't hold you in my waking hours, at least I can see you in my dreams." Draco's fingers were itching to twist one of those new dark curls, but he held back this time, not convinced that the cat was as docile as it seemed.

"So you plan to haunt my dreams until we die?" Hermione eyed him and sighed exasperatedly.

"No. Soon you'll be in my arms." Draco rolled to his back, missing how Hermione's jaw clenched and her teeth began grinding. In the dream, he was wearing a blood-red linen tunic, cut close to his torso, and white trousers embroidered in the same red as his shirt. It was the height of fashion for wizards in Mexico City, and as Hermione watched him relax carelessly, she berated herself for seeing him as attractive at all.

She knew this was his doing...Hermione had never even considered Draco Malfoy to be anything but a ferret-boy; he certainly was not a man she might consider snogging. Then Draco had started toying around in her subconscious. He was attractive. He was broad-shouldered and thin-hipped. He was deliciously tall, especially compared to the mages she'd been living with for nine months. Worst of all, the dreams where he'd made love to her had been exquisite.

Hermione needed out of this dream. Unfortunately, the landscape was so peacefully constructed, and Draco was doing nothing to make her uncomfortable, really, so she had nothing to jar her out of it. If it hadn't been set in the mid-afternoon, she could have easily dozed off. Not that she would doze off in the presence of Malfoy...who knew what he would try to do then. "Where is this?"

"Still with the questions, Granger?" Malfoy smirked at her arrogantly, even though he looked like he was about to doze off himself. "Let's make a deal...I'll answer your questions, if you'll answer mine. You already owe me two."

"I'm not making any deals with you," Hermione said and followed it with a clicking noise. The cat got up and stretched, as did Hermione, and then she bent down and picked the beast up to carry her on her shoulders. Hermione knew that this was as much her dream as it was his. She didn't have to stick around.

Hermione had finally gotten to where she couldn't sense Draco anymore, when he materialised next to her, walking in time. She was irritated by his continued presence, but felt good that something was finally happening.

"Which dream did you like best, Hermione?" Draco asked with an intense gaze on her.

"Don't call me that." Hermione looked away from him. She would be as little a party to this as possible.

"It's your name. What else am I to call you?" Draco reached down and grabbed her palm. He held it softly and stroked her smooth flesh with his thumb.

"You have no right to call me that." Hermione was about to turn and confront him when Acara's paw swept out and slapped Draco upside his skull. The move tossed his hair into his eyes, his jaw clacked, and his step stuttered. Hermione couldn't contain herself and she laughed, loudly at first, and then chuckled. Draco had dropped her hand upon the assault, and now she walked with her hands held together in front of her. She didn't even try to wipe the smile off her face.

Draco scowled. He was really liking that beast less and less. He would not be goaded. He was a Malfoy. Malfoys were always in control of the situation. He pressed on, saying, "I think it was that time on the beach."

Hermione remembered that dream vividly. She couldn't help but blush scarlet over her tan despite the aftermath of the incident. Annoyed with herself, she growled low in her throat. That dream was the second time she had woken up to an orgasm. *Bloody fucking arse-faced ferret!* Oh, how she hated him! Feeling her anger grow, she knew it was the way out of the dream, so she'd play along. "There were no times, Malfoy. This whole mess is part of your own delusional mind."

"Oh, my darling Granger, that's where you're wrong. Well... maybe you were less co-operative before, when we were students, but now...now when we are together in these dreams, it's us. The subconscious doesn't lie, Granger."

*Less co-operative?* Hermione's mind raged, and finally, her feet halted. *The sodding prick stalked me for four months, and he's calling it lessco-operative. Oh, and the subconscious lies all the time, Ferret, that's why dreams can be so ridiculous.*

However, she didn't voice these points. She just stopped and turned to look at him, making a clicking noise that caused Acara to slither down her body and coil around her legs.

"Malfoy. I'm out of your league." She poked his chest with her finger. "You come near me, near my new home, and your life, as you know it, will be over."

Draco grabbed her finger and pulled her against his body. "Why do you fight it, Granger? I can give you everything you want, if you'll just give in."

"I already have everything I want, and it certainly doesn't include you!" Hermione couldn't move her legs because she didn't want to kick Acara, who was pinned between her and Draco. Hermione could feel the magic welling up in side of her; she'd be out of this soon. She sighed heavily and leaned into Draco's body, momentarily giving in as he pressed his fingers through her hair and down to where her brand was, pulling their lips together. Just before they touched, though, Hermione sent a wave of fire through her skin.

She and Draco both screamed in their sleep, not unlike when she had broken her wand. For Hermione, it was just a vocal release of her magic, even though her skin radiated heat, especially on the brand. When she woke, Acara was purring happily on Hermione's chest.

Meanwhile, in a city a little north of where Hermione lay resting, Draco had roused his father with his cries, the dragon on his chest burning hot like Fiendfyre on his skin. Neither would get much sleep after, as they called in the local Healer, who could only offer the strongest cooling balm and prescribed bed rest. Draco would be convalescing for another week.

## The Consequences of Our Actions

### Chapter 6 of 25

Since he'd gotten to Hogwarts, Draco had weathered his parents' silent disapproval of his choice of a witch, and now his father knew.

It was three days before Draco could stay awake for longer than a few minutes at a time, and Lucius was worried. If that Mudblood had permanently harmed his son, he'd destroy everything precious to her in vengeance. He didn't care about the Dementor's Kiss, his boy was worth more than his soul. What Draco had told him about the dream had put him even more on edge.

"She is the most powerful witch alive, Father. She must be mine," Draco had said at the end of his tale. Lucius was unsure. A Malfoy never admitted defeat, but on rare occasions, they could consider calling a draw.

"Draco, I know you want her. However, if she can do all this to you through a dream you control, imagine what she can do when *she* is in control."

Draco looked at his father for a long moment and smiled broadly. Lucius would never say that any Mudblood was a worthy adversary, so to think that she might actually be better than a pure-blood was actually beyond comprehension for him. Now, he could see his father's existential crisis regarding the witch really come to a head. Since he'd gotten to Hogwarts, Draco had weathered his parents' silent disapproval of his choice of a witch, and now his father knew.

"It only makes me want her more. You always said, Father, that the greatest victories are found in the toughest battles." Draco was mostly talking about Hermione, but a small part of his statement meant that he'd been right all this time and that his parents had been wrong, and that was a great victory in and of itself. Draco fell asleep feeling vindicated and rather pleased with himself.

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Hermione was growing worried; she hadn't dreamed of Draco in days. Damn her soft heart all the way to Hades. She'd never used her fire on another person before, and while it couldn't harm her, she had no idea what it could do to another, especially another linked by the subconscious as he had been. She had no idea what had happened to him after she woke up, although there were several times when she would get a shiver down her spine for no reason. The mark was just as dark as ever, so she took that as a sign that she hadn't killed him. Still, there was uncertainty, and Hermione had taken to rubbing the brand softly, making sure it was still there. She didn't want to hurt Draco; she just wanted him to bugger off, already.

Ever since Hermione had discovered the brand, she'd been looking for information on it. When she'd left school, Hermione had left behind more than just the improved DA Galleons to keep in touch. There were three blank journals in her library that were spelled to match three still in Britain. Luna had one, as did Harry, and Professor McGonagall.

Any time she would need a book, she'd ask Luna or her professor, and they'd magically copy it into the journal, and then Hermione would copy from the journal onto books that Hermione had bound herself. This meant that even though she was living in a secluded mountain top village, Hermione had access to the outside world. She could chat back and forth with her friends through the journal pages, as well. The Galleon was good for things brief or urgent, but she had had many dates with her friends back home since she matriculated.

Many of the books in her library were about magical tattoos, branding, the Dark Mark, Unbreakable Vows, and anything else she could think of to research what Draco had done to her. Of course, none of them could tell her about Malfoy marks specifically, so she was on her own there. *Stupid family secrets!* Hermione wanted the bloody thing off of her, but after nine months, she was certain that when a Malfoy left a mark, it was permanent, unless you could coerce said Malfoy into removing it personally.

The councilors had been thrilled when she had told them about her library, as they were trying to refurbish their own. They had hired a wizard from the small city up north, but he wasn't working out. He hadn't been cheating them necessarily, but it was clear he didn't make the job a priority. Hermione's bibliophilia had made her an instant replacement, and it was her afternoon duty when the council didn't need her. In the mornings, she would gather supplies with or without the initiates, and she helped with the smaller children. Yesterday, they had gone to a lake to swim. Hermione could not be happier with her life. She was sighing contentedly.

Hermione looked up as Acara growled. Nothing seemed to be out of the ordinary until Hermione realised she'd been caressing the brand absently. She smacked her hand down to the table where she was binding sheets of papyrus together into books.

"Thanks, lady. I'd be lost without you."

If she had burnt Draco because of their bond, she was pretty sure that if she touched the mark, he'd feel it. The last thing she needed was for Draco to think she was worried. She didn't know it was already too late for that.

## Preliminary Discussions

*Chapter 7 of 25*

"Is he going to take you away now?" ---- "He is going to try."

A couple of days later, Hermione was dozing in her hammock with Acara when Lucius and Draco were finally brought into the village. She had spent the unusually warm morning at the lake with the kids and was enjoying an after-lunch nap when Acara jumped up, leaving Hermione swinging in the breeze. She swore under her breath and scrubbed her fingertips roughly in her hair to wake up.

Hermione's eyes followed her beast toward the door. Acara's hind end was crouched in the doorway as she had poked through the curtain to investigate. Her tail was still, except for the end, which twitched menacingly.

Hermione couldn't help but laugh at her spirit beast. Gryffindor, indeed. Hermione looked down at what she was wearing; it was essentially a long sundress, what most of the ladies wore around the village. Not everyone completed their education to the Mage level, so her robes were more significant than the regular robes that they had in Britain. Hermione decided that what the Malfoys didn't know would be good for her, so she left her little one-room cottage and went to meet the men.

Hermione was not surprised at all to see nearly the whole village gathered around them. In fact, the patrol had brought them to the little amphitheatre. There was very little private business in the community, which was so closely knit that it felt to Hermione like the Burrow multiplied again and again. Hermione approached the crowd slowly and from behind the two blond giants. Lucius had his cane, and she knew there was a wand in there. Draco had a wand out as well; his wand arm was loose, but his grip was ready. She was sure they'd brought extras, but she could easily take care of that.

Just as she was getting to the centre of the circle, a small boy, Kress, ran up and jumped into Hermione's arms. Hermione smiled down at him...so much for standing up for herself like a warrior. She easily manoeuvred Kress over to her left hip and started chatting with the boy as though Lucius and Draco were of no concern whatsoever.

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Draco was struck breathless at the sight of Hermione with a child on her hip and that damned cat at her feet. He had always known that he would produce an heir, but it had meant very little to him besides endless copulating... until now. Now he wanted ten heirs, and he wanted them all from that gorgeous witch. He was listening to her talk to the boy, but he couldn't follow along. She would speak in perfect English, and he would speak back gibberish.

He cleared his throat. Hermione and the boy stopped talking to look at him. Draco swallowed, nervous for the first time since the Dark Lord had been vanquished.

"Yes?" Hermione looked at him with her eyes wide, as if she were a school matron and Draco were a wee lad.

"Why can't I understand him?" Draco said quietly, feeling everyone's eyes on him.

Hermione smirked. "They adjusted my universal translation medallion for me. This is a dialect that most of the world doesn't know." She turned to the boy a moment and asked him to get down. When he was standing, hiding a little behind her skirt, she stood up and carefully undid the clasp at the back of her neck. She could speak some but was not yet fluent with the language here, and so she wore the necklace in case she got stuck as she learned.

She turned around to Kress and put it around his neck, where it hung low on his bare chest. Then she scooped him back up and told him he could talk now with the blond men if he wanted. He was shy, however, and still talked quietly into Hermione's neck.

"Which one is the Dragon?"

"The taller one." Hermione turned her body to point to Draco, and the two boys peered curiously at each other.

"Is he going to take you away now?" Kress' tiny voice wavered a little bit. He grabbed the back of Hermione's neck, and Draco felt a little tug in his heart as he felt the little hand on his chest through the brand.

"He is going to try." Hermione smiled and smoothed out Kress' hair, pushing it away from his face.

"I'll fight him."

"You would? For me?" Kress nodded and blushed as a gentle chuckle sounded from some of the men behind them. "That's very brave, but you better wait 'til you are big Mage, yourself."

"But I don't want them to take you."

"They can't take me, I have asylum." Hermione looked pointedly at Lucius as she switched Kress to her other hip.

Lucius rolled his eyes. Laws could be bent with money.

"But the Dragon marked you."

"Without asking me. Do you remember what happened when you took my journal without asking?"

The whole village laughed now, as Kress' eyes got very round, and then he smiled. "You made me give it back."

"...And?"

"You punished me."

"That's right. But Draco can't give any of what he took back to me; he took away things that you can't hold except in your heart." Hermione tickled Kress' chest over his heart, and he giggled. "Besides, he is only a wizard with a wand. Would you like to see his wand?"

Draco was, by now, totally charmed by his witch and the boy, and he would certainly let the boy hold his wand. What Draco hadn't expected was for Hermione to straighten up and fan her fingers in the air before pulling all her fingers together then folding them into a fist. When she opened her fist, there were five wands in her palm.

Hermione looked up at the two men. "Five wands? Five! And I'm sure they are all registered with the Ministry? Down, Kress." Hermione was not feeling playful anymore. "The hawthorn wand, Draco?" Draco nodded fearfully. What was she going to do to his wand? She let Kress hold the wand. "Lucius?"

Hermione had seen a livid Lucius before, but right now, he practically radiated angry, aggressive energy. Acara began to growl softly, and the people surrounding them watched with bated breath. Hermione looked into her palm and chose the shortest wand, holding it in her fingertips before incinerating it. A high-pitched squeal spread through the village for a few seconds before silence returned. All eyes were on Hermione.

"Well, Lucius?" The wizard continued to be silent, most likely dumbfounded by her actions and abilities.

She picked up the longest wand and heard Lucius take a deep inhale. She incinerated the two now left in her open palm. The squeal was louder now, and longer, more of a screech. She squatted in front of Kress and took her necklace off of him, sliding it into the pocket of her shift. When she stood, she pointed Lucius' wand at him and began advancing slowly.

"This is your favourite wand, Lucius? Do you hex house-elves and little children and helpless Muggles with this wand?" Hermione was approaching the two men, wand trained on Lucius' chest, smoke coming from her palm as it wrapped around the implement of malice. "How many Imperios, Lucius? How many Crucios? How... many... Avada..."

"No!" Draco and Lucius yelled at the same time. For the first time in her life, Hermione saw fear in Lucius Malfoy's eyes. Hermione lunged forward and grabbed Lucius Malfoy, Disapparating them out of the village.

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When they landed, Hermione shoved Lucius away from her, but he didn't lose his balance. Instead, he proudly gathered himself together and looked at her as one would look at an eight-foot tall scorpion.

Hermione was rolling his wand in her hand. She hadn't held a focus object since she'd broken hers all those months ago. *This* was a powerful wand. She could feel it. It was encouraging her. It was like sliding back into her favourite pair of shoes, or her copy of *Hogwarts: A History*. It was as if she were about to remember something really important any second now. "Mr. Malfoy, do you know where my parents are?"

This was certainly the last thing he thought he'd be asked at this point. "No. No, I do not, Ms. Granger, but I can help yo..."

"Do *not*... offer to help me, you vile piece of shite!" Hermione looked at him with wild eyes. "That... was a rhetorical question. I know you don't because I am hiding them from the likes of you!"

"So, you may be wondering why I asked you at all, if I already knew the answer. I assure you, Lucius, that I've not gone stark raving mad. I am asking you because you have been ruining my life. Even before the law, you were doing it. Before the moment I stepped onto the Hogwarts Express, before your son ever heard you say *Mudblood*, for your whole forsaken life, as have all Malfoys through all of the generations of your wretched inbreeding."

At this Lucius frowned and looked a little bored. Another lesson in morals. Joy. It wasn't until he saw the base of his wand smouldering that he put an impassive look on his face.

Hermione had spent many hours thinking of the ways in which she hated Lucius Malfoy. She had made mental lists of his every shortcoming, every malicious deed, and every underhanded manoeuvre. Now, face to face with him, feeling fire in her blood and the power of his wand in her hand, she had nothing but adrenaline, and no outlet for it. She stuck his wand in her pocket and turned to face out over the cliffs, always keeping Malfoy senior in the periphery. Hermione closed her jaw tight and breathed deeply a few times until she sighed through her nose. "How much did you pay for me?"

Again, Lucius was shocked. The woman had a mind like none other. Lucius cleared his throat. "Outright, or bribes included?" he asked smoothly. No sense in beating 'round the bush now, was there? It was with great relief that he saw her smile and chuckle softly.

"Just me."

"One hundred *thousand* Galleons," Lucius replied with a light in his eyes. That was quite a sum, even for a Malfoy.

"That's a lot of Galleons for a Mudblood," Hermione replied, peering through the brush until she saw Acara coming toward her at a vigorous pace.

Lucius raised his eyebrow, clearly expressing his emphatic agreement. "I spare no expense for my son." He paused to watch the girl and the cat reunite as if they had been separated for days and not minutes. "Shall we sit?"

Having Acara nearby put Hermione at ease, and since she wasn't going to do any of the violent things she had long dreamed of doing to Lucius, she thought *maybe* this could be cordial. The damned brand meant that she wouldn't be rid of the git any sooner than she would be of Draco, so she could *try* to be polite.

Hermione conjured a comfortable set of lounge chairs and a coffee set. She poured some for him before taking some for herself and leaning back to relax. Acara jumped up and draped herself along the wide back of Hermione's chair, her tail flicking contentedly.

Lucius cleared his throat. "May I ask you a question?"

"Certainly, though I reserve the right not to answer it."

"Why all this?" He swirled his hands around, and she knew what he meant.

"This was my plan for after N.E.W.T.s anyway. The Law just forced my hand. I had looked at other places, like Colchis, but this was everything I wanted. It came highly recommended."

Lucius wrinkled his nose at the bitter aftertaste of his coffee and utter shock that someone would *recommend* this place. "Good gods, by whom?"

"Professor Snape...but *that's* not open for discussion." Hermione levelled her gaze at the older man.

Lucius simply raised his eyebrow thoughtfully. What an interesting morsel to be considered later. "But as a Malfoy, you could have done anything in Britain."

"Being forced to marry and procreate is hardly *anything*," Hermione responded coldly and looked out over the ocean. They were on a high peak that had beautiful panoramic views.

"You don't want a family?"

"That is besides the point."

"Then what, pray tell, *is* the point?" Lucius was losing patience. Not that he hadn't loved travelling with his son, but, really now, he had things to do at home.

Hermione opened her mouth to respond, but then she shut it without a word. Once again, she started but changed her mind. Finally, she asked, "What do you do all day, when you aren't traipsing across the globe trying to apprehend unwilling Muggle-born brides for your son?"

Lucius chuckled. She was witty. He hated that she was; she had no right being so... many things. "I help shape the government to structure the world as I would like it to be structured."

Hermione rolled her eyes. *That was a very pretty way of saying I do what I want to get what I want so I can do more of what I want!* "And your wife?"

"She assists me when needed. Mostly she enjoys herself."

"And this is the same for all of your *associates*?"

"Yes."

"So, if Mrs. Malfoy said to you tomorrow, I'd like to run for Minister, you would say...?"

Lucius snorted. "Lay off the opiates, Cissy." The answer was out of his mouth before he could stop himself. No wonder the coffee was so bitter, it was drugged.

Hermione smiled a smile that would have indicated to Harry or Ron that she was about to make a very valid point, but Lucius had no idea.

"Is your wife unintelligent?"

"Certainly not; she is very competent." Lucius looked indignant on his wife's behalf.

"But you wouldn't vote for her for Minister."

"No."

"Because her place is...?"

"In the home."

"Because...?"

"That's what witches do." Lucius wasn't getting the point, and they were looking at each other as if the other was completely thick.

"Would you like to know what I do here?"

"Yes, please enlighten me."

The statement was so steeped in sarcasm, Hermione wanted to smack the smirk off his ridiculous face.

"I serve the Head Council, I manage the refurbishment of the library, and I gather supplies in the morning."

"Yes, well, you aren't married."

"Right, I won't get any *real* responsibilities until I marry. Vamisa is the head of the Treasury. She's got a dozen people under her. Paruin runs the public works. All new engineering projects are designed by her. She manages twenty."

"Until she has children..."

"Vamisa's children are nearly grown, but she's been in the job for... 28 years. Paruin is on her eighth. Kress is one of hers." Lucius could see now that Hermione was trying to illustrate that she was capable of doing more than looking pretty at parties while the boys have their little club. He was unimpressed. It meant next to nothing for him as Wizarding Britain's pre-eminent lord, and one of the richest wizards in the world. His attention was quickly drawn back to his wand as it started to smoulder as Hermione rolled it in her hand.

Lucius tried to lean forward, but he was frozen in his chair. He couldn't move or talk. He tried to glare at Hermione, but she just smirked at him. Again, she twisted her wrist and fingers, and he watched his shirt appear in Hermione's palm. She stood gracefully, and took Lucius' empty cup out of his hand and set it on the tray. Then she crawled into his lap on the chair to straddle his legs and moved to touch his face.

When he flinched, she chuckled menacingly. "Lucius, you can't really expect me to believe I disgust you. I know I do a *little bit*, but you're covetous of power, which I have in spades, and we have a long history, don't we? Much more intense than I have with Draco." Lucius was grinding his teeth. "Here you are, a big, strong wizard, a very powerful wizard..." Hermione tickled her fingers across his collarbone, and his nostrils flared. "I'm going to give you a choice now, more choice than you've ever given me, really. Ready?"

Lucius could only close his eyes and drop his chin in acceptance. Hermione held his wand up between her fingertips at his eye level.



"Now. I could destroy this instrument of evil...don't panic, it wouldn't be like what I did with mine...I would incinerate it, and then you could work to purify your magic. Don't. Panic. Lucius. Pure magic wouldn't make you impotent. Do you think I am impotent? That's right. I am far from impotent. All right, so that's option one. Option two is that I brand you not unlike Draco branded me. See these inscriptions that I've put on your beautiful wand...these are ancient empathy signs. It would bind you, Lucius, from doing harm to others or harm to yourself. Whatever you cast you will receive. No more Imperius, that one is moot with this, which is fine... and I'm sure you'd not risk it with Avada, but can you imagine a Crucio by your own wand? That would be a very powerful Crucio, I think. Bella's was strong, I remember *personally*, but yours might be even stronger."

Lucius let out a shaking breath. He loved his wand like he loved his arm, like he loved his mind. Possibly, he loved it more than his wife. He'd had that wand since he was a child. It was to be encased in his tomb with his remains, as were the wands of Malfoys throughout the generations.

But the things she could do. She was proving more and more that these mages were not just wizards but something better. Draco had made her the gateway to a new era for his family. What could she give him?

Lucius looked at Hermione imploringly.

"Need a hint? All right, well, I'll simply say it is better to walk into your fate because you will it than it is to be dragged into it by someone else's will. So, what will it be? Binding yourself to your wand or incineration?"

Lucius felt his voice come back to him and took a deep breath. He hadn't had this much anxiety since he took the Dark Mark.

"Brand me."

---

Draco's first instinct when Hermione had disappeared with his father was to chase after them, but he quickly remembered that little Kress had his wand.

"Kress?" Draco asked as he peered down at the boy who was just as shocked as everyone else by what had just happened. The little boy looked at him as though he really were a dragon and not just an unarmed wizard. Granted, Draco knew some wandless magic, but nothing like what they had here. Looking at the boy's wide, scared eyes, he began to panic. In this instance he wished his reputation had not preceded him. "Does anyone speak English?"

Luckily, an attractive little woman walked forward and took Draco's hand. "My name is Marcela, Draco, let me show you where you will stay."

Draco gratefully dropped his head and thanked her, breathing a sigh of great relief.

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They had walked leisurely for about fifteen minutes when Marcela touched his arm and whispered, "We are being followed, yeah?" She indicated that someone was behind him, and he turned to see who it was.

Kress was peeking at them through the tall grass a little ways off. One big brown eye was visible over four tiny fingers, and Draco wanted to laugh. "What should I do?" Draco asked, wanting to put the little boy in his corner; he thought that if he could make little Kress like him, surely Hermione would see how good he was, too.

"Let him stalk you like prey. He and Acara play many days that way while Hermione works."

"All right." Draco stood up as tall as he could, pretending that he hadn't seen him and walked a little slower, listening for the boy to make a noise. When they were just outside a little cottage, Draco could easily see Kress in the grass about three feet away, ready to pounce. Draco froze, waiting for the moment that Kress made his move. It was a short wait, as within seconds, Kress roared and ran, jumping toward Draco, who caught him up and threw him over his shoulder.

The boys were laughing, Kress delighting in the strong arms of this giant man, and Draco forgetting himself as he tossed the boy around. Draco, Marcela, and Kress came up to one of the guest cottages. Draco put Kress down as he approached the small door. He had noticed that he and his father were head and shoulders above all the men, but he hadn't stopped to consider the practical ramifications of this. The doorway was wide enough, but he'd have to be on constant watch or he'd crack his skull open.

Inside, it was delightfully cool. On either side were a hammock and a chair, with a large table and chairs in the centre. Three doors on the back wall led to two closets on either side of the loo. A nice clay hearth was tucked into a little alcove between the door to the loo and to one of the closets.

"Meals we take in the centre," Marcela announced as she sat at the table, sighing as though she'd had a very long day. Draco watched with fascination as a chinchilla sprang out of a small pouch Marcela had laid to rest on the table. It curled in on itself on her lap, and her hand absently stroked it.

Draco was distracted from the adorable creature by Kress, who hopped up and down muttering gibberish. Draco looked at him in panic.

Marcela spoke back to him. When the boy finally stilled and quieted, Marcela explained, "We are having roast pig, it is his favourite, but we haven't caught pigs big enough to slaughter in two or three weeks, so he is very excited!"

Draco nodded and smiled at the boy. First thing to do would be to get his translator updated. He couldn't stand not understanding what people were saying. He sat down at the table and noticed some old *Daily Prophets* had been left out for them. There was a large messy pile that seemed to go back for months.

As he was just about to pick up the one from when Hermione had broken her wand, they all heard a cry of great pain in his father's voice. Draco was up and out of his chair in a heartbeat, but he had already forgotten what he'd just been thinking, and hit his head on the doorway, knocking himself unconscious.

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Hermione was dozing with Acara in the chair by Lucius' hammock. She had brought him here directly after branding him. Apparently, Lucius Malfoy had never used a hammock before, because it had taken him several tries and plenty of foul language to get settled. When he was reclining somewhat comfortably, Hermione gave him a salve to put on his chest that would help the brand heal faster.

After relaying the tale of how Draco knocked himself out, Marcela charged Hermione with the care of the men and made sure Kress left Draco's wand at the table. Hermione was alone until supper was ready, when Kress was allowed to bring the bowls over and eat with whomever was awake, which turned out to be just Hermione. Immediately upon arriving at the cottage, Hermione had put her necklace back on and was very glad. She had felt somewhat bereft without it.

The day had been exhausting, and Hermione wished she could just crawl into her hammock and while the day away. Instead, she'd called on Harry with her Galleon, and they'd written to each other for two hours after dinner. He'd even managed to make her laugh. It was good to talk to someone who knew all she knew about the situation. She had practically fallen asleep when Draco's voice croaked from across the room.

"What'd you do to my father?"

The question was a fierce accusation, and Hermione resented it immediately. She *had* told him not to come here, after all.

"What he asked me to do." Hermione rubbed her eyes and got up to check on Draco.

"Somehow, I doubt that." Draco tried to sit up, but Hermione pushed him down. It was the first time they'd touched in reality since Hermione had broken her wand, and there was a physical jolt in her arm that she had to actually shake off.

"I fixed his wand so he couldn't do any more harm, and then I gave him two options: keep his wand and get branded, or I incinerate his wand. He chose branding."

"Yeah, *some choice*." Draco managed to sound disgusted through his bleary state.

"More choice than I had." Blue light was shimmering from her fingertips, and she announced that he would be fine.

"Still on that, are we?" Draco reached out a hand to wrap around Hermione's waist as she stood by his hammock. Acara growled lowly the instant his hand reached the curve of her waist. They felt the jolt again, but less now, and Hermione tried to back away, but Draco's grip was firm. Draco smiled at her wearily. "Don't fight, Hermione. I know you can feel it. It's *us*."

Acara's growl grew, and she prowled over to Draco's hammock and bared her teeth.

Hermione was considering burning his hand, but was still feeling a little guilty about doing it in the dream, and so she just stood there. "It's not real, Draco. It's a lie you made up." Hermione spoke softly, not wanting to wake his father up with an argument.

"Then why don't you take a lover? I'm sure one of these short fellows would be happy to take you to their *hammock*," Draco sneered.

"You know why. Until you undo this mark, *which you won't*, you are the only sexual outlet I have." Hermione twisted a little to gesture toward the table, which had five clay pots on it. "There's food on the table if you're hungry."

Draco's belly growled now that he was aware of that option, but it was too nice holding Hermione's curve to give it up.

"Just let me kiss you once," suggested Draco smoothly as his hand moved down the curve of her hip.

"Tired of stealing kisses, then, are you?" Hermione spat as she swatted his hand away. She had no way of knowing what he'd done to her while she was at Hogwarts. Seeing him now reminded her of her ignorance for months and months. If Hermione hated one thing in herself, it was ignorance.

"I've never kissed you." Draco brought his hand up and smelled, searching for her delicate scent. "I did other things, but I've never kissed your perfect mouth."

The way he'd admitted to *other things* made Hermione cringe, but she also couldn't deny the heat in his voice when he spoke of her mouth. It made her want to vomit. She walked over and touched each of the pots, heating them up. She moved to the chair and gathered her journal and quill and then moved to the doorway.

Her voice was sad and angry when she finally looked at him again. "You are the most disgusting individual I've ever had the unfortunate curse of knowing, Draco Malfoy. Come, Acara." Hermione pushed through the curtain and walked toward the setting sun.

## Welcome to the Neighbourhood

### Chapter 8 of 25

Ariulo cleared his throat and looked at the other men sternly. "You are worse than children. Like chattering birds!"

Hermione did not walk to her cottage when she left. Instead she went to the Councillors' home and knocked on the door before kneeling at their doorstep in supplication.

Marcela answered the door. "Something is wrong?"

"They will be fine, ma'am. Is Ariulo available?" Hermione was having a hard time keeping the tears from spilling out of her eyes. Although Marcela had been her confidante, she needed someone with more fire than she had right now. She was going to burst soon, the toll of the day finally catching up to her. She felt like only Ariulo could help her through this.

"I'll get him."

The sun had just set when Ariulo opened the door with a small raccoon-like cat, who was called Dondi, on his shoulder. He touched her shoulder, and Hermione stood, head still bowed, to follow him from a pace and a half's distance. They moved into a fire pit at the centre of the main square. Once there, Hermione kneeled down at his feet, Acara and Dondi curling up together on a great cushion a few feet away. When everyone was set, Ariulo made a great burst of flame, and he and Hermione Apparated to an isolated courtyard in an ancient temple.

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When they arrived, Hermione finally felt free to weep as she had never dared since she'd come to the village. In fact, she hadn't really cried at all except out of physical exhaustion or magical frustration. She could talk objectively to Marcela or Ariulo, or distantly to Harry and Ron, and her friends at home, but she'd never let it get beyond a scientific evaluation of her situation. Now, seeing, hearing, and touching Draco Malfoy had overwhelmed her.

Ariulo let her weep. They were in an ornate pit for bonfires, which had been built over a volcanic vent thousands of years ago. When this temple was in use, Earth fire was worshiped in conjunction with the sun. He knew that whatever Hermione put into this moment of surrender, she'd get back a thousand times over in strength.

Finally, Hermione quieted, wiping her eyes and nose on the same shift she'd put on after lunch, which seemed like ages ago. She snorted at her thoughts and sent up bluebell flames from her palms as they rested on her thighs. Finally, she looked up at her mentor with complete trust for his guidance.

"Is that boy in the school yard pulling your pigtailed again, Hermione?" Ariulo asked as he pulled her up by her hands and swept her into a deep hug. Ariulo was a very handsome man, and Hermione knew that without that sodding brand they would be lovers. It was one of the things she loved about this place, the polygamy. It was still a minority practice. Most of the regular citizens were monogamous, but the mages were hard pressed to feel too possessive over individuals, especially when there was so much to learn by sharing.

Hermione looked carefully at the man holding her. He was older by about forty years, but he looked perfect, aging slowly. His body was toned from manual and magical labours, his skin a nice toasted brown. Ariulo had nice lips and a strong nose. His bone structure was strong. Best of all were his eyes. Because his element was fire, when they blazed, she could see the actual fire behind his eyes. Hermione knew that her eyes were the same way now. How badly she wanted to burn with him in bed, instead of just this sacred temple.

Ariulo pressed his hands down Hermione's sides, following the curve of hip to her thighs. Hermione arched against him, smiling. "Tell me, Hermione, what did the mean boy say?"

Hermione loved that her mentor could boil her problems down to the fine points for her, and trivialise them to make her able to surmount the insurmountable.

She pressed her hands through his thick curly hair and smiled. "He's put me in a cage. He rubs my nose in it. Then he exalts the cage. He tries to make me feel like I am nothing without him, that I am so inferior without him that there is no one who would want me, and that I should be grateful for his sociopathic behaviour."

By the end of her listing, she could tell that her fire had begun to burn within her skin again. Ariulo had begun to rub her back with firm strokes, pressing her further and further into him.

These were the ways they'd gotten around the fidelity charms of the brand. It registered only intent, never product. If he touched Hermione with the intent to soothe, there was no problem, even if it pressed her against his body and aroused him. Arousing him would arouse her, but since that wasn't the primary intent but only a by-product, the charms lay dormant. It made Ariulo very pleased that they were both practised in meditation and could thoroughly clear their minds easily.

"He said you could find no other mate?" Ariulo asked as he moved to kneel in front of Hermione, pulling her thighs against his shoulders and massaging them. He knew this would break his concentration and soon his fingers would tingle unpleasantly, but he couldn't deny it tonight. Seeing the men who had made the world dangerous for Hermione made him want to do almost anything to defeat them.

"He said, 'I'm sure one of those short fellows would take you to hishammock,'" Hermione sneered in her best imitation of Ferret Boy. She slid down Ariulo's body before his treatment could begin to sting. She'd wondered frequently this sort of thing could lead her into S&M if she let it go long enough, but tonight she just needed the good parts. She needed her mentor to cleanse her and put her back in balance.

"Indeed, *many* short fellows would." Ariulo pressed his forehead to hers, locking eyes with her. In the moonlight, being directly over a volcano, Hermione ached once again for Ariulo to kiss her and possess her mouth, but he couldn't. It was like there was a magical chastity mouth guard there, blocking them. Her body was responding, but they could never really get past second base together. "I know a mage who dreams of your breasts in his hands, suckling until you weep with joy."

Hermione shivered at the flames flickering in his eyes as he spoke of his fantasies. When they were here, they were like living matchsticks. "I hate him so much, Ariulo, so much!" Hermione said before she pressed her face into his chest, rubbing against him. Cinders began to fall from their hair.

"Should I touch it?" Ariulo asked, pulling her against his erection before he teased her neck trying to make her giggle. His fingers came closer and closer to the brand. It made her whole body shiver, and he delighted in it.

"You are too old to be so childish," Hermione chided, but she was still smiling. Part of her wanted Draco to know that she *did* have other options, that even though she had been high invisible at school, here she was wanted, even craved.

"I would kill him if it would release you, but I'm certain it wouldn't. We will have to go another way." He licked his dry lips by her ear, inadvertently flicking her ear lobe.

Hermione moaned. She wrapped her arms around Ariulo's neck and begged him to burn her. To please, *please* set her ablaze and cleanse her. And then he did, and it was just like during her spirit quest. When the fuel from the combined magic was gone, they crumpled to the ground next to each other.

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Hermione slept for several hours, and it was the best sleep she'd had in a long time. She didn't know if Draco could find her here or if he'd even tried. It didn't matter. She actually *rested* for the first time in ages. Ariulo had woken up shortly after their fire-burst and picked her up and carried her to a large, soft bed in a room that overlooked the sea. He took off her shoes before laying her to rest and climbing in himself. They had slept there together many times, Ariulo curling around her protectively. Always in the morning, she would awake renewed.

The sky was a pre-dawn grey when Ariulo felt Hermione's familiar body stretch beside him. She blearily rubbed her eyes and smiled at him as if she had not a care in the world. "Care for a game of catch before breakfast?"

"I've been wondering when you'd ask."

Ariulo tousled her hair playfully and ran into the plaza barefoot. Hermione made chase and pushed a basketball-sized wad of fire at him as he turned around. Ariulo pushed back, adding a spin to it. They lost themselves to this for a long time; it was a part of the practice they did.

After about forty-five minutes, the sun came up, and they paused to glory in it. When the last bit came over the horizon, Ariulo turned to her and said, "Make it hotter."

Hermione took a deep breath and pushed a slightly whiter ball of fire at him. "Hotter!" he goaded. The ball got tighter and whiter. "Hotter, girl!" Hermione threw her tightest ball of fire at him, experiencing a kickback from the force of expulsion. "That won't keep the Dragon in his place. Make it hot, lover."

Hermione looked at him from her place one hundred feet away. She'd forgotten about Draco while she and Ariulo played. Hermione smiled at him. Thinking of everything that Draco meant to her, she closed her eyes and forced her hands down to the size of a billiard ball and waited for things to get hot. After a moment, her hands began to glow white. When she opened her eyes to look at her partner, Hermione's irises looked like molten lava, and she sent a ball of blue fire at her mentor with such a force that he stepped back as he caught it. The look of pride in his eyes as he regained his footing set Hermione's skin on fire, and her spirit leapt. Draco Malfoy would not be her master.

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Having spent most of the afternoon and all of the night unconscious, Draco was also up slightly before the sun rose. As he lay in his hammock, he listened. No matter where he was, he liked to be up when no one else was so he could listen to the peaceful beginnings of the day. Pre-dawn was when he felt the day had the most hope, the most potential.

He would use this time to learn about the place. He crept out of his hammock, careful not to wake his father as he put his shoes on and walked out the door. First, he wanted to orient himself in relation to some landmarks he'd spotted on the way in. He'd made four trips back and forth from different locations before stopping to watch the sun rise. He tried not to consider Hermione's parting words too much. Draco knew that they were on opposite sides of things, so what he did out of love and affection she could only perceive to be malice. She would learn. His Hermione was a very clever witch that way.

Having been away from *his* world looking for *her*, he knew he'd changed. Well, maybe not changed, more like evolved. If he thought it would benefit him, he would abduct Hermione in a heartbeat; he had a Portkey back to the Manor, and from there they could go to any of the other properties, and he could keep her to himself. However, Draco knew that her elemental and wandless magic could destroy him. She could probably turn his wand to ash without touching it. Then where would he be?

After the sunrise finished, Draco went to the centre of town. He came to where Acara and Dondi were sleeping by the temple portals, and he was confused that Acara was there and not with Hermione. Where could she be? Come to think of it, he'd tried a couple times to dream of her, and nothing had happened except that he fell even deeper asleep.

Draco sat down on a bench a little away from the sleeping cats. He couldn't be sure that Acara was the same here as she was in dreamland, but that wasn't a risk he wanted to take. Looking around, Draco had to admit that this was a fully functional city, larger than Diagon Alley, but still it somehow felt wild. As he leaned back to listen to the morning calls of the birds, he couldn't help but doze off, feeling more at peace than he probably had at any other point in his life.

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Draco woke up under the weight of a small child. Kress had seen him on the way to breakfast. He bolted to where Draco was sitting and launched himself on his lap. A pretty, slender, yet very pregnant woman smiled at the two and slowly came to sit with them on the bench. Behind her, a creature that looked like a large white anteater strolled lazily, climbing up on the bench beside her and curling against her side.

Once she was settled, the woman reached over to the amulet around Draco's neck and uttered the translation spell so that Draco could talk freely among the people.

"Good morning, Dragon," the woman said, and Kress began talking to him a mile a minute. Now Draco could understand him, as much as one could understand an overly energised seven-year-old.

"Good morning to you, madam, and thank you. I have been going out of my mind hearing and not understanding. Especially with this one." Draco smiled down at Kress and picked him up, sitting him across his lap so could also face the woman and talk.

"Oh, yes, Kress was the first up this morning, *very early*, and couldn't wait to get to breakfast. I can't imagine why." The woman gave Kress a knowing look and smiled at the boy. She was clearly delighted in the boy's excitement.

"I also can't wait for breakfast," Draco said, turning to Kress. He was about to continue when the portal from the temple burst into flames, resulting in the arrival of Hermione and Ariulo. Watching the two mages come out of the flames was a resplendent sight, except that Draco didn't really care to see his witch kneeling in front of another man. She was certainly beautiful. The man moved off the platform first, and Hermione rose, following him with her head down in supplication. Now, *that* was something new.

Before Draco knew what was happening, Kress and both the cats were bounding for the pair, the smaller cat jumping on Hermione's shoulders and Acara rubbing against her legs. Kress had latched on to her middle, but then suddenly grabbed her arm and began leading her toward the bench where Draco and his mother were sitting. The man turned to look at the disruption, and Hermione looked up apologetically. She'd inadvertently broken ritual, but the man just burst out laughing as she was clearly harassed by the whole prospect. Ariulo picked Acara up and put her over his shoulders, which seemed fine by Acara. She dropped her head down onto his shoulder.

Draco thought Hermione looked beautiful. Perfect. The way he'd imagine she'd look after he'd given her a thorough shagging. This thought made him clench his teeth. The man was looking pretty pleased himself. The logical part of Draco kept saying that no shagging was possible. Shagging was impossible. Hermione can't touch another man out of lust. She can only come to Draco to meet her need. He is the only man who can have her. Still, there was a tiny voice inside his head that whispered, *Hermione makes the impossible possible*. And with this in mind, Draco set himself the task of finding out just what was going on here.

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When Ariulo, Kress, and Hermione had arrived at the bench, Ariulo moved toward Kress' mother and caressed her forehead, smoothing her hair back. It was clearly very affectionate, and Draco thought he should feel uncomfortable, but he didn't.

"So you've met Paruin?" Hermione turned to Draco and asked evenly. She reached up to grab Dondi's tail and stroke it, scratching it every now and again. Dondi purred loudly.

Draco couldn't believe she was being so... not unfriendly. He immediately became even more suspicious, but kept his voice neutral. "Not officially, but Kress dragged her out of bed to catch an early breakfast." Draco smiled as Kress dropped Hermione's hand and crawled into his lap.

Hermione laughed. Kress loved strangers. Draco may think that he'd charmed the boy, but if he could stand Kress' attentions for more than a couple hours, she'd be a Blast-Ended Skrewt. Not that that would stop Kress. No! Draco had dug his own grave on this one.

"Well, then let me introduce you officially. This wonderful woman is Paruin. She is the head of engineering and public works. And..."

"And my mother," Kress interjected. Everyone smiled.

"And Kress' mum." Hermione tousled his hair and accidentally brushed Draco's shoulder. Draco took a deep breath through his nose and licked his lips, looking at Hermione intensely.

"And this is Ariulo. He's the council's Fire Mage, and the highest ranking Fire Mage in the community right now." Hermione looked at the man with literal fire in her eyes. Draco could see glowing embers behind Ariulo's when he looked at Hermione. Draco was overwhelmed by the things he was inferring now.

"And your father, right?" Draco tore his eyes away from Hermione to look at Kress.

"No. My father is Kapli. He works in the treasury. He is water. Mother is earth. I can't wait to find out what I will be."

"Soon, Kress. Three moons and you are eight years old. Then you can be an initiate," Hermione said automatically.

Kress sunk onto Draco's chest looking a little glum. "I know." Without thought, Draco put his arm around Kress, pulling him closer.

"You get to train at eight? I had to wait until I was eleven!" Draco said to the boy, suddenly jealous that he had had to wait to go to Hogwarts. Not that Draco hadn't had tutors. And his own wand. And broomstick. And whatever he wanted. But Draco secretly loved Hogwarts and would have loved to go to school much sooner than he had.

"Kress knows. He knows a lot about Hogwarts, right, Kress?"

"Yes. You have to be eleven years old. And you can bring a familiar, which is like a spirit beast, but not quite. And you meet lots of kids on a big caravan called a train. There are people there to teach different ways to use a wand. I'd really like to see Hogwarts one day." Kress was nodding at Draco, his troubles forgotten at the prospect of seeing the great castle from Hermione's books.

"I think it's time to eat, Kress, what about you?" Hermione held out her hand, and Kress pushed away from Draco. Acara lifted her head and swept her tail in a big circle before Ariulo bent to let her down.

"Dondi, come," Ariulo said after he stood. The cat on Hermione's shoulders opened one eye and began purring louder. Ariulo was not impressed. Usually Dondi would wait for Ariulo to come and pick him up, stealing a caress off Hermione's shoulders. Neither man nor beast wanted to alter the routine, but Ariulo knew Draco would not be pleased and wanted to be diplomatic at this point. The beast didn't give a whit.

Hermione looked at Ariulo and bowed her head. "My apologies, sir. Dondi, go." Hermione moved to stand about a foot away so the cat could jump to his master. Dondi took his time getting up, and as he moved to leap from Hermione to Ariulo, he let his long fluffy tail stroke along the back of Hermione's neck. She shivered, but kept her head lowered.

Draco felt the fur tickle his chest as well and rubbed it gently to mute the sensation.

Ariulo turned to him once Dondi was settled and said, "Come, Dragon. The men take breakfast without the women and children. I will answer your questions. I am sure you have many."

"Yes, thank you." Draco stood and adjusted his tunic, bidding farewell to the others as he followed the Mage and his cat toward breakfast.

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"Dondi is a troublemaker," Hermione said as she and Paruin watched Kress race ahead to breakfast, joining in with some other children on the way. The beasts travelled behind them a few feet, and it was easy to imagine them in some variety of discussion as well.

"Just like Ariulo. You can't tell me that you were at the temple just to *meditate*?"

"You know he is the only one who can contain me when I am out of sorts." Hermione's reply pled innocence, but Paruin knew better.

"You cannot fool a woman with seven children, who is again ripe with child. Especially Ariulo's child. I see the looks."

"I can't even kiss him, Paruin." Hermione grabbed the other woman's hand and squeezed it, looking at her sadly.

"But you can kiss the Dragon." Paruin wagged her eyebrows at her. "Have you kissed the Dragon?"

Hermione rolled her eyes at the other woman who giggled like a little girl and turned Hermione to look at her.

"He is so handsome, Hermione, and I can feel the power on him. And his father. Delicious." The older woman stopped short of licking her lips, but only barely.

Hermione looked at her friend and couldn't help but be reminded of the giggling nannies at school. Oh, yes, Draco Malfoy was the dashing bad boy, and every girl in every House would titter as he walked by, preening for them and showing off. "They are bad men."

"If you keep them here, we can show them the way. We need the new blood."

"Lucius can't be a mage, Paruin, he has *murdered*." Hermione was exasperated. What was it about that man that made people just put him in power? He must have found the devil and made a deal with him. Or, maybe, he was the devil himself.

"Yes, yes... but look at what he'll do for those he loves. He has done everything in his power to get the perfect bride for his son."

"His son, who has made a point of making all my magical years as miserable as possible, Paruin."

"But imagine if they used their powers for good instead of evil," Paruin said knowingly.

Hermione held her tongue. There was something about this place that brought out the best in people. Or at least soothed the worst. Which was not to say that there weren't disputes and disagreements. They were all just people, after all. However, the community was such that they could always be counted on to move through or past things. Part of it was that they were fairly isolated and resistant to the destructive trends. Only those with magic could find this place. It was a South American Avalon.

Like the faeries had cut away from the wizards, and the wizarding priestesses and druids had cut away from the isles, so had this little pocket tribe of modern Incans. The other part of it, Hermione knew because she could feel it, was that the power of this place was *love*. They loved the magic, the land, and each other.

Hermione sighed and sat down at a table. She was ravenous; she always was after she came back from the temple. Kress brought his plate over from another table and sat close to her. Hermione was looking forward to losing herself to the village chatter and relaxing into the routine when the inevitable happened: Draco and Lucius were mentioned.

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"So, Paruin is your wife?" Draco asked as he walked beside Ariulo. It was clear that he was one of the leaders here, as many people came to clap his shoulder as they passed or moved to get out of his way.

"No, she is Kapli's wife. She *is* carrying my child," Ariulo explained as if it were as simple as the sky being blue or fire being hot. He also seemed rather proud of himself, which he was.

"And Kapli allows this?" Draco asked incredulously.

"It is not for Kapli to decide. Paruin is New Blood. We encourage her to breed as she pleases. It is the same for all the women, but New Blood especially."

"But then Kapli is responsible for your bastard."

Here, Ariulo chuckled. "There are no bastards among the mages. It is a fact we hide from outsiders because it is so contrary to how most of the world works, but for us it is an extension of our magic and ourselves. Kapli's children are my children, and mine are his, and we love them all. With that love, they grow to harness the powers of the elements."

"So only children of mages can become mages?"

"No. Anyone can study to be a mage. We begin general magical control when a child turns eight. Once they go through puberty, they can begin to train as a mage if they decide to. Few do since it requires higher than average intelligence, power, and focus."

"Which is why you always accept New Blood." Draco nodded. The two men sat at a centre table. Another man came over to Ariulo, and he introduced him as Kapli.

Ariulo turned to Kapli and said, "Kress has found his latest victim." Kapli moved to sit next to Draco.

"So you are the infamous Dragon. I have to say that Kress could not stop telling me about you last night. I was away hunting when you arrived; I'm sorry to hear I missed it." Kapli pulled a big piece of warm flat bread onto his plate from a centre dish and piled fruit onto it.

Draco noticed that he was the only man at the table without a beast, large or small, in tow. When he asked, Kapli replied, "I do have a beast, but not one I can bring to breakfast. There is a sanctuary for beasts like mine."

"I was just explaining to Draco about our children here," Ariulo interrupted. He had much to discuss with Draco, and he wanted it to go a specific way.

"Ah!" Kapli said, nodding. "That can be a challenge, indeed. It took a lot of discussion for Paruin to understand it. She is also European, but she came here at only fourteen, so many of us forget now."

"So there are many Europeans here?" Draco followed the example of his host and dug into flat breads and fruit, with a little pork from the night before. It was a delightful blend of spicy meat and sweet fruit.

A man who had been sitting at the table when they sat down spoke up. "Some. You can tell by the nose."

"Too right, Maank," Kapli said, pointing his fork at him and nodding. "You Europeans have these pointy noses. There was one here many years ago. He was very pale with dark hair, and he had a great hook for a nose. It stuck right out of his face like an eagle's beak."

Draco couldn't help but laugh at Kapli's description of a classic Roman nose. It was easy to see where Kress got his exuberant personality.

"Old Blood gives flat noses." He gestured between himself and Maank, who were both darker than Ariulo and had flat noses and squarish faces. "Ariulo here has one European on his mother's side and one on his father's side. That's why he's so damned handsome."

Ariulo chuckled and nodded. He had grown up in the village, but he was always set apart by his strong cheekbones. When he first started courting, these kinds of compliments would embarrass him terribly. "Don't let these two goats fool you. They have many whelps of their own, more than I have, in fact."

Draco watched the other men fill their chests with pride. They went about their breakfasts for a few minutes. Maank and Kapli were watching Draco covertly, but soon Draco was starting to feel a little bit on display.

Ariulo cleared his throat and looked at the other men sternly. "You are worse than children. Like chattering birds! I haven't even mentioned it yet."

Neither man looked too ashamed, though.

Finally, Ariulo turned to Draco and said, "Come, let us walk, for there is much to discuss. Maank, let Marcela and Isova know that I will be back with him after lunch."

"After lunch? But... my father, Hermione..."

"Hermione has already taken him breakfast and checked on him. He will rest another day or two. She has gone to the fields to gather supplies for the library. You will see her again at dinner. Come. Dondi, come."

Draco turned to see the cat hop off the bench to follow beside the two men as they walked out of the village.

## The Council's Plan

### Chapter 9 of 25

You cannot own Hermione. You can only worship her, and pray that she will lend you her power.

Draco was sitting on a flat rock, looking at a huge waterfall from across a lake. He'd never seen anything like this before, and the constant thunder of falling water seemed to put him at ease. Ariulo smirked at him; if he'd been a betting man, Ariulo would have pegged Draco as water, which is why they'd come here.

"You've put us in quite a conundrum, Draco." Ariulo looked at him with quiet authority.

"How so?"

"Hermione," Ariulo said knowingly.

"She's mine." Draco turned and spoke in a tone that brooked no argument. It didn't matter that Ariulo had more power than Draco here: Hermione was his, had always been his, would always be his.

Ariulo chuckled. "You Europeans are all the same. You think you can *own* everything. You know nothing. You cannot own the waterfall. You cannot own a volcano. You cannot own *Hermione*." Ariulo looked up as Dondi scampered about in the branches up above. "You can only worship her, and pray that she will lend you her power."

Draco did not respond. Instead, he looked at the water and sighed. He knew differently. If he could just convince her to let him have her, she would be his, and they'd be happy, and she'd love him. She'd love him more than Potter or Weasley or anyone else. He'd gotten deep into his thoughts so he was surprised to hear Ariulo speak again.

"However, you *have* marked her so no one can touch her. She says she doesn't mind, but I see her with the children, and I can tell she wants one. Or several. You see her with Kress. I could tell by the way you looked at her yesterday as she held him that you would like to see her fat with your child. I know I would."

"Keep your hands off of her." Draco scowled at the man as he watched his beast in the tree.

"I can't even kiss her, as you well know. None of us can. Hermione is strong and would simply go without. She could live here and work and live for all her days, reveling in the children from other women's wombs. I don't think she'd be completely happy, though.

"Her being here with your mark disrupts the balance of our place. It is still fresh here, and novel, so people are tolerant. However, in time, I am certain that it will cause discord; her unhappiness will be our unhappiness.

"Fortunately, the best course of action for us may also be the best course of action for you. We can work together to keep Hermione happy and to bring her into your bed."

Here Draco's head shot up. He had expected these people to damn him and curse him, and cast him off, and here Ariulo was offering him exactly what he wanted. Instantly, he put his guard up. Things that sounded too good to be true usually were. "Somehow, I don't think it will be that simple."

"Simple? Yes. Easy? No. A mage can only be married to another mage. You would have to undergo mage training, go on a spirit quest, and *if* you are successful, I believe Hermione would be more interested in what you have to offer."

"What's in it for you?"

"Hermione's happiness. More new blood. You." Here, Ariulo moved to sit beside Draco, facing the opposite way so that their torsos were aligned and they could look at each other up close. "You, Draco, are a very powerful wizard; I can feel it radiate from you. It is a gift that helps me with my duties on the Council. We want you. You want Hermione. We have Hermione. I'm sure an agreement could be arranged." Ariulo pressed his hand into the stone and warmed it so it was soothing beneath them.

Draco looked at the other man. He had felt the stone heat beneath his legs, and looking at Ariulo, he could see dark embers in his eyes. It was seductive, but Draco had seen his father get seduced by the Dark Lord, and Draco had promised himself that he wouldn't do the same. He would find another way. "I kneel to no man." He looked away.

"If I am correct, you would be kneeling to Isova, who is a very lovely woman," Ariulo joked. "Here, we are non-secular. Everyone yields to the magic of the elements; all kneel so that when we stand we have powers that I can't even begin to describe."

Draco rolled his eyes.

Ariulo was not convinced of Draco's lack of interest. "Look at the falls, Draco. Good, now... I have seen Isova come to these falls and summon the water around her, shoot it up into the sky, so high you could not see the sky and laugh as it rained back down upon us at her command. That power could be yours," Ariulo finished with a gentle smile and an encouraging nod.

Draco swallowed loudly. "I must discuss this with my father."

"A wise move.... Come, it's time for lunch."

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Hermione was more than relieved to get away from breakfast. Since every woman at breakfast had seen Draco in all his *splendour*, it was all they could talk about. These women spent way too much time thinking about sex. All through her meal Hermione had dodged questions about herself and Draco. Somehow, he was coming off as a misunderstood anti-hero, and she couldn't take it. Factor in his stature and physical make-up, and theories were born of how thoroughly he could shag a woman. Or two.

Hermione shook her head. It had essentially been forgotten that she had arrived here completely broken and seeking asylum from Ferret Boy. It was actually in this very field that she had collapsed, Kress having heard her utter the one word before she lost consciousness. Now she was swinging a great scythe, cutting down great fronds of stringy grass to make into books. Sometimes she used magic, but she liked the way the scythe felt in her hands, and Circe knew she had to burn off some of her anger from breakfast; she might as well get a workout. Hermione loved the way her arms and shoulders looked now that she could swing this great scythe like it was nothing.

She was so busy hacking down the field that she didn't hear Marcela walk up behind her. The older woman watched Hermione as she wore herself out. She knew the fiery witch would not appreciate the news Marcela was bringing, and it would be good strategy to catch her while she was tired. Finally, after Hermione had stacked and bound all the fronds to be processed, she turned around, nearly jumping out of her skin at the sight of Marcela.

"Jesus, Marcela, you scared the life out of me." Hermione clutched her chest and caught her breath.

Marcela chuckled. "Why is it that you only invoke this Jesus for small surprises?"

Hermione smiled. Because her mum had. The first owl at the window? Jesus! The first time Hermione came unannounced through the fireplace? Jesus! The first time Hermione Apparated into the backyard as her mum was hanging laundry? Jesus Christ, Hermione Jean Granger, you're going to give me a heart attack! Hermione blinked tears back from her eyes. "Old habit, Marcela. What are you doing down here, anyway?" Hermione moved to pet the little ball of fur whose head was poking out of Marcela's satchel.

"I have to tell you something important." From the look on her face, Hermione knew that important meant unpleasant, as well as official, Council business.

"Yes, ma'am," Hermione said, dropping the scythe and standing evenly on her feet with her head bowed.

Marcela liked that Hermione never put off hardships. She always came against trouble with her shoulders strong and ready for action. "Ariulo is offering Draco the chance to train as a mage."

Hermione felt like she'd been punched in the gut. No. No-no-no-no-NO! This was supposed to be her asylum, her refuge, her place away from him. And *Ariulo*? Hadn't she just spent the night with him, preparing to fight Draco? She felt so betrayed. Everyone was just letting Draco do what he wanted; Draco Fucking Malfoy always did just what he wanted. She felt the tears slide down her face and then heard them drop to the ground. She'd never escape him. Never. She'd broken her wand for nothing. It all came to *nothing*.

Marcela was shocked at Hermione's response. She had never expected this from the young woman. She had been prepared with the Council's reasons for their decisions and had even put together a plan for an aggressive rebuttal. Marcela had never seen Hermione like this, and she had no idea what to do. "Do you have questions?"

Hermione just shook her head pitifully. Marcela bowed, then reached her arm out to squeeze Hermione gently on the shoulder before walking away. Once Marcela's back was turned, Hermione crumpled in the now short grass, curling up with Acara and crying until she was empty, falling asleep under the sun, her head pillowed on her cat.

## An Equal and Opposite Reaction

Chapter 10 of 25

"Why ask? We both know you will do as you please regardless of what is permitted."

Hermione had slept through lunch, which was fine by her, since she didn't want to look at any of those people anyway, let alone eat with them. Instead, she went straight from the field to the library workshop, where she began processing the fronds to be made into paper. It required some spell craft at each phase, but Hermione could do it all mindlessly by now.

Hermione had worked for nearly two hours when Acara let out a loud growl and prowled along the door.

"You are not happy, then?" Ariulo asked from outside the doorway. Acara was baring her teeth, and Ariulo wasn't interested in being made into a late lunch.

"Come, Acara," Hermione croaked. Her voice was tight and ragged from crying earlier, but she wouldn't hide it from Ariulo. The cat obeyed, retreating to sit beside Hermione's stool, backing up all the way. Her teeth were still bared, but the growl was more of a quiet hiss.

"When you were not at lunch, Marcela told me what happened. I came here after taking him to his father, but you must have still been in the field," Ariulo said as he entered the room. He walked around by the wall until he could see Hermione's face. Her eyes were red and swollen and her face was splotchy. Ariulo felt his heart clench.

"Your *concern* for me is appreciated," Hermione said as she ripped through another frond, never looking at him. Usually they spoke in light banter and *entendre*, so her use of the formal language and inflection was an affront in and of itself.

"Hermione..." Ariulo tried to step forward, but Acara moved between them, eyeing the man menacingly.

"I have work, Ariulo," she said, finally looking up at Ariulo, letting him see just how miserable she was. Hermione picked up a tub full of soaking fronds that were ready to be made into paper and walked away from him.

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Hermione had a very productive day. Usually she made four books a day, but today she made nine. That was one perk of working through dinner. When Hermione and Acara left the workroom, they went straight to her cottage, where dinner was waiting for her on the table. It sat there untouched as she wrote letters into her journals, letting everyone know what had happened and that she wouldn't be available as much since she would have to take care of this. She never touched her supper, unwilling to take any gifts or peace offerings.

Hermione was sitting in her chair with Acara across her lap, staring at the coals in her hearth, when Malfoy senior rapped on her door frame. "May I come in?"

"Why ask? We both know you will do as you please regardless of what is permitted."

"Manners, of course. I hate to interrupt your sulking, but..." He started to push her curtain aside and was ducking under the door frame when Hermione responded.

"*Sulking?* You horrible piece of shite, get away from me," Hermione said as she Conjured a ball of fire the size of his head with one hand.

Lucius, being a sensible chap, stopped his progress. "I see. Well, in that case, may I draw an analogy before we part ways?"

Hermione turned away from him and let the ball of fire dissolve as she looked back into the embers in her hearth. Who cared what he did?

Lucius cleared his throat and said, "I'm sure you would not have elected to have the riotous curls you have atop your head, and I remember your hair was quite unpleasant in years past, but you have learned how to manage them exquisitely. Why can't the same be said for Draco?" As he finished, he stood as though he was actually expecting a response, but she never acknowledged him, so he eventually turned away, feeling very maudlin. He'd never felt badly for anyone before, so he was sure that it was some by-product of the bloody mark on his chest now.

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Lucius walked back to where Draco and the Council were sitting. When Draco had told him about the offer to train as a mage, Lucius had felt invigorated. Always quick to recuperate, Lucius was ready to join the rest of the people for dinner, enjoying sitting with the Council, despite Hermione's marked absence. As he approached, Lucius could hear Isova chatting with Draco about training while the others awaited Lucius' return.

"Well?"

"She Conjured a fireball as big as my head, instantaneously. It was extremely impressive," Lucius said, moving to sit between Marcela and Maank. "Besides that, she is sulking."

"What did you say to her?" Ariulo said as he pet a morose-looking Dondi in his lap.

Lucius couldn't ignore all of the animals at the table. Maank had a breed of falcon waiting for him in a tree nearby, which would sometimes flap down to nuzzle him with his beak. Marcela had a chinchilla that would hop in and out of her lap erratically. Once, it had jumped into Lucius' lap, and he couldn't help but let out a slightly undignified, "Gah!" before the thing settled for thirty seconds and then leapt away. Cissy had chinchilla coats, so he'd known it'd be soft, but it was something entirely different to have one flitting about in one's lap.

"I asked if I could interrupt her sulking..." Isova turned and looked at him, gasping loudly. "...And then I asked why she couldn't just accept Draco and get on with her life, through analogy."

Isova, a very short, very brown woman with an amazingly long black braid, looked at Lucius like he was a complete idiot. Then she said, "For such an intelligent man, you are such a stupid ass!" Maank and Ariulo tucked their chins and laughed, and Marcela let her broad smile stretch across her face. "That is it, the blond men are forbidden from talking to her! And that one is married! He should know better."

"Mother has a lot of jewellery," Draco added helpfully, enjoying the rare opportunity to rib his father affectionately.

"Draco..." Lucius scowled but saw the impish delight in his boy's eyes and let him get away with it as always.

Ariulo stood and cradled the listless Dondi in his arms after giving Lucius a hearty clap on the back. "We'll give her time; she's a clever girl." Then he walked to his cottage and went to sleep.

Draco, though, did not want to give her time. He was young and driven and stupid, and he wanted to go snog the girl into realising this was the best thing that could happen for them. He had just talked himself into it when Isova pinched him meanly.

"If you are to do this, you will submit to our will, and when I say you won't talk to her, you won't talk to her." Isova was nearly two feet shorter than Draco, but still he feared her already.

"Yes, ma'am," Draco said and settled back in his seat.

Maank took pity on the men and tried to change the subject. "Now, tell me about this Mudblood situation, I don't quite think I grasp it."

Draco froze as soon as he heard the word tumble from Maank's lips. Fortunately, his father took pity on him and sent him off to the cottage. Then Lucius, Maank, Marcela, and Isova got down to the dirty work of trying to unravel years of psychological trauma that had been inflicted upon Hermione.

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Lucius showed Draco where Hermione's cottage was, and the next morning they watched her depart for breakfast. If they had known what was different, they would have been more worried than they were.

First, Acara had exited the cottage ahead of Hermione, which was rare. Hermione usually had to drag her lazy beast to breakfast. When Acara had come out, she sniffed the air and found the two wizards immediately. Still, her tail thumped on the curtain, and Hermione came out. She had slept, but restlessly, always on her guard that Draco would come to her. Fearing Isova's wrath, he'd stayed away, because while technically it wasn't talking to Hermione, Draco didn't think that Isova would buy it.

Hermione's casual pace was slower than usual, her anxiety about seeing everyone stringing her out a little bit. Her plan was to give special attention to the children, since they were innocent in this, and she still had to take them out to the lake that day, as was the typical morning for them when she wasn't in the field. As she walked with Acara, the cat did not play, but looked for any possible interceptors, her muscles flexing and rolling as she walked. It made her look rather dangerous.

Lucius and Draco followed them until they converged with the women and children going to breakfast. At least she was coming to eat instead of spending the day in her cottage. It was something.

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Hermione ate her breakfast with Kress, who was quickly filling her in about all she'd missed yesterday. He was better than a newspaper; he always said just what he knew and implied nothing else. The women who greeted Hermione asked neutral questions, and the whole affair went off more like it had before Draco came. It was a blessing for Hermione.

There was one thing, though, that set Hermione off a little. When Dondi came to sit with Acara as they always did, he was looking rather pathetic. Acara had licked his face and groomed him, but still Dondi just lay there. She'd promised herself she wouldn't look around for the man who'd put her back into this position, and she kept that promise. She wasn't sure of whether or not she should be proud of that, but that's what Hermione did.

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One of the children let out a tiny screech when they jumped into the chilly lake. "Battat! You silly thing. Let me warm it first." Hermione smiled and dove under the water, doing a couple somersaults before coming up for air in the middle of the lake. She summoned the fire, and soon the water was perfectly comfortable. "Now you whelps can swim! Come! Play!" Hermione said as she backstroked to the other end of the lake where there was a nice rock she could lie on while she watched the kids. Acara was already there curled up with Dondi, and Hermione looked around for Ariulo.

"You might as well come out," Hermione called, unwilling to leave the kids swimming to find Ariulo.

"I was trying to give you time, but Marcela says I'm moping."



Hermione turned to see Ariulo coming up from under the rock. He'd been sitting in the shadows watching her.

"What would you have to mope about?" Hermione said, wrapping a light blanket around herself, wishing it would actually protect her from the world. She looked at him for a response, but he was just looking at her with a face full of regret. "That's what I thought." She called for Acara, and then Disapparated to her cottage. Let Ariulo watch the children today, for all she cared. When Hermione and Acara arrived, they climbed into her hammock, where Hermione cried herself to sleep again. She woke up late in the afternoon and went straight to the library for the rest of the day and into the night.

## Common Ground

Chapter 11 of 25

That night when Hermione slept, she dreamed of Hogwarts.

That night when Hermione slept, she dreamed of Hogwarts. She and Acara were in Snape's office, and Draco and Snape were having tea. Hermione was looking around, and as she craned her neck, she felt a tie. She looked down and saw she was in her Head Girl's uniform.

"Miss Granger, please have a seat." Hermione was startled out of her reverie by the dulcet tones of the Potions master. It had been such a long time since she'd heard him that the sounds were like music to her ears.

"Yeah, Granger, come sit." Draco made room on the couch between him and Snape.

"This isn't real." Hermione stood her ground. She wanted to stare at Snape, but locked her eyes on Draco's.

Snape walked to her and took her hand, leading her over to the couch, but still, she didn't sit. "I assure you, Miss Granger, that it is very real. At least, as real as a dream can be."

"Is that so? How?" Hermione locked eyes with Snape in a silent dare. He smirked.

"I left Draco a piece of me. Not a Horcrux, but not unlike a Horcrux. More sentient than a painting, but sadly, I'm still very much deceased."

"And this non-Horcrux is...?"

"In my ring." Draco waggled his fingers at her. "Uncle Severus is my ephemeral companion and confidant."

"I don't believe you." Hermione rolled her eyes.

"What would it take to convince you?" Draco asked, desperate for her to believe him. As much as the village was ready to wait for Hermione to come around, he knew it wouldn't work. He had loved when she would fight with Potty and Weasel and loved how stubborn she could be. No, his Hermione needed a much shorter leash than these people were giving her.

"Tell him the secret." Hermione crossed her arms and leaned on one leg, pushing her chin out in a perfectly know-it-all kind of a way. She would have looked down her nose, except that she was the shortest of everyone in the room. She may have been standing, but she could never be more arrogant than either of the other people in the room.

"A secret?" Draco looked between Snape and Hermione, very interested in Hermione's secrets, or even Snape's, if that's all he could get.

"Not a secret, Ferret, *the* secret." Hermione whipped her head around to Snape, who had turned slightly toward her, draping his arm across the back of the couch.

Severus looked at her and smiled. He was not an attractive man, and his smile was crooked, but Hermione revelled in it. "Only if he promises not to destroy the ring."

"Why would I destroy your ring, Uncle?" Draco turned to face the other man on the couch, leaning against the armrest.

"You won't like what you hear, Draco. You really won't like it."

"Fine. I swear," Draco said impatiently.

"Eh, eh...wand oath." Snape said as he pulled his wand from his robes. "If you do this, the ring will be indestructible." Draco pulled out his wand and he and Snape made the oath. Hermione couldn't believe her eyes.

"Okay, what's *the* secret?" Draco was alight with anticipation.

"For most of your sixth year, I was shagging Hermione." Severus couldn't help but smile into his cup of tea, his eyes drifting from Draco to Hermione, and once upon Hermione, they traced down her body and up again.

Draco froze. He could not believe what he had just heard. "What?"

"I shagged Snape, over and over again. It. Was. Amazing." Hermione couldn't help but twist the knife, enjoying when Draco flinched.

"But he's so... Snape." Draco was fighting a variety of reality implosions. First, Snape was like his father, and while his father was a virile man, he did not shag. Therefore, Snape also did not shag. Also, Snape was ugly and greasy and old. Gross. Also, Hermione would not have been of age, and there was that whole, student-professor thing. Also, Snape knew Draco had been obsessed with Hermione, though at that time, he was still playing it off as hate and disgust.

"No." Draco stood up. "No. No. No!"

"Yes, Draco. I shagged Snape for months. It started with botched Amortentia potion we were adjusting for the Order's purposes, and we found that even after it had worn off, we couldn't keep apart." Hermione leaned towards Snape, looking at him for the first time now that she believed he was real. "I went to Peru, like you suggested."

"I know, Draco has been talking about it *for days*. Your hair is rather fetching like this, by the way. I like it. Though, it does make it harder to pull." Snape was about to push his fingers through Hermione's hair when Draco cried out in torment. Snape whipped out his wand and froze Draco.

"I lost all my hair and nails when I broke my wand. It's darker now, too," Hermione said as she crawled into Snape's lap and curled into his body. Her arms automatically went around his neck as they quickly fell into a position they had spent many post-coital hours in.

"And you are earth or fire?" Snape said, untucking her shirt to slide his hand underneath. It was less a gesture of sex than it was of intimacy, but Hermione was still shocked to feel his long fingers on her flesh.

"You can touch me?" Hermione squeaked in delight, relishing the way his long, thin fingers wrapped around her ribs once again.

"Of course, why wouldn't I be able to?" Snape said as his hands reached up and cupped her breasts. Hermione arched back, her head dropping back as Snape began to play with her.

"The damned dragon on my neck." Hermione turned to show him. "It's some pre-marriage fidelity thing." Hermione usually resisted when Snape touched her because she lost her ability to focus, but this time she was happy, thrilled even, for the capacity to be incapacitated.

"That little prick." Snape growled and sank his teeth into her neck, sucking softly. "Maybe it's because I'm dead." Snape whispered something, and her shirt unbuttoned. Nuzzling her breasts, he turned and met Draco's eyes. Snape pulled back when he saw how covetous and vulnerable Draco was. Damn, he had a soft spot for the boy. Hence this whole, post-death presence business.

Hermione whined when Severus pulled away and buttoned up her shirt. Not that she wanted to have Draco watch them, but it had been over a year since she and Severus had last touched, and Merlin, how she missed Severus Snape!

"Now, now, as much as I'd love to give a lesson, I'm not here to show Draco how to make you scream. I'm here to chat him up to you," Snape said, turning her in his lap and cradling her there. "Draco, I'm going to unfreeze you, but only if you can contain your temper," Snape warned and then flicked his wand, unleashing the dragon.

"You whore," Draco gritted through his teeth. He would have advanced on the couple on the couch, but Acara began to growl at him. She had curled up next to Snape's feet and now had her ears tucked and her teeth bared.

Snape simply rolled his eyes and gently pulled his fingers through Hermione's hair soothingly. "That is no way to speak to one's affianced, Mr. Malfoy."

"Don't you speak to me, Uncle. You knew! You. Knew. And you knew about this... place, too! We spent weeks searching!" Draco seethed, and even in her dream, his wand was shooting off angry red and black sparks. Acara didn't seem bothered by the sparks at all...she began to crouch in front of the couch, ready to defend at the drop of a hat.

"Didn't I say to you, Draco, that one day you'd reap all you'd sown?" Snape looked down at Hermione thoughtfully. "And here we are, you having chased the poor girl halfway 'round the world because you can never ask nicely for the things you want." He smoothed the hair off Hermione's forehead and looked down at her. "You should probably consider yourself lucky that she thinks of me as an ally, or you would have no one in your corner with her."

"She is still in the room, if you don't mind." Hermione moved to sit up, but Snape had a hold of the collar of her uniform oxford shirt and gave her a hard pinch inside her thigh.

"She needs to remember her manners, I think." Snape looked down at her meaningfully, and he felt a shiver go down her spine.

Hermione loved when Snape dominated her. He'd never hit her, although they did play a little on the rough side.

Snape had dished out too much pain in his days to do anything to her, but they'd often role play, and it was as excellent a stress relief as the sex itself.

"They are letting him train for a mage-ship...They are just going to let him have me. It's like I never left Britain." Hermione drew herself up and curled into Snape's arm. "I broke my wand." Hermione paused to mime the act. "*Broke my wand*, Severus. It nearly killed me, and Malfoy still wins."

"Who decided this?" Snape said, continuing to pet her soothingly.

"The council. *Ariulo*." Hermione sneered. *Betrayed*. She had never been so betrayed.

"Ah, Ariulo. I met him. You are his... aide?" Snape looked at Hermione meaningfully, and she blushed.

"Yes, he is the highest ranking fire." Snape smirked, knowing full well that Hermione was dying to live as the other mages and to be included in the things that Draco would hardly approve of.

"I see. Draco, stop shooting sparks like a first year and sit on the bloody couch already." Snape flourished his hand over the other seat, and Draco sat down, glaring into space and rolling his wand between his fingers and thumb. "Well, Miss Granger," Snape purred at Hermione, "as I see it, that would be the lesser of two evils. Would you have rather they just let Draco take you away? Back to Britain?"

"I would rather they cast him out! I do not want him. He has made every moment of my life since I got to Hogwarts horrible!" Hermione exclaimed quietly, having been completely lulled by the rhythms of Snape's fingers.

"But he is yours. You will make darling babies, I am sure." Snape chuckled as Hermione opened one eye to glare at him. "Draco told me he has sent you dreams. I know, Hermione, that your body has needs. You can't tell me that Draco would be unable to take care of you adequately."

"Not the point." Hermione sighed. She couldn't argue with Snape, but she did not want to admit defeat.

"I know, but there is no use in swimming up river on this Hermione. Take Draco. The council can teach him; Ariulo can teach him. *You* can teach him. He'd do anything for you. Just because you don't approve doesn't mean that he hasn't already done everything he can think of to have you." Snape's voice was getting very wispy. Hermione was falling asleep on his lap, but because she was already asleep, it was just taking her out of dream levels.

"Severus?" Hermione tried to reach out, but only encountered her blanket. She woke up extremely confused. She was disoriented. She thought for sure she should be in Gryffindor Tower, but she quickly caught onto the hammock she was lying in and the walls of her cottage. When Acara jumped up next to her, having left to answer nature's call, Hermione curled up around the beast and fell back to sleep with her brow furrowed. In the delicate space between awake and asleep, she couldn't imagine what had just happened. Fortunately sleep claimed her, and she was able to sleep well into the afternoon.

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Hermione spent Saturday dazedly thinking of Severus, Ariulo, and Draco. She made books. She copied books. She taught some of the children about spelled writing. However, through it all, she kept thinking of those men and the web she was in. Severus had said to take Draco. Ariulo had facilitated a situation where she could stay, and if Draco became a mage, surely he would stay and adopt the customs here, as long as he got to make Hermione his bride. Paruin would be thrilled by the opportunity to relieve Hermione of Draco for some evenings, she was sure, and there would be others. Most certainly though, Hermione couldn't go back to Britain, no matter how homesick she got. This was her place now, thanks to the Ministry of Magic's Marriage Law and the wonderful elemental fire she'd found here.

Hermione was staring into space, her hands submerged, as she had been processing fronds, though she hadn't actually been doing anything for several minutes. She was too lost in her thoughts. Suddenly, Maank was in front of her, and when she noticed, she jumped up, unsettling the tub and spilling water to the floor.

"Those blond devils have addled your brain, Hermione." Maank chuckled, coming around to right the tub as Hermione evaporated the water. Once everything was set, Maank pulled her into a hug like a bear, crushing her against him, making her feel as though she were a small girl. After Kress had found her, Maank had set watch at her

bedside and waited for her to wake.

"It's not just the blonde ones, Papi." There was something about this man that reminded her of her father so intensely, Hermione had called him that from the very beginning. For someone who hadn't been in the colony even a year, she'd found so many people who simply fit inside of her. "It is the dark ones, and the pale ones, too. It is the night and it is the day."

"Ariulo wishes you'd come to him."

"Not yet. I cannot see him now, not after..."

"Just because the timing was bad? It was coincidence only. This had been our move since you became a Mage, whelp." Maank tapped her chin lightly with his knuckle and smiled at her, seeing how weary she was.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Hermione said as her face shot upward.

"When? When you were just blooming? Or when he hadn't shown himself for months and months? Maybe just before, but it was possible that it could have been months more, and all the while you have done all this, and more, resigned to your fate or maybe leaving us? We don't want you to leave. If we have to take all of Europe's giants in to keep you, we will, and they can all build their own houses with taller doors," Maank finished, chortling softly.

Hermione shook her head at him. Up in the window, Dondi appeared. He looked about curiously, as though he hadn't been in the window ever before, although he had spent countless hours in it.

"See... even now, Ariulo can't stay away from you. He is like a dog, and you are his master," Maank said softly, rubbing her neck as she looked at the door for Ariulo. "You two have put the people on edge for a week; be done with it." With that, Maank left, and Hermione could see his bird fly down from the roof outside and swoop past him as he strode away.

Hermione took a deep breath. "Dondi," she whispered, and watched as the cat looked at her shyly. "Come on, Dondi." Hermione smiled weakly. The cat walked over to her slowly, slinking up and down as he crossed into the centre of the room. Hermione moved to sit cross-legged on the floor next to Acara, who was lying about, Hermione's turmoil leaving her beast lethargic when she wasn't set to defend her mistress. Hermione curled up with the cats and was just dozing into the sounds of purring when Ariulo came into the doorway.

"This is a work room, not a hotel," Ariulo said, leaning against the doorway, wearing only pants and sandals.

"You mean a veterinary clinic. This cat is making such a racket." Hermione scritchd her fingers down Dondi's tail.

"You are speaking to me?" Ariulo said, holding his breath.

"Yes. I am." Somehow, this did not lessen the tension in Hermione's belly. He was just... looking at her.

Ariulo had often hated that mark. He'd hated it when he'd found out it was forced upon her. He'd hated it the first time she'd laughed with him as they were reaping in the fields and she had been so beautiful. He hated it every time she'd begged him to set her ablaze, pawing at him and trying to pretend. None of those times paralleled his hatred for it now. "Just in time for worship tomorrow, and a new initiate."

"Yeah, that was cutting it close." Hermione got up, holding Dondi in her arms, and walked over to the doorway. She lifted Dondi up, and he lurched toward Ariulo's shoulder. Once he was settled, Hermione knelt and dropped her head, giving up her fight. "I should not have questioned the Council's plan."

"The Council should have considered the spirit of the matter and executed the resolution differently," Ariulo said formally before dropping to his knees and taking Hermione's hands and forcing his fire through her body until they burned together, not too hot to bring down the building, but enough to heat the place up. Hermione looked at his eyes as they churned with fire.

If she could not rend Draco Malfoy from her life, then at least she would bear the burden with people who loved her.

## Discussing the Minor Details

*Chapter 12 of 25*

"Every witch in Europe would sell her very soul to be the next Lady Malfoy, and you couldn't be arsed about it!" --This section contains discussion of violent behavior that may be offensive to some readers. Please read at your own discretion.--

Sunday passed in beautiful normality for Hermione. Draco and Lucius kept to themselves in their cottage except for meals, presumably planning for the arbitration between the councilors and the Malfoys as to the fates of Hermione and Draco. If she hadn't been constantly rolling over all that had happened in the last week, she might have forgotten about them all together, since her day was so peaceful and perfect.

She'd slept fairly well, considering the anxiety she had regarding the upcoming negotiations. It was with a great deal of relief that Hermione found herself walking back with the kids from the lake Monday morning. When Tiden, the man who supervised the media that came into the colony, came running toward her waving a newspaper, Hermione was nearly frozen in anticipation. What could have happened now?

Tiden thrust the newspaper into her hands, and she turned it to read the headline. Hermione's legs nearly gave out in one instant, only to start jumping up and down, running into the village centre the next, the children chasing after her.

Maank and Isova were sitting with Lucius and Draco as the food was being brought out. Hermione ran up to the table in between Lucius and Isova and thrust the paper under his nose. Hermione was breathing heavily, and Lucius arrogantly looked her over as though she were an insolent servant making too much noise.

"Law...amended," Hermione gasped, turning to put her hands on the table as she bent over and caught her breath.

Lucius took the paper and read the Headline: MANDATE MODIFIED: Muggle-borns and Half-bloods Now Allowed to Refuse Petitions. The article went on to explain how touted war vet Hermione Granger's protest had sparked a review by the Wizengamot. Since the major force behind that provision of the law, Lucius Malfoy, had been notably absent, there had been little cohesive resistance.

"This changes nothing," Lucius said, passing the paper to Draco before turning to Hermione. "The brand still marks you as ours." Then the elder Malfoy began filling his plate as though nothing interesting had happened at all.

"This is dated for tomorrow," Draco noted as he browsed through the paper.

"Tiden gets advanced copies before they go out to distributors," Isova explained as she too began loading her plate. "Also, there is a time difference, yes?"

"Doesn't matter." Hermione heaved a great sigh and sat down between Lucius and Isova. "The point *is*... I can go back to Britain now, if I so choose, like for Ginny and Harry's wedding and when babies are born. I'm almost happy you sods came all this way and took all that time, too. Still, if you'd like to bugger off, please feel free," Hermione said, leaning into Isova's one-armed embrace.

Lucius refused to acknowledge her, but Draco was watching her, enjoying her flushed state and noticeable release of tension.

A piece of Hermione's heart that she'd locked away was free again. She hadn't realised how much she'd missed the freedom to come and go as she pleased, but now that she had it back, she felt divine.

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They had been negotiating for three and a half torturous hours. Hermione was beginning to feel very tired; her giddiness over the amended law still kept her jovial, but she certainly wasn't brimming with glee as she had been when she'd sat down in her chair. It would be an understatement to say that the Malfoys were thorough and firm negotiators. It was painfully clear after the first half hour that these men knew business and meant business, as well. Not that the Council didn't, but watching Lucius Malfoy move through a contract was sort of like watching the man duel...his precision, skill, and talent were a sight to behold. It was too bad that he was such a rotten bastard.

Draco, on the other hand, had said nothing. He had simply sat there, looking at Hermione since the moment this had all begun. His hands were folded on the table, and his eyes would go from smug to curious to intensely possessive and back again, depending on the topic at hand. Marcela and Isova were on her right, and Ariulo and Maank were to her left. The five of them against Lucius, and Draco watching Hermione the whole time. Isova and Lucius were going on about something now, and Hermione couldn't resist looking at Draco as he was looking at her. She was so focused on watching him that she'd tuned out the discussion and was utterly surprised when Draco spoke.

"I will not remove the brand."

Hermione shook her head a little bit, slightly confused, as if a statue had just spoken to her. She tuned into the conversation as Maank turned to him.

"If you do not remove the brand, then she cannot participate in the lifestyle of a mage, and this whole process is a waste of our time."

"I will not remove the brand."

"But, according to the contract, you will have three of your own children, if not two sons." Maank leaned back and rolled his head, clearly beginning to lose his patience.

"I will not remo..."

"Then brand the others," Ariulo spoke up. "We will make a clause that after two sons or three children, Hermione, as well as Draco, may take others, and Draco will brand them, including them in this." He finished with a flourish of his hand and leaned forward over the tables.

"That's never been done before." Lucius spoke neutrally. There was no guarantee that it would even work. No Malfoy had ever let another man share his wife, certainly not through an ancestral mark.

"What if it doesn't work?" Isova asked, looking between the men.

Maank scrubbed his face with his hands and said, "Then he will remo..."

"I will *not* remove her brand."

"Then we must try it now to see if it is a viable option," Marcela offered, as if the answer was as plain as day.

"What? No. No one touches her," Draco said, the fierce possessiveness returning to his gaze.

"Then you'll agree to remove the brand after you have your heirs," Marcela offered gently, looking at Draco as if she were trying to reason with a child.

Lucius turned to his son and spoke quietly into his ear. Draco nodded four times, then said, "The way the charm works currently is to prevent others with illicit intents from achieving their goal. I will brand someone and allow one kiss, if I am also allowed one kiss. His must be in front of me, and mine must be alone with her. I will remove his mark before surrendering my wand, and all charms will return to the present status."

"Excellent." Marcela smiled broadly, turning to Ariulo. "Would you like to volunteer?" Ariulo looked extremely pleased with his wife and her proposal and turned to look at Draco.

Draco had known he would be the obvious choice, but it still grated on his nerves, the thought of Hermione's mentor touching her. Still looking at Hermione, jealousy burning his eyes and his nostrils flaring, Draco said, "It will have to be on your chest." He beckoned to Ariulo to move to him and watched as the other man shed his tunic and made his way over. "I have no idea what will happen; this is a first." There was slight menace in his voice as he flicked his gaze back to Hermione, who was watching now with rapt attention.

"Malice will bring your death." Ariulo smirked. The blond giants had tried to play dirty after about ninety minutes, but when Maank kept the air from moving in and out of their lungs for a few long moments, they had learned a quick lesson. These two might be consummate Slytherins and some of the most shrewd business men in all of Britain, but they still needed to breathe, and Maank could deny them that, if he wished to.

"Quite." Draco stood and moved in front of Ariulo. He was almost a foot taller than the little brown man, which made the leverage awkward. Stern focus faltered for a moment as Draco shuffled his feet and brought his left arm around Ariulo's back before putting his right palm on his chest. Holding him like that, feeling Ariulo's body in his arms like he had held so many girls at school made him uncomfortable. He looked around at the others; finding a mixture of amusement and rapt attention from the crowd was unnerving as well. Lucius cleared his throat, and Draco gathered himself together.

Beginning the chant, he felt the magic once again move through his arm as he put a palm-sized dragon on Ariulo's chest. Ariulo gritted his teeth; he was no stranger to pain, but this was something else entirely. He could feel it burning, and as he watched Draco chant, he couldn't help but feel a strange bond forming. *Quite unusual. Definitely something to consider further in the future.*

When Draco was finished, the two men moved away from each other after a quick glance and a nod. Ariulo's gaze immediately found Hermione, and he noticed that she was breathing heavily and touching the back of her neck. When she looked up at him, he had to control himself to maintain dignity in getting to her. Maank laughed out loud, mumbling something about how pretty Ariulo was and how all the young ones liked him.

Ariulo stopped in his tracks and leaned forward, smiling and saying, "You're just jealous, Maank. I belong to the Dragon now, and you can't lay your covetous talons on me." Everyone but the Malfoys laughed. Ariulo did a fair impression of a lady walking, and even managed to bat his eyelashes at Draco without laughing out loud. Finally, he got to Hermione, and she was laughing and beautiful, and even though it was in front of all of these people and those blond bastards, Ariulo knew it was his chance.

He took her hand and pulled her up to stand in front of him, and Hermione felt the fire right away, the elemental fire they always shared when she was especially needy of him. Her hands met Ariulo's and they formed a link, burning ever hotter until cinders began to fall from their hair. Maank brought a breeze up to cool the others around the great stone table, but he couldn't keep his eyes off of the pair to his right. Hermione stepped forward as Ariulo pulled his hands up her arms, always maintaining the connection, over her shoulders and gently up to her face. She licked her lips as her mouth fell slack, and Ariulo's mouth finally met Hermione's, after all those months. Ariulo pulled her lower lip between his and sucked gently before Hermione opened her mouth and sucked his tongue inside. Just as it was getting good, she felt a sting at the back of her neck, and the arrogant drawl that she had hated for nigh on eight years cut through to her.

"I said a kiss, Granger, not a snog." Draco's tone was a mix of meanings, and it filtered through Hermione's highly aroused mental state. She broke the kiss and looked at Draco, the fire in her skin and hair receding even as the fire in her pelvis turned to hot coals. Ariulo pushed his fingers through her hair, enjoying the way it crackled with fire, and she smiled up at him. They moved to their more customary chaste position and rubbed noses for a moment. Finally, she sighed and smiled, turning back to sit across from Draco.

"So...that's settled." Isova breathed a sigh of relief. "After the agreed-upon heirs, Hermione will point out who to... induct... and they will be marked permanently."

"W-wha..." Hermione stuttered and cleared her throat, blushing as Draco raised an eyebrow at her, and Ariulo put his arm around her. "What about Draco? Won't he need to mark whomever he wants as well?"

"The charm is only relevant to wives. Men can perform beyond the brand, although his seed won't grow inside anyone without the brand. That is how we are certain of our line."

Hermione began to grumble about patriarchy and misogyny and the whole damned biased system when Ariulo spoke. "Then he needs to brand the women he takes as well. We want his blood mixed in, that is why we are here."

Draco by now had gone back to staring at Hermione, though now there was nothing but jealous possession in his eyes.

"I will give as many children to the colony as Hermione gives to me," Draco said simply. "Those mages will also receive the brand."

"Fair enough," Lucius said, flipping over to the last page of his notes and leaning forward. "As with the other Malfoy children, they will be registered as dual citizens until the age of majority." Lucius only paused for a moment to allow protest, then heaved a great sigh of relief himself. "Signatures, children, and then supper, I think."

The agreement had been made up on formal parchments as details were hammered out. Draco signed, smiling over at Hermione, and leaned back in his chair. He breathed deeply and rolled his head to watch as Hermione finally signed the document that would make her his wife. Then she stood up and gave each of the councilors a long hug, thanking them profusely.

"First, my kiss," Draco said, making no move to get up. He was looking cool and confident even though he was sporting a massive hard-on. He was confused to find the earlier kiss as... interesting as he had, in addition to enjoying the arousal the other two had felt through the brand. He had also seen Hermione's reaction to Ariulo's branding, and he was certain there was a level of connection among all three. Draco had spent the last brief minutes of the meeting deciding whether he wanted to remove the other man's brand before or after *the kiss*. On the one hand, Draco had always loathed sharing. On the other hand, he wanted to inflict the sort of... discomfort on his rival he'd been put through moments before.

"Oh. Right." Hermione turned and looked at him, clearly uninterested in the prospect. Lucius and Isova were already outside the Apparition wards, Isova smirking at everyone before taking Lucius along in Side-Along Apparition. Maank and Ariulo shared a look before each gave Hermione a passing squeeze on the shoulder, Dondi and Maank's falcon following them out of bounds. Marcela walked to Draco and smiled at him before turning and waving to Hermione. When she had her chinchilla tucked safely away in a pocket at the front of her dress, she too left the betrothed at the stone table.

Hermione and Draco looked at each other for a moment before Hermione walked over to him, impatient to get this over with. "Come along, then."

"Is that all you have to say to me?" Draco looked her body over before locking gazes with her.

"Yes, it is, actually." Hermione sat on a bench a little bit away from him, looking out over the cliffs to the ocean. "Now hurry up and kiss me. Dinner is starting."

"You're such a little bitch, you know that?" Draco asked, finally standing up. Before she could respond, he was standing over her, leaning in. His hands were on the table on either side of her body, and his face was dangerously close to hers. "Every witch in Europe would sell her very soul to be the next Lady Malfoy, and you couldn't be arsed about it!"

Hermione tried to move away from him, but couldn't. She could hear Acara growling, but Hermione was so boxed in by Malfoy that she had no idea where the cat was.

"I have done *everything* in my power to have *you*, and you have no *appreciation*. Did you know that if the Dark Lord had won, *you* would have been *safe*? You would have enjoyed many long years in the library of my ancestral home. Do you know what I lived through for that privilege?" Malfoy moved to touch Hermione's hair, pulling back slightly. "My father pushed the law through, at no small expense, mind you, so we could be together, and you *ran*. I find a way to bring us together in our sleep, which I know you enjoyed, Granger, I remember how you whimpered for me." Draco paused to watch his fingers in her hair. "...Not at first, but you eventually became extremely willing in those dreams. Do you deny that you would wake up those nights ready to shag?" Draco's hand closed to a fist around her hair and pulled her head back roughly before moving to smell her neck. "*Do you?*"

Hermione swallowed. She was not afraid. Besides the fact that Acara would pounce at the slightest sign from her, Hermione knew that she could push the fire through her body and protect herself from him. Instead, she was sort of *intrigued*. Draco *really* thought he'd gone out of his way to win her, and he *had*, in his own sick little way. He was radiating power, and if she weren't a mage, he might have had the upper hand. When she felt his breath in her ear, she shivered, then blushed, embarrassed by her body's reaction to him.

Draco licked her ear and whispered, "Answer me."

"I don't deny..." Hermione croaked. Draco was wicked, and he was having his way with her.

"Then, I arrive, and you treat me like *filth*. You insult me and avoid me when I am nothing if not civil to you." Draco moved his mouth down her neck, never touching, not willing to waste his one kiss before surrendering to the initiate program. Still, his breath was hot and fast on Hermione's neck, and Draco had to put very little effort into actually moving her as he wished. "Then, you flaunt your little fire man in front of me. Tell me, Granger, you seem to go to cinders with him awfully quickly. Just how do you get around my charms with him?" Draco let a shuddering breath move into her other ear before pulling her face just next to him. His deep grey eyes were boring into her.

"We don't...we've never kissed before just then," Hermione said, trying to hide the lie behind the truth. She shook her head as much as his hold would let her.

Draco stared at her for a moment, then brought his free hand up behind her neck. When he spoke, his voice was gravelly. "Don't lie to me. I could kill you, you know. You may have fire in your body, but I could snap your lovely neck. I don't give a fuck about that cat; my life is empty without you...I'd *welcome* death because we'd be together." Draco looked at her face and shook Hermione. "Now... how do you get around the fucking charm?"

"Draco, just kiss me." Hermione closed her eyes and let out a deep, shuddering breath.

"No, princess, I'm finished playing nicely. Tell me." Draco began stroking the mark on the back of her neck. She'd never lied to him before. He was so angry about it he couldn't see straight. Anger and loathing he could tolerate, but deception had no place in their future. "You're not the only one who can use a Portkey, you know."

Hermione's eyes snapped opened at his implied threat. "Then why haven't you done it?" she whispered, afraid of the answer. Her fragile sense of security was starting to crumble, and she was glad she'd brought two of her own Portkeys with her to the meeting.

"Good faith. Last chance, Granger. Either you tell me, or you never see this place again. I won't tolerate lies."

Hermione blinked slowly. She didn't want to tell her secret, letting him take even more from her than he already had. It didn't matter, she told herself; he'd already seen Ariulo kiss her. How had things gone to rubbish so quickly? "It's in the intent." Hermione swallowed and continued in a whisper, "If he doesn't intend to touch me like that, then the charm stays dormant."

"So you've been *accidentally* touching each other for how long?" Draco said, holding his breath.

"Since my spirit quest?" Hermione was still very afraid. Draco was keeping her physically immobile, and she wasn't sure what he would do. "So... since... graduation, I guess."

Draco looked at her. She was starting to tremble now; that was something she'd never done at Hogwarts, tremble because of him. Today it was anxiety and fear, but soon he'd make it out of joy or excitement, or maybe even lust. "You really are the cleverest thing, aren't you?" Draco smiled at her and pulled her body close to his, lifting her off the bench and spinning her around in a great circle.

The word *bipolar* lit up in neon lights in Hermione's imagination. Still, it seemed like his threat of Portkeying her away had passed. The spinning, though, was starting to get to her. "Draco?"

"What did you just call me?" Draco stopped suddenly, lurching Hermione's already queasy tummy. They stood together, Draco's arms around her as she leaned into him, trying not to vomit.

"... Draco?" Hermione was nervous. Had she done something wrong?

"Say it again." His eyes lit up. Draco squatted down to look her in the face.

"Draco." Hermione was starting to look at him suspiciously.

"Perfect! No more of this 'Malfoy' business. From now on, *Hermione*, we are on a first name basis." He was looking at her adoringly and stroking her hair. Hermione's stomach roiled loudly, and Draco looked down at her belly curiously. He had a strange expression on his face. If she'd seen it on Ron, she would have called it amused, but on Draco it could only be described as... watchful? "You're hungry. Good. I want you to gain a stone, okay? Not that you aren't fucking amazing looking right now, but you need to be a little... fuller to make babies," Draco said, sweeping her up into his arms and spinning her once more before bumping his nose against hers to get the angle he wanted for his kiss.

Hermione was still a little dizzy and completely baffled at this point, so when his mouth pressed over hers, she was more than a little surprised. She wasn't expecting it at all, not to mention that it was an amazing kiss. Draco, of course, went straight to the proverbial top, his mouth sealed against hers and his tongue completely in her mouth in the most delightful way. Then he sucked her tongue into his mouth and caressed it. Hermione forgot herself and wrapped her arms over his shoulders, pressing against him.

Internally, Draco smirked. He was certainly enjoying himself, and having Hermione lose herself while they were kissing totally vindicated him. The ends absolutely justified the means. Now they were snogging somewhere in Peru on a beautiful mountaintop, and she would be his! Draco pressed his hands down her sides, reveling in her beautiful body until he heard a sharp whistle and a smattering of applause.

Hermione pulled back and looked at the disturbance dazedly. It was Paruin, Lucius, Maank, and Kress. Hermione blushed red and buried her face in Draco's chest, hiding. Then she realised what she was doing and took three large steps away from him to be out of arm's reach. The bastard just smirked at her.

"Ariulo sensed trouble... and dinner is nearly over now," Paruin offered, thankfully breaking the increasingly awkward silence.

Hermione blushed again and cleared her throat. "There was some tension for a few minutes, but I believe we have come to an... understanding," she finished, looking away, not wanting to acknowledge what everyone had seen.

Lucius cleared his throat and said, "I told you it was much ado about nothing. Come, Maank, I believe you were going to show me that little pebble game." Lucius hated not being allowed to Apparate around the village like the grown wizard he was, but was not too perturbed by Side-Along Apparition with Maank for some reason. He suspected it had something to do with the new artwork on his chest. *Sodding Mudblood.*

Hermione made a clicking noise and bent down for Acara before she called out for Kress. "Whelp, come, and you can help me eat dinner?" So much for Gryffindor bravery; Hermione needed out of there. She didn't want to have to Apparate Draco back to the village centre. Kress couldn't Apparate to the town centre from here yet, so she made a quick decision to take the boy and run for it.

"Looks like you're with me, Dragon." Paruin smiled, and together they Apparated back to village centre where Draco would spend one more night with his wand before becoming an initiate the next day.

## Training Begins

### Chapter 13 of 25

He looked at her for a long moment before remembering that he had to bow to her. Draco flinched internally and dropped his head. Maybe it hadn't been the brightest idea to have Hermione supervising his training.

Draco spent the rest of the week fasting and meditating. He was sleeping in a room with seven children, who were all doing the same practice he was. Moreover, they seemed to be better at it than he was. Draco had no idea that giving up his pride would be so much more difficult than giving up his wand.

He began hallucinating on the third day. The weather was hot, and a diet of juices made from local plants was not enough for his body, which was used to large meals in the British tradition...meat and potatoes with the occasional veg. Draco's visions brought him back to Hogwarts, with Severus and Potter, and they were some sort of trinity.

They were looking for Hermione, who had become a witch of Goddess proportions. She was giggling and running up and down a labyrinth of stairs that moved. Some were

upside down, and some were horizontal; all the while she was trotting about in flowing robes of Gryffindor red and lilac like her mage's robes. Her hair was woven with wildflowers, and each time Hermione would meet Draco's gaze, he would turn to stone. Once she was out of his line of sight, he'd return to the flesh and begin the chase again.

To Draco, this pattern seemed to last all day and all night, so he was very surprised when he was woken up by one of the little girl initiates just before supper on that same third day. Draco looked at her dazedly, totally out of his element. The girl, whose name Draco couldn't place at all, just bowed to him, and he returned the bow, standing up and moving to a table where they had hot broth for supper.

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After one week of meditation and cleansing fast, Draco got his first real breakfast. He was sitting at a small round table with all of the children from his cottage. They had already started this routine, so Draco was the only one surprised to see Hermione at the table. He looked at her for a long moment before remembering that he had to bow to her. Draco flinched internally and dropped his head. Maybe it hadn't been the brightest idea to have Hermione supervising his training.

*Gods, she was beautiful* The last thing Draco wanted was to bow to her. How many times at school had she mouthed back at him to the point that he had wanted to push her against a wall and fuck her until she admitted that he was the best? How many times had he wanked while thinking about her on her knees, begging for him? Draco wanted to tie her to his bed and tease her to the point of blind desire for him and him alone; instead, he had to keep his head bowed while she supervised his breakfast, as if he were a child. He was so caught up in his thoughts and his delicious meat and flatbread breakfast that he almost missed when she spoke to him.

"We all bow to the power of the elements, so that we might be blessed by those same elements." Hermione click-called Acara to her, and the cat came and rested her head on Hermione's lap. "Today, you will harvest the fronds from the fields north of the village, without magic. Your sweat will bless the land, as the land will bless you by making you strong."

After a few minutes, they left the table, each initiate carrying a scythe scaled to their proportion and skill level. They followed Hermione single file into the field. Draco was surprised to see that his scythe was actually shorter than Hermione's; he would have asked her about it, but he knew he wasn't allowed to speak unless spoken to. The Dark Lord had had this rule as well, so it wasn't unfamiliar. Of course, he rather preferred a mountain in Peru where he could gaze at Hermione's rump on the sly to the Manor's dungeon with the most evil wizard that there had ever been.

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Once they were in the field, Hermione called them into a half circle and stood so that she could see everyone before starting the morning's directions. "This field will be cleared by the end of the day. It is important to begin slowly, for you will surely tire more quickly than you imagine. When you tire, you are to sit and meditate for thirty minutes; Acara will make you aware of when your rest is finished, and you will begin reaping again."

Hermione looked at the eight in front of her, measuring them up. She had some dried fruit and meat in her satchel for lunch and figured that each would need a rest after, to recoup. Looking at Draco, she felt a little pity for him: he stood out like a dove in a line of ducklings. "How do you usually protect yourself from the sun, Draco?"

Draco looked up suddenly, startled and frankly surprised at being addressed. "A potion, Lady." He had to fight the smirk off his face as he said the last word. As his wife she would be Lady Malfoy, but this was not like that. It was the closest translation for what the others were calling her. There wasn't a word he knew that meant master, professor, and elder all in one. The contract had determined that he would call her 'Lady' until he became fluent in the language and could work the declensions and conjugations appropriately. He had extra 'classes' after the evening meal, during which she would teach him the basic grammar and vocabulary. It was the only thing they'd do that would resemble his Hogwarts education at all.

"Come." Hermione motioned to a spot in front of her where Draco would kneel before her.

He swallowed thickly before making his move. Once he was kneeling, she put both her hands on his face and tilted it up to hers. Hermione's eyes turned to a pale brown; so much so that they were almost yellow. Then she began to chant, and Draco could feel a cool tingling sweep across his skin. When her hands fell away, her eyes were still dark yellow, like the sun on an overcast day.

"You should be protected, but we'll want to do that again after lunch. Everyone spread out!"

Draco watched as the children moved along the edge of the field, spacing themselves out. Hermione was walking with him toward the very edge.

"You will reap moving forward, then turn to the right, coming back, then turn left, and up again. Have you ever swung one of these before?"

"No, Lady." Draco looked out at the expanse that he was set to clear; it was only slightly larger than what the children were working on, and that was only because his section had a bit of curve on the furthest part.

"Fine. It is not unlike swinging a Beater's bat, although the length requires that you really use both arms in order to be efficient. Move back and watch."

Hermione moved forward a step and spit in her hands; Draco was slightly disgusted by the maneuver. However, he couldn't complain with the view...Hermione was wearing short pants that accentuated her legs and arse nicely and a shirt that covered her closely over her body. She stretched her back and rolled her neck a little. She was quite strong and limber, and Draco felt a sort of possessive pride.

Finally, Hermione took up the scythe and made a long swing from right to left across her body, the fronds in front of her falling with a *softthwap*. Once the scythe was on the left side, she gave a quick twist of her wrists, and the blade of the scythe flew back the other way. Again, the fronds dropped in front of her, and she quickly fell into a march, sweeping the scythe and clearing the first twenty feet of his land. Hermione was graceful and efficient, and Draco was quick to marvel at his betrothed...certainly his mother wouldn't even know what a scythe was, let alone be able to swing one with such majesty.

Hermione stopped and turned to Draco. "All right, let's see you."

Draco nodded and moved over slightly so that he could begin where he was standing. He let the first swing go, moving from left to right. To his embarrassment, the cut was not nearly as close to the earth, nor as straight as Hermione's. Draco spun the scythe and tried again, his right-handed stroke worse than the first. Draco scowled.

"No one does it right the first time, Draco! Hurry up!" Hermione called at him.

As much as he wanted to tell her where she could stick it, he bowed and worked toward her.

Hermione could see he was taking his frustration out on the poor earth, and she held back a low chuckle. When he finally reached her, he was sweaty and winded. She put a hand on his arm. "You'll tire out quickly like that." Then Hermione turned and gestured to the others, saying, "Slow and steady, Draco...think of it like meditation for your body. You aren't weak, just... unpractised."

Hermione had some bitterness about having to be encouraging toward Draco...if he failed, he wouldn't have the opportunity to marry her. Still, she couldn't just sabotage him. She reached up and squeezed his arm reassuringly before moving to the centre of the field so she could watch and summon fronds as they were cut down.

Draco watched her hand leave his arm with a mix of sullen resentment and sheer lust. She'd squeezed his arm and looked at him with kind eyes, and all he could think of was licking up her neck as he fucked her in this field of grass. He could practically hear her moaning as he set about his work, not stopping until he couldn't hold his arms up any more. Draco dropped his scythe and fell to his knees, sliding more quickly into a meditative place than he ever had before.

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Draco was pulled out of his meditation by the unfriendly *thwap* of Acara's tail on his back. Where she would nuzzle the children gently, she put an opposite amount of force into Draco. Draco was stiff and thirstier than he had ever been before. It was bloody hot up here, and all of this *work* was really starting to get to him. He looked around at

the others, all of whom were working tirelessly and without complaint. Comparatively, he was now behind each of those children.

He muttered to himself, "You are stronger than an eight year old, Malfoy." He stood up, turning to watch the cat bounce playfully through the high brush. Draco shook his head...he would not finish the day last. Draco reached for his scythe and got to work.

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When Draco sat down across from Hermione for his first language lesson, he could barely move. Even his hands, which had swung and twisted the scythe all day, were sore. They curled like hooks because his muscles were so tight. Draco held them in his lap under the table so Hermione could not see; he was embarrassed by his weakness.

"Medallion off, Draco," Hermione said as she reached up to unclasp hers from behind her neck. Her fingers tickled the brand.

Draco shivered and groaned lowly, his gaze heating even though he could only stare at the table.

"I can't, Lady...my hands..." Draco held them out to her, looking up at her through his eyelashes. There were several blisters, and they were stuck in a loose circle. Standing, Hermione walked around the table and pushed his hair up to see the clasp. Draco shivered again at her touch and groaned softly in pain as his muscles protested.

"Sore?" Hermione chuckled and set his medallion on the table beside them. "Just give it two days; even breathing will hurt." She patted him on the back casually, smirking at his pain as she walked back to her side of the table.

Draco muttered, "Heartless wench," as he moved, flinching, to sit properly for studying, but Hermione chose to ignore this. She had picked out some children's books and brought a quill and paper to the table before Draco arrived. "You did well today, Draco. I can't imagine that you've done much manual labour, what with magic and house-elves at your disposal your whole life."

"Thank you, Lady." Draco felt as though she couldn't be serious, but her voice was sincere. He wanted to look at her face to see what was happening with her beautiful, expressive eyes, but he was not allowed to look at her unless she invited him to do so. Intellectually, Draco was trying his hardest to be submissive; he knew that the more submissive he was, the faster this would all go. However, Malfoys don't submit, and his instinct as a Malfoy made him want to push her down on the table and mount her. The very notion made his body ache, though. Draco shook his head softly and reached for a quill.

Hermione looked at him thoughtfully and sighed deeply. The world was tipped on its end for sure if this truly was Draco Malfoy in front of her. "Let's get to work, Draco."

## The Indiscretion

### Chapter 14 of 25

Hermione tried to pull her hand away, and Draco's eyes snapped open, staring at her as if she'd insulted him.

Hermione was having trouble keeping a straight face. Draco Malfoy, Slytherin Prince, Heir of Wizarding Britain, Bastard Extraordinaire, had freckles. After two weeks in the sun, his skin was barely even the slightest shade darker. If she hadn't known it for a fact, having seen it personally, she never would have guessed that Draco had been spending all day sweating with his scythe under the hot sun...except for the freckles.

They certainly weren't of a Weasley-quantity of freckles. They only spread across his cheekbones and over the bridge of his nose, but there lay the sprinkling of pale brown dots. Draco was kneeling before her, waiting for her to protect him from the sun. His eyes were closed and thick blond lashes lay against his cheeks gently. Hermione wanted to run her finger across his nose just to make sure the freckles were real, but got herself together in time to maintain their routine and get everyone working out in the field.

All of the initiates were now trained well enough at working the field that Hermione didn't have to watch them closely anymore. Some were even starting to help with the binding of the fronds into bundles, which left Hermione with time on her hands. She surreptitiously cast individual *Protegos* on each of the children and sat on a flat rock to watch Draco.

Still smiling over his darling, freckled nose, Hermione chastised herself. It was stupid to like them so much. It wasn't as though Draco had done anything intentional to grow them so that, when he looked up at her the way he did, he would look even more boyishly handsome. Also, on a diet of only proteins and plants with very little bread, Draco had become downright chiselled.

He was working with her longer scythe today, and it was making him sweat already. Hermione could tell that Draco enjoyed the increase of power. He was working like a machine, clearing away the plants nearly four times as fast as the others. He was probably ready for the next level; Hermione would test him tomorrow.

But today she would just watch him work, with the reluctant quiet of her mind that said that this man was to be her husband for all her days...why shouldn't she leer at him? His arms and back rippled with the rhythm of his swing. It was... glorious. Hermione was so lost in her thoughts, she didn't notice when Paruin walked up beside her.

"It is nice to see you enjoying the sight of your soon-to-be husband." Paruin raised her eyebrows at Hermione and smiled.

"You just want me to make his babies so you can bring him to your bed, Paruin." Hermione chuckled and swept her gaze over the other initiates.

"I don't see why we both can't be right." The older woman laughed and pressed her hands against her lower back, trying to ease her ever-larger swollen belly. "I find it hard to believe that the dragon has become even more..." Paruin finished with a growl deep in her throat.

Hermione laughed. "As delightful as a visit from you is, what are you doing down here? Surely there must be something more pressing for your time than Draco's diminishing body fat."

"Ah, yes. I'd forgotten in light of the scenery, yes?" Paruin smiled, giving Draco a last long look. "The council needs you this afternoon, to discuss your proposal for the library expansion. Tiden has been able to set aside today for the meeting."

"Excellent. I will have the initiates meditate after lunch." Hermione nodded and smiled. Finally! She'd been working on getting more room for the books she'd been making and the books she would make.

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"It's not French, Malfoy!" Hermione threw down her quill and pulled her hair back from her face, groaning hoarsely. "Stop squeezing your throat like that." Hermione's afternoon had not gone as smoothly as she had hoped, and Draco was having some sort of block with his latest set of vocabulary. She hadn't had this much trouble since Ron and Harry and the OWL exams fifth year.

"Forgive me, *Lady*, I have been speaking French as long as I've been speaking English. I find it rather difficult to stop," Draco ground out through his clenched jaw.

Hermione was clear that when he called her 'Lady' at moments like this, he meant 'most heinous of all know-it-all cunts.' "Well, there is more to this world than London and Paris, and you need these chants at the fourth plateau!" Hermione stood abruptly and stomped over to Draco's side of the table. She touched her thumb under his Adam's apple and felt a jolt.

Draco took in a stammered breath and turned his eyes up to her. Hermione rolled her eyes, exhaling deeply while shaking out her hand. Draco's eyes darkened as they rested on her, but she again put her hand to his neck. "Close your eyes, Malfoy." Hermione glared at him, clearly indicating that she wasn't interested in any funny business.

"Draco," he insisted.

"What?"

"We agreed, *Hermione*, that we were on a first name basis, yeah? Or did you forget our little snog on the mountaintop." Draco looked at her stonily, and Hermione shivered. He could barely suppress his smirk. Of course she hadn't.

Hermione stared at him, her jaw working noiselessly as she tried to control her temper. She was in charge here, but she did not want to waste any more time. She sighed heavily and said, "Fine. Close your eyes, *Draco*."

"Of course, *Lady*." The smug bastard finally smirked at his tiny victory and made a big show of closing his eyes slowly, licking his lips. He was tempted to touch her softly, but held back.

Pressing her thumb into his throat, she instructed, "Now chant until I tell you to stop." He did, and it was perfect. So perfect, in fact, that Hermione almost wondered if he'd been able to do it the whole time. She pulled her hand back gently so that he could get used to manipulating his throat on his own. When her thumb finally came away, Draco's hand shot up and grabbed hers as if it were a Snitch.

His eyes were still closed, but his face turned up into a victorious smile, broadening as his fingers came in between hers. Hermione rolled her eyes. It was not exactly misbehaviour, but it certainly wasn't following initiate protocol. Draco pulled her hand up against his face, which had a soft bristling of five o'clock shadow on it. He turned his cheek against the back of her hand, all the while chanting perfectly.

Hermione tried to pull her hand away, and Draco's eyes snapped open, staring at her as if she'd insulted him. He stared at her, still chanting, but his grip on her hand tightened. His other hand came to rest on her waist, exactly at the bottom of her ribs. Draco began to pull her gently toward him.

"No. Unhand me." Hermione dug in her heels, and from somewhere in the bushes, Acara began to growl. She prowled into the clearing where their table was and sniffed.

Draco looked at her like she was completely daft for behaving in such away, and he held her tighter. He stood, towering over her. His chanting never stopped, except now they were but a couple of inches apart. Draco looked down at her in combination of utterly jealous possessiveness and complete adoration. Draco smoothed his hand down to her hip and back up again.

Hermione swallowed. "Stop."

Draco's voice stopped, and he looked down expectantly. Both his hands were now working up and down her sides. His gaze was heating and began to wander from her face. On each pass, his hands would get a little more daring.

"Draco. Stop." Hermione turned her cold gaze up at him, even though her body was quickly responding, and Draco could see it all in her face. He shook his head and pulled her closer, licking his lips, getting ready to kiss her. That was until the fire shot through his body, starting at his hands. Hermione's eyes went from brown to churning lava. Draco screamed and fell onto the hard stone bench. "I had thought you were ready to move to the next level, but you have proven that you are not. You'll begin again tomorrow...one week's cleansing meditation, and instead of the fields, you can go to the quarries with Paruin."

Draco began shivering. He held his arms against his torso, and Hermione could tell that he was fighting back tears. Again, Hermione cursed her bleeding heart. Draco was an opportunistic bastard who would do whatever he wanted. Still, she hated to see anyone in pain.

"Give me your hands," Hermione ordered. Draco looked away from her, resisting. *What a child!* Hermione stepped forward and took his hands, weaving their fingers together. She pulled all of the heat she'd put in right back out and watched as Draco's body soothed in response. "You can't just do whatever you like, Draco." He sniffed. Hermione dropped his right hand and turned his face to look at hers. His eyes were watery, and she could see in the dimming daylight that he was humiliated that she was seeing him like this.

"You may speak freely."

"You touched me, you've *been* touching me." He set his jaw, angrily blinking back tears. "You have no idea what it does to me. We sit at this table, and I can't look at you. You're mine, and I can't even look at you!" Draco paused to take a cleansing breath. "I sleep in a room with children, and I lay awake thinking of your... of you and *him*... and I get *one* moment with you and *you burn* me, you bloody fucking cunt." Draco would have liked very much to punch something, but as he was sitting and Hermione was standing in his way. It looked like he had more to say, but he certainly wasn't going speak further.

"What do you want me to do? Allow your misbehaviour? I'd be doing you no favours, not to mention failing at my own task." Hermione crossed her arms and stuck out her chin.

Draco stared at her. His expression didn't change, not even his eyes. Inside, he was doing a high-stepped jig. This was classic hyper-swot mode. It was really only ever used on Potty and the Weasel, sometimes Longbottom, too. And now him, *Draco Malfoy!* How to proceed? Piss her off more for the sport of it? Play the puppy dog, and see if she'd go for it? Draco sighed, looking as downtrodden as he could manage. "Hasn't *anything* I've done, anything at all, changed your mind, even just a little bit?" Draco put his head in his hands and his elbows on his knees. He resisted the urge to look up, knowing that the moment would be lost if he did.

Hermione squinted. Was he being serious or laying it on thick? She didn't really think Draco was just chomping at the bit for her validation, but Merlin only knew the sort of absurd ideas he had in that pretty blond head of his. He had searched the globe for her, given up his wand, done hard manual labour with minimal complaint, and promised to allow her to take other lovers... eventually. Draco certainly had done some things to compromise.

Dammit! Hermione did not want to feel generous toward Malfoy! But the sun was setting, and she seemed to hold his whole world in her hands. *Bollocks.*

Hermione pushed her fingers through Draco's soft blond locks. He looked up at her in surprise. She shook her head, still in disbelief of what was happening, what she was going to let happen. "If you and your *father*..." Hermione sneered at the thought of doing anything more with Lucius Malfoy, "...agree to retract the provisions that I oversee the first part of your training, I will go to the council and request that language lessons are less formal. You will still begin a week's cleansing meditation and go to work in the quarry as punishment for tonight's behaviour." Hermione sighed, enjoying the blond silk on her fingers, unable to keep herself from making a second pass. "You would spend tomorrow back in the colony and begin again the following day."

Internally, Draco was elated. Gryffindors were so *easy*! Sure, Draco would miss seeing Hermione all day, but that was nothing compared to being casual in the evenings. "It would be nice to see my father."

"Fine." Hermione moved away from Draco and gathered her things. "You will still sleep with the initiates tonight."

## Quiet Times

Chapter 15 of 25

Okay, so he'd asked for this perfect hell. If he had just kept his fool trap shut...

The first night after Draco spent the day in the quarry was a quiet one. He slumped down on the bench, completely exhausted from the day's labour. Where the first day with the scythe had left him frustrated and sore, the first day in the quarry left him demoralised mentally and physically. Draco couldn't help but lay his head down on the table and let his eyes close.

"Not like the fields, is it?" Hermione asked as she put her materials on the table in her usual orderly fashion.

Draco's only reply was a grunt. He was so exhausted that he couldn't even open his eyes.

"I take it you don't have the stamina for verbal practice tonight." Hermione stared at him coldly.

Draco tried to push himself off the tabletop, but couldn't. His arms quivered, and one hand slipped, scraping the underside of his wrist.

Hermione sighed. "Fine. Go and sleep, but you'll do double tomorrow."

Hermione turned and cleared her things away, leaving him without a word. Hearing her feet quiet in the distance, Draco succumbed to his exhaustion and fell asleep with his face on the table. He stayed until the middle of the night, when he woke up with a start to find Isova waiting to take him back to the initiates' house.

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A few days later, Hermione was wrapping up what could easily be called the best co-operative study session of her life. Draco was clearly approaching his task with renewed vigour, and Hermione was reminded of the pride that Severus had always shown in Draco's potions all those years. She had always chalked it up to Slytherin favouritism, but now she truly felt that Draco's intellect was formidable.

Hermione could feel herself being impressed by that, and she scowled at herself, her mouth pinching closed. She would not entertain any further reasons that Draco Malfoy might be something more than the Ferret of her school days.

"You told Ariulo everything about that night, didn't you?" Draco's quiet voice suddenly broke Hermione out of her reverie.

"What?" Hermione shook her head slightly to clear her thoughts. She didn't realise that moves like this tossed her hair gently about her face. It was maddening for Draco to see those soft curls bouncing around her eyes, her little nose, her perfect lips. She was so unconsciously pretty; that was one of the things he loved about her. Luckily, he saw her mouth begin to move, so he turned the audio back on in time to hear her say, "Of course, I have to report back to the council about your progress, only slightly more so than the other initiates."

"I could tell. Ariulo was... reserved at breakfast." Draco turned away and looked at the water where the sun had just set.

"Reserved?" Hermione's damned curiosity prevented her from holding her tongue.

"Well, he would look at me, and it was like... I don't know. It made me feel uncomfortable."

"It's called guilt, Draco." Hermione huffed, pulling her satchel onto her shoulder. "It's what keeps *most* people from behaving atrociously. I can see how that might be unfamiliar to you." Turning away from him, she flounced away, feeling unsettled for some reason she couldn't quite put her finger on.

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The next evening, Draco picked up where they'd left off. "So, you tell Ariulo everything?" he asked as he worked out a lengthy translation he needed to have done so he could advance to the fourth level. He'd been stuck at the third for weeks longer than he thought was reasonable, especially when Hermione let it slip that it had only taken her twenty-six days to complete this phase.

"What?" Hermione said distractedly. She had just received a wire brush via post, and she was brushing Acara thoroughly. Huge clumps of fur were blowing away on the breeze.

"You tell Ariulo everything. You have no secrets from him." Draco's quill nimbly worked as he spoke.

"Nearly, but no, there are things that I don't tell him. Harry and Ron are still my best friends. And Luna and Ginny."

"You could tell me things." Draco's nonchalant declaration stopped Hermione's hand brushing suddenly. She looked over at him, mouth unabashedly hanging open and her eyes wide in shock. She stared for a full two minutes before the sting of Acara's tail slapping Hermione's thighs pulled her out of it.

Hermione gently *thwapped* Acara's belly in response before restarting the brushing. "Yes, since we have so much in common."

"I'm glad you see it my way." Draco fought hard to keep the smirk off his face, having clearly ignored her heavy sarcasm.

"Malfoy, listen..." Hermione started to say, but Draco's head jerked up and he stared her down. Hermione scowled back at him. Draco matched her scowl. However, his was more practiced, and Hermione lost her nerve in short order. She rolled her eyes. When she looked back at him, she found him stalking toward her.

"I'm sorry, *Princess*, but I don't think I heard you *correctly*." Draco squatted gracefully in front of her, his forearms balanced on his knees. The undertones of correction and discipline in his voice were not missed by Hermione. He wouldn't touch her again, no matter how he longed to hold her chin with his thumb and forefinger, but that was a non-issue. Force is the weapon of the weak, and Draco knew he could get his point across without it. "What did you call me?"

Hermione looked at Acara. She didn't care for what Draco was doing, but was it worth a battle? She had genuinely slipped up; he'd been 'Draco' for only a few weeks and 'Malfoy' nearly all her magical life. She shook her head. "What difference does it make?"

"We aren't at Hogwarts anymore, Princess. Why keep up bad habits?" Draco began to lean into her, closer and closer until there were just millimetres between the tips of their noses. She could feel his breath on her chin, and even surprised herself when she inhaled his scent deeply. Her nostrils flared, and she noticed that he noticed.

"Go finish your work, Draco," Hermione conceded, desperate to him away from her.

"One question first?" Draco leaned back only far enough to run his eyes down her neck and up over her face.

"You mean in addition to that one."

Draco couldn't help but smile softly at her swottiness. "Yes, Lady."

"And then you'll go over there and finish your work?" Hermione flicked her eyes to the table. Draco nodded softly. Hermione turned her face to his in silent acknowledgement.

"Don't you miss tea? In the mornings, Earl Grey with just a splash of milk and honey?" Draco watched her for a reaction. He knew Potty and the Weasel didn't know how she took her tea in the mornings. Frankly, they didn't need to, since he did.

Hermione didn't know how to answer that question. Sometimes she did get the bug for a nice cup of tea made properly, but it wasn't as though she was wandering about in search of one. Besides, Draco's proximity was getting to her.

"I get by," Hermione finally muttered and tried to wave Draco away with a pointed look at the table and a few flicks of her wrist. She then set herself to the task of finishing with Acara, determined to ignore Draco looking at her appraisingly.

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"What's the most interesting sexual position you've ever been in, Hermione?" Draco asked quietly over his translation work.

"What?" Hermione asked with a furrowed brow, totally confused by the seemingly random question. She was a few feet away from Draco, curled up with Acara in a low chair, reading, while Draco worked. Hermione liked studying with Draco; he had drive and caught onto things quickly. He did not blather about Quidditch. Although, with whom would he blather? Better to reserve that judgement for now.

Draco carefully set down his quill and turned to look at her, letting his eyes look her all over. Hermione had been late coming from the library expansion, so she hadn't changed out of her work clothes. His transfer into Paruin's watch three months ago had been... fruitful. Even though Paruin had just had the baby, she was back in charge with the baby slung across her chest after two weeks. She lost the weight quickly, and for the first time ever, Draco was sort of relieved that he had agreed to copulate with the lady mages. Paruin was lovely, she made no excuses for wanting the young wizard, and Draco was starting to be curious as to what his child would look like coming from her womb.

Isova, who he saw in the afternoons, was lovely as well, and for the first time since the Dark Lord fell, Draco was free to consider all his basest instincts. Apart from the endless stream of lady mages, he would have Hermione in his bed nightly. Draco was feeling very optimistic about life in general.

It was nearly four months into his training, he wasn't breezing through as quickly as Hermione had, but Draco was getting through his training at an accelerated rate. In the mornings he did the physically hard work with Paruin. Afternoons were spent with Isova, trying to re-route his magical wirings. Maybe because Draco had always known he was a wizard, it was harder for him. Hermione hadn't known for her whole life what magic she could do, so she was used to acquainting herself with new ways. Then, in the evenings, he would sit after dinner with his fiancée until the sun set. Life was good.

Draco cleared his throat, ready again to broach the question that had been nibbling at his conscious and subconscious minds more and more lately. "I don't want to know about the *Muggle*. However, I am interested in what you have done and what you would like to try. I'm sure my uncle... kept you on your toes." Draco still hated thinking about that Muggle and his Hermione, but had gotten over the information as much as he could, considering how much it had shifted his universe.

"You want to know what Severus and I did?" Hermione asked incredulously. "I thought you were disgusted by how I whored around with him." Hermione gave him a look he knew well from that time when the Weasel had latched on to Brown via their faces. He was in the doghouse. He knew he should feel guilty, but just knowing that she had a doghouse for him meant that he was slowly seeping into her heart.

Draco strained to keep a straight face. "Well, Hermione, I must admit that I put you on a rather high pedestal. However, in light of various new factors, I think I prefer to let you tell me first and accommodate myself to what is actually pertinent to you."

Hermione muttered under her breath something that sounded like, "How novel!" She looked out over the cliffs. "Fine, what was the question again?" Hermione had grown accustomed to giving these little scraps to Draco when he'd been well behaved. Not having to deal with him all day like she had before was nice, and she was able to settle into a routine. It was almost as if she were dating him. She'd go out in the mornings to work in the field or play with the kids, help the council, work on the library, and come here after dinner for quiet time with Draco. There were worse ways to spend an arranged marriage, she supposed.

"What is the most interesting sexual position you've ever been in?" Draco asked again slowly, drawing out the words.

Hermione's eyes focused on nothing in particular, and she licked her lips slowly. Draco had to breathe very slowly to keep himself from getting a full erection just watching her, knowing what she was thinking about.

"For him, or me?"

Oh...Draco hadn't considered the implications of his question. Of course something might be more interesting for one partner than the other. "You...and when I say interesting, I mean in every sense of the word: stimulating, provocative, everything."

Hermione blushed, and Draco knew it would be good. Virgins were all well and good; being able to pick the cherry was a prize in itself. Also, the opportunity to train her and discover her while she discovered as well would have been excellent. However, if she already knew what she liked, he wouldn't have to waste time on faulty experiments.

"I used to have..." Hermione hesitated, looking away from Draco, blushing furiously. "I can't say; I really can't."

"Bollocks! Gryffindor bravery, yeah? Come on, then." Draco walked over and crouched by where Hermione was sitting. He wasn't about to let her back out now. Seeing that she wasn't going to budge, Draco was willing to play dirty. "Please?" Draco looked up at her with the perfect blend of shy interest and lascivious intent. Hermione blushed again.

"Fine. Fine. I used to have this outfit." Hermione smiled, looking very young, as she really was, once the authority and focus were taken away from her face. She was about to continue when Draco interrupted...

"What did it look like?" His eyes sparkled, trying not to imagine, lest he miss what she actually said.

"Oh! I can't believe I'm even *considering* telling you this!" Hermione had found the ensemble in a Muggle lingerie catalogue about a month after she'd started with Snape, and she'd got it as a laugh... sort of. Looking back at Draco, Hermione rolled her eyes. "It was satin, and Slytherin green, all right? There was a bra that barely covered my nip..." Hermione stopped talking a second as Draco's eyes got wider. "...Nipples, and there was a little skirt that barely covered half my arse, and there were the shoes."

Draco swallowed loudly. "Shoes?"

Hermione was feeling her face flush over and over again, and she tried to keep her breathing slow. "Yeah, well, boots, really, black stiletto boots with rivets up them, and green laces. And..." Hermione was interrupted as Draco turned his head to the side, eyes closed, picturing Hermione, hair down her back in such a get-up. Merlin, his hard-on was nearing painful proportions. Draco sighed and turned his finger in a circle, gesturing that she could continue.

"And Severus would spell my wrists and forearms to the wall, at shoulder level, and he'd pull my hips back until my back was to an angle on the wall. My tits would start to fall out of the bra, and my arse would stick out a little bit..."

Draco touched her arm gently, and Hermione jumped a little at the usual jolt they shared when they hadn't touched in a while. "That's quite enough." Draco dropped his head down to look at the ground and catch his breath.

Okay, so he'd asked for this perfect hell. If he had just kept his fool trap shut, he would not have the image of sixteen-year-old Hermione falling out of green satin with her arse out ready to be mounted. Of course she wouldn't give him a simple 'doggy-style' or 'bent over a table.' No, she would paint a picture of her image in everything a nineteen-year-old man would wank off to.

"What? You don't think that's kinky eno..." Hermione retorted indignantly only to be interrupted by his hand clapping down on her arm.

"No, you daft bint, I'm just trying to let my cock soften enough that I can stand up." Draco didn't even look up as he talked, knowing that to see her would loosen all his control, and he'd take her on that chair, damn the cat, the colony, and the contract.

"Oh!" Hermione exclaimed softly, now feeling embarrassed for him. "Should I, erm, go?" Draco swallowed and nodded his head softly. "Okay...well, um, finish the translation for tomorrow, and um... goodnight, Draco." Hermione skittered out of the clearing and up to her cottage with Acara sauntering beside her.

Once he couldn't hear her any more, Draco fell on to his back, his cock making a giant tent in his loose initiate's pants. Snape in a tutu. Dumbledore in a bikini. Weasel in a thong. Crabbe and Goyle snogging. McGonagall's saggy tits. Trelawney naked. At last, relief!

## The End of the Beginning

### *Chapter 16 of 25*

Draco was laughing riotously, something he'd never done in his entire life.

Draco's body hit the ground hard as his rapid metabolism processed the sacred herbs and opiates.

His first awareness was of being held inside the coiled body of a pure white dragon. He rubbed his eyes, gently climbing down from his resting place. He was unaware of the dragon's eye as it followed him into the dreamscape.

Draco passed through the steaming exhalation from the dragon's nearest nostril. Everything was green, as if paint had been spilled across the entire backdrop. Draco longed to go explore the new place, but every which way he turned, something kept him within arm's reach of the motionless beast.

He was trapped. Draco walked around and around, trailing his fingers on the perimeter's barrier. Draco knew it was an illusion; he needed only to figure a way out of the cage.

After thirty-eight laps around the green wall, Draco's fingers detected a snag. He stopped suddenly, turning to look at the spot. There seemed to be a handle hanging from the mouth of a Chimaera on one side and in the bent arms of a siren in the other. Draco pulled with all the might he could muster, and the green scenery uncoiled along the circumference of whatever was keeping Draco and the dragon wherever they were.

What appeared on the other side stopped the man in his tracks. Draco had come upon a grand estate in shambles. He knew instantaneously that it was Malfoy Manor. Bending down to pick up a piece of the entrance way, Draco knew what it was. He wiped off the dust from the copper plaque and read the too-familiar words.

Malfoi...Toujours Pur

Draco lost himself looking at the shining surface. He could see his face in it, and then his father's face, then his grandfather's face. Each face was just a variation of the last, as Draco saw countless generations of pale men pass before his eyes. At the very last face of his very earliest ancestor, the plaque began to dissolve and crumble like sand from his hand. A wind had come up behind him; it blew away all of the rubble of what had been.

The ruins of the grand estate remained, broken walls jutting up and marking its three-dimensional blueprint. Draco stood silently for a moment before moving to investigate again. Before he could make even three steps into the ruins, they seemed to burst into flames. Draco leapt back, blocking the heat from his face with his arm.

He watched the ruins burn and burn, unaware of even the concept of time, let alone how much was passing. Finally the flames receded to embers. Once the embers turned black, Draco dropped to his knees and wept. Everything was gone; it was all over. Once his tears were spent, he caught his breath and once again made his way to stand where his ancestral home had once been.

His progress was immediately halted as the earth below him began to shake. With every second it grew more violent, and Draco soon found that he could not retreat fast enough. The ground was falling out from under his feet, and Draco was sure it would be his end.

His panicking lasted as long as his weeping had. However, a familiar burst of steam brought Draco's mind back to the forefront, and Draco realised that although there was no dirt under his feet, he was not falling to his inevitable end. Instead, where Malfoy Manor had been just moments or hours ago, there was just falling earth. Draco stared out and wondered. His thoughts were simultaneously specific and abstract. He felt in that moment that he understood nothing, and he was surprisingly pleased by that.

Draco was pulled from his stoic observation by the gentle pressure of the dragon's skull on his back. He turned, the last flows of dirt forgotten, and looked up at the dragon who now stood at its full height. Draco could tell now that it wasn't pure white, but that some of the scales were shades of blue. Draco reached out a trembling hand to touch it.

The beast was hot and smooth. Draco was lost again; this time it was in wonderment of what was before him. The dragon was large enough that Draco was sure he could be swallowed whole in one go, and the tail seemed to curl around for metres and metres. The dragon pushed the flat of his skull against Draco's shoulder and pulled back to eye Draco from one side. Draco couldn't help but think that the dragon was trying to play with him.

With that in mind, Draco extended one arm and pressed the dragon's snout away, a timid smile playing on its lips. A shot of steam came out of the dragon, and it blinked slowly at Draco. It hesitated just long enough to cause Draco some concern. However, a gentle shoving match ensued, and before he knew it, Draco was laughing riotously, something he'd never done in his entire life.

Draco was unaware when water seemed to rush up from where the earth had just fallen, and his playing continued as he and the dragon were fully submerged in what could only be classified as a water lift.

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Hermione was surprised when laughter filled the temple. The mages had gathered to the main pavilion to receive Draco after his quest. The saunas where many left their bodies as their souls went abroad were below the pavilion. Millions of years ago, the elements had dug out the precursors to the rooms, and little had been needed to incorporate them into the temple.

Hermione looked up, and her breath caught as she watched Draco being led into the main rise where the council was standing. A small dragon was circling his head, occasionally landing on either shoulder as it called out. Everything about Draco's posture was changed, a fluidity marking every movement.

"My son," Isova said and smiled when Draco knelt before her. Even though he was kneeling, the top of his head came to her shoulder. She took his face in her hands and began chanting. Draco's voice soon joined, as did those of all the Water Mages present. After the initial chorus, the other mages began to sing as well.

After the processional out of the temple and back to the main part of the colony had finished, there was a great feast. As was customary, Draco was surrounded by fellow Water Mages for the first part. Hermione had seen Lucius go off with Maank. Since Lucius was not a mage, he couldn't enter the temple, but Maank had agreed to allow Lucius to use Legilimens on him afterward. Hermione was sitting with Ariulo, Paruin, and their new baby, gently stroking Acara and feeling the peace she always did after a great ceremony.

Hermione couldn't help but watch her betrothed. She imagined that this is what it must have been like in the Slytherin common room all those years. Everyone was sitting around, seeming lithe and glamorous. There were no bold or brash movements. When she'd come out of her quest, every Fire Mage had rushed upon her. Some had swept her up in great hugs; other gesticulated broadly in their excitement. Her matriculation had resulted in a ruckus.

Hermione had seen initiates move into each of the elements over her time there. The Earths were the most understated, but their good-humour tended to last the longest. Air Mages seemed to have some of the Waters' fluidity, but also the excitement of Fires. Sometimes, Hermione was covetous. When Ariulo noticed, he would flick little balls of fire at her, and Hermione would give her mind back to her spirit and enjoy the fire.

Paruin was leaning against Hermione's shoulder, facing away slightly when Hermione heard her speak. "The Dragon has begun staring."

"He has," Hermione confirmed. Now that someone had voiced what she had been trying not to acknowledge, she began to panic. Hermione had met his gaze a handful of times, but it was too much for her. The sound of his laughter rang in her ears, and she was truly at a loss.

"He has," Paruin parroted smugly.

"What? Paruin, you are such a ninny sometimes!" Hermione turned her head toward the other woman. It was a convenient excuse to not have to look at Draco for a moment.

"You need a ninny in your life, Hermione! Look at how he stares at you! This night should be his, and yet his thoughts already turn to you." Paruin leaned forward to put the now fussing baby to her breast beneath her robes.

Hermione tried to subtly turn her head towards Draco. His father had just clapped him on the back. Hermione was shocked at the sight. Lucius was beaming with pride unlike anything she'd ever seen before. Draco looked at his father with unbridled appreciation. Hermione was nearly positive it was the first time she'd ever witnessed such a thing out of either of them.

Paruin began speaking again. "He will be good for the village, I think. Occasionally, we need some new ways." Hermione watched in silence, neither confirming nor denying. Draco was now holding the tiny dragon securely in one arm as his other arm swept out over his head. It looked as though he was trying to recount his quest to his father. Draco caught her looking at him again, and his eyes widened before he turned away, showing the dragon to his father again.

The festival was to carry on for a few more hours, but Hermione made her excuses shortly thereafter. She slipped away with Acara for one more solitary night in her cottage. Since Draco had finished his Mage training, they would be heading for Britain the next day.

## Homeward Bound

### *Chapter 17 of 25*

Hermione was more nervous the next day than she had been in her whole life, including the day she stepped onto the Hogwarts Express.

Hermione was more nervous the next day than she had been in her whole life, including the day she stepped onto the Hogwarts Express. They were to Portkey to Malfoy Manor any minute. She was worried about Acara; she knew she could Portkey with her, but still, even when they got there, it certainly wouldn't be home.

Lucius and Draco were clearing out their guest house, Lucius having resided there for over a year as Draco studied. Hermione had keyed him in on how to keep in touch with the outside world after Draco had gone to Paruin, and Lucius had ultimately returned to taking business appointments in the mornings (afternoons in Britain), chatting with Narcissa in the afternoons (evenings in Britain), and then socialising in the colony after dinner. He was, of course, quite the social climber and was a favourite both at dinner and after.

Hermione looked around her cottage. She didn't need to pack. She had a few souvenirs in a bag for her friends, but it wasn't as though she was moving back. She was getting a whole new Malfoy-approved wardrobe when she got there. It was a very strange feeling. The contract stated that she could spend up to one third of the year away from the Colony in total, but never more than three weeks at a time. Draco could spend half a year away, but with the same duration limit on individual visits.

Their first three weeks were already planned: wedding preparations, wedding, post-wedding. Hermione was especially unsure of this part, but she tried to keep her nervousness at bay. The optimist in her just kept thinking of seeing all the familiar faces she couldn't wait to see again. Hermione softly drummed her fingers on the table in the centre of her cottage. Malfoys apparently needed all morning to get ready for a Portkey.

"You know it's autumn at home," Lucius drawled from the doorway, startling Hermione out of her reverie. "You'll be rather chilled if you show up in that sleeveless thing." He looked her over in her lavender Mage's robes. Lucius knew Draco had told her to gain weight, and they both hoped that she would comply. Watching Cissy's miscarriages had been the worst trials of his life. Clearly, Hermione had not gained an ounce although it wasn't that the girl didn't eat, because she had a hearty appetite. Perhaps a trip to Honeydukes was in order.

"London isn't home any more, and I have my Hogwarts cloak." Hermione pointed at her chair where her school cloak was laid out like an artefact. "Besides, we're going directly to the Manor, aren't we?"

Lucius chuckled. It was very hard for him to remember that this witch did not need the same designer cloak in three different colours each season. Draco tapped him on the shoulder, and the older man ducked to the side so Draco could come into the room. His dragon, Lodus, was peaking out from the flap of a customised satchel that lay across Draco's chest. It was only a hatchling, so it was about eight inches long from the end of its snout to the tip of its tail. Hermione had to fight to keep from cooing at it, but it seemed to eye her curiously, and she almost couldn't help herself.

Her fiancée was holding something behind his back and looking very smug. "It is improper to travel in this season without a proper cloak. Since you dropped out of school, we can't allow you to parade around in that. You'll have to wear this instead." Draco presented her with a bundle with a big white bow on it. Hermione looked between the two men, equal parts suspicious and intrigued. "Open it, you daft bint; we have a busy day back at home. It's nearly two o'clock!"

Hermione set the package on her table and pulled open the bow, watching as it unveiled a beautiful velvet travelling cloak in deep purple. Hermione's eyes went wide as saucers, and she let out an indelicate gasp. She lifted it up and it felt like heaven in her fingers. "Oh, this is too much!" Hermione said in earnest. She'd never even seen anything so nice in her life!

Lucius chuckled in the background. Draco relieved her of her burden and indicated for her to turn so he could put it on her. As he did, he whispered into her ear, nipping occasionally. "Malfoys always get the best." He breathed out heavily. "As Lady Malfoy, the same will apply to you." He pressed his hands down her shoulders and arms, finally enjoying his hard-earned prize.

"Oh! Thank you!" Hermione couldn't muster up the energy to be indignant about their collective arrogance. It was truly a good gift and, as such, deserved her sincere appreciation.

"Flame-proof with a repellent charm for pet hair," Lucius added sardonically. Hermione rolled her eyes at the man on the opposite side of the room. She was so distracted by him that she was unable to resist Draco's embrace.

In the time since his training had started, he'd lost all signs of boyhood, except for the freckles. Draco was strong and hard-bodied, his arms encompassing her securely. He dropped his mouth to her ear, asking, "You really like it?"

"Yes, I really do, Draco." Hermione looked at him and even gave him a peck on the cheek. Draco's jaw dropped a little, but his mouth stayed shut. Hermione hated herself a little for it, but she couldn't take it back.

"How touching," Lucius cut in loudly, clearly getting impatient. "Portkey, children, Portkey!" Lucius moved the curtain of Hermione's door out of the way and strode out of the cottage. Hermione took her chance to get free of Draco and followed Lucius, Acara trailing right behind her.

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Britain was unbelievably cold! Hermione, who had not had to think too much about insulation in nearly two years, was shocked to find herself shivering in the single digit temperatures. Intellectually she knew that this wasn't so cold...it was even mild for October...but Merlin's frozen knob, she was freezing!

She had survived the Manor tour and tea with the Malfoys. The paintings had stared at her in open curiosity or utter disgust, and the house-elves were... curt. Hermione kept up a mantra, listing all her friends she would see tonight with a time countdown. Three hours to go! Two hours to go! Ninety minutes! She nodded politely, trying not to be baited by her soon-to-be mother-in-law. Acara was by her side the whole time, and after one especially pointed comment, Hermione was half-tempted to let her beast drink out of the centuries-old goblin-wrought silver just for spite.

Draco seemed to pick up on this, though, and abbreviated the whole affair, to Lucius' relief and Narcissa's annoyance. "Hermione, would you like to freshen up before we see your friends?" He had laid down his silverware pre-emptively and was moving to get her before she could even voice her answer.

Draco showed her to her suite and left her to get ready himself. He would be leaving Lodus behind in a specialized addition to his father's aviary. Since the dragon was still just hatched, it would have to stay in an enclosure when it couldn't be with Draco. Isova had instructed that he not spend more than eight hours away at any given time and that Draco would have to be especially attentive in this delicate phase of the dragon's life.

Hermione's rooms were absurdly lavish and made Hermione miss her cottage and her hammock and her little clay hearth. Acara, on the other hand, jumped right to the centre of the sinfully soft bed and made herself quite at home. Hermione stripped down to her skivvies and walked to scratch Acara on the belly before she wandered into the loo. It had taken her breath away the first time, and even after knowing what to expect, Hermione was breathless as she opened the door again. The stonework, the tiles, the carvings, the everything! It was as close to being over the top without actually going over.

Coming out of an extended hot shower, Hermione towelled off and pulled a pair of denims and a t-shirt out of a secret compartment of her bag. Hermione pulled on the dark, high-waisted denims with stovepipe legs and placard front. She loved the feel of slight stretch on her backside. The colony may be her home, but she still had a little place in her heart for London's fashion scene. Next came a tissue thin t-shirt, dark red with a bright golden lion screen-printed on it. The sleeves were short enough to show off her biceps. She was looking at herself in a mirror that stretched from floor to ceiling, nearly twenty feet tall, considering cosmetics, when she heard Draco from the doorway.

"If my mother ever saw you in something soMuggle..." Draco closed the door and leaned against it. He was wearing a pale green oxford shirt and dark grey slacks. It was simple, but clearly high quality. He had a dark grey cloak over his shoulder, making him look rather dapper.

"I'm not changing."

"I am not my mother. Your arse looks great in those trousers, and it's been a long time since I took a bird out, even if it is to a Gryffindor party." Draco sneered the end.

"You don't have to go," Hermione said simply.

"And let Weasels make drunken grabs at your arse? I think not! Besides, you don't know how to get out of here without using the main doors, and I'd like to see you explain to my mother why you are walking around like that."

"Fine, but play nice." Hermione did one more thorough shake-out of her short, curly hair in the mirror. This room had lots of them, and Hermione was confused by this a little...she hadn't used a mirror since Maank had told her of the brand.

"I will if they will." Draco's reply was ominous.

"Good, I'll get my cloak." Hermione walked across the room toward the wardrobe where she'd been instructed her things were. When she opened it, not only was her purple cloak in there, but there was a rainbow of them to select from. She shot a questioning look at Draco, but he just smirked. "This is obscene! I could wear a different cloak every day of our stay here!"

"And you haven't even gone shopping yet," Draco reminded her as he walked to the wardrobe and grabbed a navy cloak to complement her denims. The clock on the mantel chimed the half hour as Draco smoothed out the perfect fabric over Hermione's strong shoulders. Hermione shivered when his hot breath tickled her neck. "You

know, I could think of some other ways to occupy our time, if you like." Draco dared a kiss on her brand and enjoyed her second shiver.

"No, my friends are waiting, let's go," Hermione said, pulling the cloak around her. "Acara, come!" Acara got up and bounded through the room. Hermione shoved Draco firmly on his shoulder, and he smirked at her and her hasty need to escape. With a practised flick of his wrist, he unfurled his cloak and secured it around him, and they went out one of the dozen back doors of the Manor, Draco Apparating them to the corner nearest number twelve, Grimmauld Place.

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Draco had been standing in the outside doorway, watching as Hermione got passed around the room nearly three times, receiving hugs from all of her friends, some professors, and some Order members. He seemed to have been totally forgotten until Loony Lovegood turned toward him. "Mr. Malfoy, won't you come in? I'll take your cloak."

"Thank you," Draco said, looking around. This was his cousin's old house. His great aunt's portrait was still in the foyer, but silenced these many years. She appeared to look at him, and as if smelling some horrible stink, scrunched up her nose and began shouting silently at him. He could almost hear her when her little painted mouth formed the words, 'Blood Traitor!' He rolled his eyes at the old bat and gave her the two finger salute. One of those fingers just happened to have the Malfoy Crest on it.

Draco turned from the portrait to see Luna walking toward the party in what looked to be a ballroom. It was pretty full for a party in honour of a girl who had been a quiet bookworm and a stoic heroine. Hermione was being pulled around the room so quickly that Acara had to retreat. She moved to sit by Draco where he was leaning on the doorway. Feeling her tail curl around his leg, Draco noted, "Yes, Acara, it's going to be a long evening."

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When Draco had had three Firewhiskies, he started to not give a fuck that he'd spent all those months with Hermione while her friends were half a world away. They could have come to visit, so why the fuck should he spare any time for them? Giving Acara a quick scratch by the ear, he ventured to the centre of the ballroom where Hermione was surrounded by Weasels and a Potter. He rubbed his chest firmly, and Hermione's eyes shot up to look for him. She had half a drink in her hand, and it looked like she was feeling pretty loose. As he walked up to the group, she said, "Ello, Draco! And welcome to the gun show!" She finished by flexing her arms and kissing her biceps.

Harry and a couple others laughed, but not everyone, and Draco felt better that he wasn't totally out of the joke. "Is this a Muggle thing?"

Harry, feeling drunk and ecstatic that his best friend was back, leaned over to Draco and said loudly over the music, "Yeah! Biceps... Guns... Hermione's ripped. I'm sort of intimidated!"

"You would be, Potter." Draco chuckled into his drink. He nearly choked when someone clapped his back and pulled him into a masculine hug.

"Draco Malfoy, the only prick big enough to insult the host of the party!" Blaise Zabini boomed at his long-time friend.

"Zabini? What are you doing here?" Draco breathed a sigh of relief; he'd had enough of the company of Hermione's cat for the night.

"Dating the lovely Luna...a lot has changed since you went globe-trotting." As he spoke the words, Luna sidled up on Blaise's other side, two shots and two mixed drinks in her hand. Luna and Blaise did the shots and leaned on each other, enjoying the group dynamic.

Ron rolled his eyes at Draco, not thrilled to see him, but Hermione's friends had decided as a group to put up with him for Hermione's sake. She'd be a Malfoy in a matter of days. "I bet she could beat you at arm wrestling."

Hermione shook her head, laughing. "Oh, no! Maybe before, but he's been working in a quarry for a year! He's got his own gun show, trust me." All the boys in the room turned to look at Hermione's strange declaration, while all the girls turned to Draco to validate the statement.

The music thumped a few beats before Blaise said, "Show 'em, mate!"

All the while Draco was looking at Hermione, who'd just loudly revealed that she'd been keeping up on the status of his physique. She was beet red and drained her drink rather quickly. It wouldn't be the first time he'd stripped for a crowd because Blaise had required it. However, it was the first time with this crowd. Once Hermione had finished her drink and was looking at him sheepishly again, Draco began untucking his shirt, and all the girls let out a high pitched, 'Woo!' Once his shirt was off, he threw it at Hermione, who caught it numbly. She couldn't help looking at his pale, rippled torso with a slack jaw and eyes glazed with lust and whiskey. Somewhere she heard Ginny say something about grating cheese, but the noise of the party was just swirling around her ears.

Draco reached forward and pulled Hermione to him, turning her so they were back to front. "All right, Granger, flex!" Harry, Ron, and Ginny were scowling, flabbergasted as Draco put his arm around Hermione, bending just enough so that their flexed arms were together. He looked critically at their arms, Hermione giggling and blushing, very aware of Draco's bare chest behind her. "I think Granger wins. Back to the mines with me!"

Hermione was a moment behind on everything, so as she was considering Draco's self-deprecation, he had already pulled her out of the circle, taking his shirt back. He put it on but left it open and pushed Hermione toward the kitchen. Once inside, he cast a spell to keep the door still, and then he pressed Hermione against it.

"You've been watching me, Hermione?" Draco, being back in Britain, even if it was just Potty's house, felt like his old self again, and seeing all of these people brought it out even more. Hermione's face had apparently flushed pink permanently, whether it was from booze or embarrassment Draco wasn't sure, but he liked it. She nodded softly. "Are you drunk, Hermione?" She nodded again.

Draco let his hands smooth over her body for the first time since they'd fought over a year ago. He'd been as chaste as possible, but being back home spoiled his resolve. "Will you burn me again, even though I can see you like it?" Draco pushed both his hands up to grab her breasts, massaging carefully. Hermione moaned loudly in negative. "Two years is a long time to make a wizard wait, Hermione. Do you know how many times I've wanked thinking about you?" Hermione shook her head as Draco found her nipples, rolling them firmly. He leaned his mouth beside her right ear, whispering breathlessly, "Every night, Hermione. Every night, and sometimes in the mornings. Tossing off to your pretty mouth, or your tight cunt. You may not be a virgin, but you are tight, aren't you? Tight and wet for me?" Draco finished by pulling her nipples away from her body and letting her tits drop and bounce in front of him.

Draco took a few minutes to lick and bite Hermione's neck, sucking and leaving bruises like he'd been secretly planning to since fifth year. Hermione was cooing and keening beneath him, arching against the door, pleading incompletely. After a few minutes, someone pounded on the opposite side of the door, shouting, "'Mione?"

"Oh, your bodyguards want you, sounds like the Weasel," Draco whispered, reaching down and grabbing Hermione's thighs, lifting her up and pinning her between the door and his cock. "Tell them you are fine."

"'M fine, Ron!" Hermione yelled as Draco started pushing his hands up under her shirt and started working the buttons on her pants.

"Are you Imperiused?"

Draco smirked, lifting Hermione's shirt ever higher.

"One fish two fish, Ron!"

Draco's mouth sealed over her ear, licking and flicking it sinfully.

"Fine, you got five minutes 'til we storm the kitchen, and your cat's going bonkers out here!" Draco pulled back and rolled his eyes. Hermione rolled her head in the opposite direction and closed her eyes, willing her mind to catch up with her body.

"Acara! Settle!" Hermione shouted as Draco's mouth found her nipple through her bra. Hermione heard the cat run up and paw at the door. "Settle, Lady!" A heavy thump

settled on the other side of the door. "Draco, ooooooh..." she moaned as his mouth switched nipples, his hard cock grinding into her. "You should stop." Draco vanished her bra and began lapping at the valley between her tits. "Do you really want Ron to find us shagging in the kitchen?"

"You want to shag me, Hermione?" Draco helped her to wrap her legs around his waist. "With all your friends in the other room?" Draco sealed their mouths together, kissing her forcefully until he felt her arms around his neck and her hips rolling against him. "Do you want me to stick my prick inside that tight cunt, Hermione?" Draco said, pulling back. His eyes were dark and glazed. He reached up and pinched her nipple. "Answer me."

"Yes, Draco, I want you," Hermione declared, rubbing her nose against his neck.

"Good." Draco smirked and put her back on the ground. Hermione leaned into him, confused. Draco just stepped back and buttoned his shirt a couple of times in the middle; the effect was... delish. "Mind your trousers, Granger." Hermione looked down to see how dishevelled she was. She blushed and turned around to straighten herself.

Draco was having none of that and stepped forward enough to pull her against him. "I am going to fuck you, but not in Potter's kitchen. Not the first time, at least. We'll be married in four days, you can wait, just like you made me wait." Well, not just like I waited, Draco thought...he was planning on taking ample liberties with her in the days to come.

"My bra?" Hermione looked around.

"Vanished." Draco smiled, stepping away from her and releasing the spells from the door. Acara, who had been leaning heavily against the door, fell through and rolled over, but she quickly leaped up to coil herself around Hermione's legs. "Don't keep your friends waiting." Draco waved, leering at her tits as he entered the party, making a beeline for Blaise.

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Blaise was standing by himself, watching Luna and Hannah Abbott dancing Muggle-style in the centre of the room. Draco clapped his childhood friend on the back and moved to stand so they could both watch Hermione come through the kitchen door. It took a couple minutes, but eventually she came, Acara held like a baby over her shoulder. Hermione went straight to Ginny, whispered something in her ear, and then dragged the girl from the room. All the while, Hermione's one unobstructed breast swayed nicely without her bra in place to hold it still, and Draco could see his marks on her neck.

Blaise smiled broadly at Draco. "Looks like I owe you a Knut, mate. Now, let's see Granger's bra." The men adjusted their positions so they faced away from the party for the moment.

Draco, who could now do wandless magic as though he'd never used a wand in his life, flicked his fingers, and Hermione's lace bra appeared in his hands. He raised it to his nose and enjoyed the combination of Hermione's natural scent, her perfume, and the inevitable musk of a sweaty party and snogging. Draco was glad his pants were charmed to look perfect all the time, otherwise the major tent he was pitching would have caused many people in the room a good deal of dismay.

Blaise reached over and grabbed it, tagging the time, date, location, and the initials DM,HG on it. Finally he pressed his Slytherin signet ring into it. "Better late than never. I'll make sure my cousin gets it where it goes." Blaise shrank Hermione's bra, making sure it would be preserved for posterity in the secret trophy room that the Slytherin boys kept. While technically not a student conquest, since they weren't attending school, there was an empty place waiting for the evidence of Draco's victory. Now they had it.

Slamming the door to the room Ginny and Hermione had always shared at Grimmauld Place, Hermione dumped Acara on the bed and whirled around. She was a little off-kilter, what with all the booze in her system, but she and Ginny caught each other. Neither girl noticed the cat sniff disinterestedly at the lumpy mattress below her.

"Draco vanished my bra, and you have to help me with my neck, Ginny! Please!"

Ginny stood up and looked her friend over, nodding and smiling. "Of course!" Ginny pulled out her wand and flicked it at Hermione's shirt, mumbling a spell that would keep her bosom from shaking all over town. Ginny wore a lot of backless tops, so she was really good at it. "Chin up, 'Mione!"

"But everyone will see my neck. I'm sure I have loads of marks!" Hermione ran her fingers over her tender neck and shoulders.

"No, you daft chit, chin up so I can cast the spell." Ginny rolled her eyes, wavering unsteadily on her feet. With six brothers ready to pound any suitors, she was pretty good at this spell, too. Never let it be said that Miss Ginevra Weasley went anywhere with a hickey in plain view.

Hermione laughed at herself and put her hand on Ginny's shoulder. "Right... okay, then." Hermione looked up at the ceiling she'd spent so many nights under and tried to keep the room from spinning too much. Soon enough she felt the cool trickle of magic over her skin.

"All set," Ginny said and pulled Hermione onto what used to be her bed. "So Draco seems... not like a total bastard?"

Hermione crumpled over Ginny's lap and said something. It was totally muffled by Ginny's dress. Ginny chuckled and ran her fingers through Hermione's hair and began tracing the dragon on her neck. Hermione turned her head to the side and said, "Careful, he can feel that."

"Yeah, I remember. It's just weird seeing it. Seeing you. All of it. Nice trousers, by the way." Ginny finished by sliding her hand into Hermione's back pocket and kissing the brand.

"Ginevra Weasley!" Hermione chastised in mock outrage. Ginny had a thing for girls' bums, and Hermione thought that given the opportunity, Ginny would make an excellent lesbian.

"I thought you said it stings when someone touches you with lustful intent." Ginny made a point of licking the dragon on Hermione's neck slowly and carefully. "I missed you so much."

"Ginny, you are smashed and in love with Harry and..." Hermione was rationalizing when the bedroom door banged open. Draco appeared at the foot of the bed, not that Hermione could see, and Blaise hovered in the doorway. Both young men were stunned to find Ginny's long red hair flowing over Hermione's shoulders.

"Uh-oooh!" Ginny smirked and looked over at Draco like she was a cat who caught the canary.

"Weaslette." Draco was panting, relieved. He had bolted up the stairs, a rather difficult proposition given his state of arousal. Ginevra Weasley was attractive, he realized suddenly. She licked her lips as Draco rubbed the tattoo on his chest. He had thought for sure that someone else had been up there with Hermione, and the warm moistness on his chest had been alarming.

"Malfoy."

Hermione managed to push herself up to sitting on the bed next to Ginny. "She's plastered, she won't remember anything tomorrow." Hermione let her head fall heavily on her shoulder. "Ginny only snogs girls when she's pissed."

"It's true, mate," Blaise said from the doorway, noticing the heated look in Draco's eye. "I've seen her and Luna make out loads of times. It's quite hot."

"Thanks, Blaise." Ginny smiled and gave Hermione a sideways hug. "I'm so glad you're home, 'Mione." Hermione put her arm around Ginny and smiled, revelling in the unbridled affections her friends were showing her. Neither girl noticed when Draco signalled to Blaise to extract Ginny from the room, but the girls did notice when Blaise scooped Ginny up from behind, easily reaching over the little twin bed, and carried her out of the room, shouting for Harry to come take care of the youngest Weasley.



Without the support of her friend, Hermione flopped back, lying on the bed with her legs over the side.

"Hermione, you are well and truly pissed, aren't you?" Draco smirked and kicked her feet apart so he could stand in between her knees.

"Quite, Malfoy." Hermione rolled her head slowly and tried to look up at him. Oh my! Was he ever tall! "I haven't had this much to drink since the law was introduced. None at all at home."

"We should get back to the Manor." Draco shook his head.

"We can stay here. Harry said."

"I don't think so. We have a busy day tomorrow, shopping, and I have to check on Lodus." Draco paused a moment to pull her up, lifting her as though she weighed nothing. Wrapping one arm around her ribs, he cradled her neck in the other hand. Hermione's eyes were totally unfocused, as was her brain. Draco took this moment of complete defencelessness to snog her again, which he could tell she enjoyed.

After minutes of kissing her thoroughly, Draco pulled his teeth gently up her jawline so he could whisper in her ear again. "I'm going to buy you gorgeous robes to wear while you're at the Manor. I know dozens of nooks that I'm going to pull you into so I can do this again and again." Draco felt Hermione's head loll forward against his. He reached down and encouraged her to wrap her legs around him for stability.

"I'm going to vanish your knickers and take advantage of you whenever I want." He paused as Hermione clutched at him tighter, whimpering softly. "Or whenever you want. Tell me again, Princess, that you want it, and I'll give you everything you want."

"Mmm, Draco..." Hermione tried to talk but it was getting harder to focus.

"You want to go to the Manor with me, Princess? You ready?" Draco leaned back and looked at Hermione's sleepy visage. She nodded drowsily, and Draco slid her off his body, helping to keep her vertical. He whistled for Acara to follow, and they made their way down the stairs.

Harry and Ron were waiting at the landing, clearly discussing if they should go up and intervene. Draco nodded at them neutrally and asked Harry to allow them to Disapparate. As Harry changed the wards on the house, Hermione gave Ron an overly enthusiastic hug and then turned to do the same to Harry.

Draco bent down and picked up Acara, and when Hermione fell back into his arms, he held her close. With a final smirk at the witless duo, Draco took his bride-to-be home, feeling all was right with the world.

## Shop 'Til You Drop

*Chapter 18 of 25*

She looked out at him through one eye, scowling gently.

Hermione woke up feeling as though her brain was floating in a pickle jar. She couldn't remember where she was, or why she still felt so drunk. All she knew was that it was too early, whatever time it may actually be.

"Good morning, darling," Draco said as he shook up the bottle of hangover potion he was going to give Hermione. Of course, she would have to earn it.

Hermione's eyes squinted in pained response, and she shushed him silently with a finger at her lips.

"Well, if you don't want any of this potion, I'll just leave. Breakfast in fifteen minutes. I would not recommend keeping my parents waiting." Draco shifted his weight on the bed to make as though he were leaving.

Hermione's hand wrapped around his wrist, and she was able to croak out a plea for the potion. Draco smirked and unstopped the phial. He tucked the tip of his finger in the mouth of the bottle and got a little potion on it. Then he traced his finger over her pert little mouth and watched with avid fascination as her tongue darted out and over it.

It was just enough to relieve her eyes so that she could look into the morning light. She relaxed her eyelids, and Hermione moved her hand to rub her eyes sleepily. Then she looked out at him through one eye, scowling gently.

"Not enough?" Draco's eyes scanned her face. Four days from now he'd be waking next to her, and it was all he could do to keep his excitement in check. He tucked his finger back in the phial, this time spreading it on his own lips. He watched as Hermione watched him.

Even through her booze-soaked brain, Hermione could see where this was going. She had some vague notion that they had snogged a bit the night before, but she'd been drunk, so it didn't count. *Right?* In any event, Hermione had to weigh her options seriously: no more potion or taking it from Draco's mouth.

Hermione sighed and closed her eyes, opening her mouth softly and licking her lips to signal to Draco that he could kiss her. Draco lowered himself over her and held his face just above hers. Hermione waited for him to finish, but after a moment figured out that he was waiting for her. Carefully, she licked his lips and took all of the potion that glistened there.

"Mmmmmm." She sighed in relief.

Draco, hearing her approval, kissed her soundly in return. Inwardly, he smirked as Hermione's mouth stopped in surprise at his behaviour, but after a moment she couldn't deny how nice the kiss was. Draco kept at her for a few long moments and was appropriately smug when, as he pulled away, Hermione's mouth followed his.

Taking one of her hands, he pressed the phial into it and said, "Bria?" Hermione was confused until a small house-elf in a pillowcase appeared beside the bed. "Bria, this is Miss Hermione, and you need to have her ready for breakfast and then shopping in twelve minutes. I've selected clothes for her and laid them out in the sitting room. Bring her to me outside the breakfast hall when she is ready."

"Really, I can get ready by myself, Draco." Hermione scowled at her fiancé after she tossed back the potion.

He turned and smirked at her before replying, "And do something artful with her hair, to impress my mother." Draco finally strode out of the room, not missing the gentle thump of Hermione's fists hitting the soft mattress as she harrumphed at his decree.

"Bria?" Hermione turned and looked at the little elf.

"Yes, Miss?" Bria bowed low and then looked up at Hermione with a gentle tilt of her head.

"Are you able to take direction from me?"

"No, Miss. I is to do what Master Draco says only." Bria eyes watered and she looked fearful.

Hermione sighed. She missed home and it was only the second day. Looking over the huge bed where Acara lay on her back with her legs splayed out, Hermione scratched the beast awake. "Let's get on with it, then." She smiled apologetically at the elf.

Bria looked wary. "You isn't going to fight?"

"Not today, Bria. Now, make me *artful* for Lady Malfoy so I can get this over with?" Hermione turned her legs on the bed and put her feet on the floor.

Bria breathed a deep sigh of relief and snapped her fingers. Hermione's hair was done up with bits and sections pinned around her face, and upon spying herself in a smaller mirror by the bed, Hermione had to admit it was very nicely done.

Hermione summoned underclothes from the wardrobe and moved to put on the olive green robes Draco had left out, along with matching heels. She sat on the chaise and looked warily at her feet. She hadn't worn heels in years. It would not do for Hermione to fall on her face the first morning in front of Lady Malfoy by tripping over herself. Hermione quickly transfigured her shoes to a pair of ballet slippers.

"All right, Bria, I'm ready." Taking the house-elf's hand, Hermione called Acara and they went to breakfast.

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Draco was practically whistling as he stood outside the breakfast room waiting for Hermione. He'd waited eight years for this moment, and he could barely contain himself. These last ten minutes had been some of the most thrilling of his life.

Finally she popped up in front of him, and when she appeared, she took his breath away. Olive was definitely her colour. It made her skin look tan and healthy and brought out the gold flecks in her eyes. Roaming his eyes over her slowly, he came to discover something was amiss.

"Show me your feet," Draco said as he knelt in front of her.

Hermione felt as if she'd been caught with her hand in the cookie jar, but lifted up the front of her robes anyway.

"These aren't the shoes I put out for you."

"I transfigured them. I haven't worn heels in years, Draco, and I don't want to turn my ankle."

"Take them off; I'm changing them back. You won't turn your ankle, and if you feel unstable you will use my arm for balance."

Hermione glared down at him. "So you are saying I should wear dangerous shoes and let the big strong man take care of me when I'm thusly endangered by my own shoes!" Hermione yelled at him in a harsh whisper. She did not want to alert his parents to a disturbance in the hallway, but he was being ridiculous. Acara was sniffing at the door to the breakfast room, the smell of breakfast meats wafting gently underneath.

"Hermione, they're just shoes," Draco ground out, forcing the shoe off her right foot.

"It is not just shoes. This is just another example of acceptable misogyny! I'm lucky I don't have a wand any more so you can't take it to protect me from it!"

Draco transfigured her shoe back to its original form and thumped her big toe to make her lift her foot. "You are being absurd! You are going to walk no more than ten meters to the breakfast table!" Hermione's left shoe came off easier than right, since Hermione was trying to balance between the two different heights. As Draco transfigured it back, Hermione bent down, took off the first shoe, and held it in her hand. "What are you doing, you harpy? We are late for breakfast!"

"I'm not wearing these shoes," Hermione ground out. She could feel the fire building up under her skin in her anger, and she wondered for the first time where she could go to let it out.

Draco stood up and scowled down at her. Hermione's eyes were beginning to have the look of lava underneath the usual beautiful brown. Draco spoke lowly, occasionally punctuating his points by pointing her shoe at her. "Listen here, Princess. You'll wear these shoes and any other shoes I find for you to wear. You will not burn down the Manor trying to fight me over it."

Hermione wasn't intimidated. She stepped up into him and tapped the stiletto heel of the shoe in her hand on his chest. "I would gladly wear shoes that were bloody reasonable. I'm not going to cripple myself over your sense of fashion!"

Draco reached down and grabbed Hermione's wrists, raising them above her head. With a dancer's grace, he turned her and pressed her against the wall, holding her wrists and one shoe with one hand. With his other hand, he stroked her neck to her chin, smug victory showing on his face when she shivered.

"I'll make you a deal, Princess." Draco licked his lips and pressed his lower body against hers. "I'll transfigure the shoes if you agree to wear whatever I want as long as it won't *cripple* you."

"Only while we're in Britain, and it must be appropriate to the occasion," Hermione declared, thrusting her chin out stubbornly.

"Only in Britain, fit for the occasion," Draco agreed.

"Fine. Deal." Hermione moved to pull her arms down, seeing as they were now definitely late for breakfast. However, Draco's hand was still holding fast, although she did hear one shoe drop to the floor.

"I think I quite like you in this position, Hermione." Draco leaned down and kissed her softly on the mouth. "I think you should get used to it." His hand left her chin, gliding gently down her neck and over to her breast. He pulled her lower lip between his as his thumb began rubbing over her nipple through her robes.

"Draco, no." Hermione let out a broken sigh when his mouth moved to her ear, nipping expertly.

"That's not what you were saying last night." Draco slid his tongue in her ear, his lips curling into a smile as he heard the other shoe drop.

"Your parents are on the other side of the door." Hermione swallowed, arching into him as one of his thighs pressed between her legs.

"Indeed, they are," Draco said quietly into her ear, chuckling softly. He couldn't deny having fantasised about this as well. He dropped his chin a moment to whisper a spell so she couldn't hear it. Draco pulled his hand away from her wrists, and Hermione found she was bound to the wall.

Panic flooded her face. Draco tried to soothe her, gently caressing her face, neck, and ultimately her breasts until her lust outweighed her fear. Summoning her shoes, he transfigured them not into the slippers she had made, but into a delicious set of kitten heels. When he raised them up for her approval, Hermione was delighted, but could only nod in approval.

Draco knelt once more, lifting her skirts gently and placing the shoes properly on the floor. He picked up her right foot, massaging her calf and ankle a moment and pressing his lips to the top of her thigh toward the inside. Her thigh quivered in response, and Draco slid the shoe onto her foot. He repeated the treatment on the other side. When he was done, Draco took a few more moments to kiss her thighs, reaching higher and higher.

Hermione's thighs were slowly spreading, and he could smell her soaked knickers. His kisses turned bruising, and he left a dark love bite mere inches from her juicy cunt. Dropping her skirts, Draco revelled in her disappointed mewl. Looking up, he saw her eyes closed tightly. He stood and began to straighten her robes, casting a spell to hide her tight nipples from the gaze of others, although he could still see them through the dress. Then he reached into his trousers and adjusted his erection to a more comfortable position.

Finally Draco leaned over and licked her earlobe once more. "I would have you for breakfast, Hermione, but if you'll remember from last night, I told you you'd have to wait, just like I waited." Hermione swallowed, her eyes still shut tight. "If it were up to me, Princess, if we weren't to go shopping after breakfast, I would vanish your knickers and your bra and keep you wound up tight like this all day. Would you like that?" Draco's fingers quickly set to pulling her nipples again, and soon Hermione's back was arched and her whimpers were more like moans. "Look at me."

Hermione slowly opened her eyes into his dark grey gaze. The last parts of her will to fight him were crumbling under the pressure of his hands on her breasts. He was working her masterfully, and Hermione thought she might even feel wetness at the top of her thighs, having soaked her knickers completely through.

Beside them, the door handle began to turn. Draco smiled impishly. He muttered a couple of spells and Hermione felt her knickers dry, and the smell of her sex was replaced with the clean scent that she realised was throughout the Manor. Draco ended the spell at her wrists and moved to lead her into the breakfast room with his hand at her lower back. Lucius was standing on the other side of the doorway.

"You decided to grace us with your presence. How charming." Lucius' drawl held a certain note of impatience, especially since Acara had taken residence beside what would be Hermione's chair.

"My apologies, Father, Mother. We were resolving a minor dispute," Draco said as he assisted Hermione at her chair, pushing her gently into the table. Narcissa's mouth pursed in a way that showed she was restraining herself from expressing her annoyance.

"I see." Lucius returned to his position at the end of the table and observed Hermione's flushed state openly. She looked at him sideways and narrowed her eyes in response to his knowing look. Her scowl deepened at the unabashed pride in his smile at Draco as he dug into his breakfast. Thus was the start of a very long day for Hermione.

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Hermione was regretting the deal she'd made with Draco before breakfast. They were in their third shop, and already she had more clothes than she'd ever imagined herself owning. Also, she had no idea how much had been spent, since Draco had told the sales clerks to hide all the price tags after she caught sight of one. It had been enough to buy a Muggle car. Hermione had tried to explain to him that it was silly to spend so much on clothes she would only wear a few times, but he had given her that look.

Oh, yes, Draco Malfoy had looks, and Hermione was well versed in them. There was the Puppy Dog, the Troublemaker, the Philanderer. The look in question was what she'd dubbed the Authoritarian. It was resolute; it meant that she was, in his mind, being ridiculous and daft, and he would not be moved. Draco Malfoy obviously had a stubborn streak, and it was possible that it was longer and wider than Hermione's.

So, when Hermione had fussed about the price of the dresses, Draco had gone Authoritarian on her, and she hadn't seen a price tag or a sales clerk since. She was certain that if they hadn't already spent her parents' joint annual income, they would by the end of the day.

Stepping out of the dressing room, she walked to where Draco was languishing with Acara on a beautiful velvet couch. They were in a store that leaned a little more to the Muggle style, and Hermione was wearing a pair of slacks, the first of the day, and a black top that clung to her curves snugly. The collar came well above her cleavage, so not an inch of flesh was in sight, but it hardly left anything to the imagination.

Not for the first time, Draco stared, making no response. Initially, Hermione had thought that this was because he hated the outfit. However, she now knew that it meant that Draco was reining himself in. She figured this out after the second time it happened, and Draco had stalked into the dressing room with her and snogged her thoroughly against the wall before drying her knickers and freshening up the place with the same spells he had used before breakfast. That ensemble he'd gotten in two different colours.

Now Hermione knew to just stand still until he got over it so he could look at the next outfit. He stood, circling her as a predator would. After two rotations, he stood behind her and brushed the hair back from her ear. His mouth clamped down on her neck, and his hands pressed up and down the sides of her curves. Draco had basically followed through on his promising threat from earlier in the morning; he had certainly kept her aroused and wound up tight as much as possible.

Now he turned her to the mirror, stroking her body. Hermione arched into his body, and his hands came up stroked her nipples as he gazed at her.

"Are you going to finger yourself tonight, Princess?" Draco asked in a low voice.

Hermione was shocked into silence. He'd done this move twice before, both times praising her body and describing all the ways he would fuck her once they were finally married. Asking her such delightfully vulgar questions was, however, new.

"Uhm..." Hermione swallowed.

"Merlin, I want you to. I want you to think of me while you frig yourself. I want to watch you do it." Draco pushed one hand into her hair and held it firmly but gently. Hermione's skin went to gooseflesh. "You get sexier every minute. It's all I can do to control myself."

Hermione wasn't sure what control he was talking about, since she was sure his hard cock was pressing into her back and he was toying with her breasts magnificently.

"Maybe I should fuck you on that couch, put your arousal to use." Draco turned Hermione to face him. "I do arouse you, don't I, Princess?" Hermione's own stubbornness didn't want to acknowledge it, at least while she was sober. She wanted to look away from him, but she knew it would only fuel the fire. What she didn't know was that her silence was fuel enough.

Draco continued, moving her now to the couch, walking backward so that when he reached it, he fell gracefully into a sitting position. He pulled Hermione onto his lap, both moaning when his toddler brushed against her core.

"Tell me what you want, Princess, and it's yours." Draco stroked her hair, the pins from this morning gone since the snogging session in the first shop.

Hermione was at war with herself. On the one hand, here she was, so aroused by this man under her that she couldn't think straight. On the other, a younger, swottier, version of herself was yelling, "It's Draco Malfoy! What are you doing! Stop! Stop it now!" But she didn't want to stop; Hermione wanted him inside of her.

Hermione looked at him, the panic somehow held at bay. She looked him over, her decision slowly being made. Her chin dropped shyly, and she leaned in to whisper in his ear. Before she could get there, though, she was awash in his scent. That sealed the deal, and her mouth dropped suddenly, inadvertently grazing his jaw line. Draco swallowed, his Adam's apple bobbing beside the side of her chin.

"I, uhm, I could probably cum if you... mmm, suckled my breasts," Hermione whispered, her voice taking on a decidedly sultry tone at the end. Draco felt her cheeks flame hot in pre-emptive embarrassment. He fought to keep his breath steady, turning his head toward her ear.

Massaging her breasts, Draco took his time. "Ask me nicely, Princess," he coaxed with a firm but encouraging tone. If he could just play this correctly...

Hermione swallowed. "Please, Draco? Suck me?" Every word that dropped from her lips came with a corresponding clench of her quim.

"Again. Like you mean it." Draco's promising voice drew her out, his thumbs and forefingers rolling her nipples encouragingly.

Hermione arched her back into his hands. "Please, Draco? Please use your mouth on me?"

"Do you want it?" Draco pushed his hands down to her sides and back up again underneath her shirt.

"Yes."

"Do you need it?" Draco Vanished her bra, catching her breasts as they bounced softly, free from their restraints. He went back to massaging her breasts firmly and playing with her nipples.

"Yes!"

"Once more, Princess."

This time, without hesitation, Hermione moaned into his ear, "Please, Draco, stop teasing me, and suck my nipples. Gods, I'm so close, I want you to make me cum." She moved her hips toward him reflexively.

Draco couldn't believe it. He pulled the shirt off her, and his mouth found her bare nipples expertly. How many nights had he dreamed of just those words tumbling from her lips in absolute need? How long had he waited for just this moment?

As Draco switched sides, pulling her other nipple gently through his teeth, Hermione moaned, pressing her hands into his hair. Her hands turned to fists around his hair, and she began grinding against his cock.

"Fuck, Hermione!" Draco's mouth fell from her breast as he fought not to cum in his pants. She didn't seem to notice though, as she just kept grinding against him. Hermione's back was arched and her head dropped back, and it was the most glorious sight he'd ever seen.

"Draco!" Hermione reached up and squeezed her tits. She was delirious with passion. She was so close, so close and couldn't get over.

"Finish, Mione." Draco squeezed her thighs before moving his hands up to her hips. "Cum for me. I want to see you fucking cum for me." He adjusted her pace to one more of his own and watched as her body finally hit its peak. Her orgasm broke loose. Fragments of his name came out in her gasps and moans, and as her body convulsed on top of him, Draco found he couldn't bridle his own orgasm any more either.

His orgasm started on the last wave of hers, and as she flopped forward into him, he arched up into her. Draco's arms wrapped around her tightly. Her name on his lips, Draco had the most glorious orgasm of his young life. Once they'd caught their breath, Draco kissed her temple softly.

Hermione pulled back, feeling overwhelmed with emotion and wishing she could vanish completely right now. Had she really just dry-humped Draco Malfoy on a couch in a shop in Diagon Alley? *Really?* Hermione tried to swallow her emotion and plan a hasty escape, but how could she when he still had her arms round her?

Hermione swallowed again. She felt Acara bump her side with the flat part of her head. Trying to keep her face hidden, Hermione moved her hand to Acara's neck, hoping that the beast would not give her away.

"I'm neither blind nor deaf, Hermione." Draco sighed, smoothing his hands up her bare back. He tried to clear his mind of the post-orgasmic haze in order to have a coherent conversation with her.

"It's nothing, really." Hermione hastily wiped her tears with the back of her hand, sniffing. She tried to move off of him, but his embrace was too strong.

"Don't lie." Draco's hands moved to grab her waist, sitting her upright. He whispered a spell to clean up the cooling ejaculate in his pants, and he adjusted himself so that he was sitting more upright once again. "Never lie. You're bad at it, and how can I take care of you if you don't tell me what the problem is?"

"You don't take care of me," Hermione replied miserably, scowling at him. "You tell me how great it would be if I died. You tell me how inferior I am to you. You, Draco Fucking Malfoy, are the worst human being I've ever met." Hermione swiped her arm across her dripping nose, snot running all the way. "I hate you, and somehow I'm sitting in a shop in Diagon Alley in your arms, half naked."

"You don't hate me, Hermione, not anymore." Draco reached up to brush tears off her face, but she slapped his hand away. She used the break in his embrace to stand up.

She reached down and grabbed the damned top that had instigated all this and pulled it over her head. "You're right, Malfoy, I don't hate you any more." Finally, she reached down and picked Acara up before Disapparating away.

## To Those Who Wait

*Chapter 19 of 25*

Harry smiled beatifically and offered Draco his shot glass.

Despite the fact that Hermione's parents were living blissfully unaware of her in Australia, Hermione had kept their house. Harry was the Secret-Keeper of her address, and although the house didn't disappear like his did, it was effectively hidden from magical folk instead of Muggle. Harry paid someone to keep it up on the outside and had come himself to check on the inside a few times since she'd gone away.

When Hermione appeared in her old bedroom, it smelled the same...dusty, but basically the same. She set Acara down on her bed and curled up with her. It was quite a snug fit, but snuggling was what was needed at that point.

Although Hermione's heart felt like weeping, she fell asleep almost instantly. When she woke up, it was dark. She cast a spell to light the candles she'd left around the room, the electricity having been off for years. Rubbing her eyes, she adjusted herself in her bed. She'd left her Galleon at her cottage, and she didn't have an owl. She hadn't cast a Patronus for years and never without a wand. She'd have to try, though, seeing as she figured Draco was probably going nuts over her disappearance. If she quieted her mind enough, it was almost as though she could feel his anxiety.

What was her happiest thought these days? It used to be the memory of Professor Sinistra's voice after she'd explained about Hogwarts.

*Her parents were in the other room talking quietly while preparing tea, and Hermione had quietly asked, "So, I'm not a freak?"*

*Professor Sinistra had smiled brightly and said, "No, darling, you are not a freak. You are a witch, and from what I can see, you will be an extraordinary witch, indeed."*

But that was seemingly a lifetime ago. What was her happiest thought now? Stroking Acara absentmindedly, her mind zeroed in on the temple and the ornamental plate over the volcano. Hermione could almost see herself there, fire radiating through and around her. She whispered the spell and was thrilled when the room filled with a silver light. However, instead of her usual gamboling otter, a chimera solidified. It trotted around the room once, and Acara even got up and batted a paw at it. Her paw struck the corporeal beast, and they began to play in earnest.

Hermione smiled, almost giggling in delight. But she had to let someone know where she was. Once she got the beasts to stop playing, she turned to the chimera and cast the spell so it could carry her message. Watching it squeeze through the window, Hermione made her way to the loo. The water was still on, and after letting it run for a few minutes, she filled the tub, heating it with her own fire. Hermione sunk into the water, hoping to wash as much of the day away as possible.

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*At number twelve, Grimmauld Place:*

Harry Potter was surprised to come home to Draco Malfoy sitting on his doorstep. His hand was inside a satchel, and Harry could see Draco's arm twitch in gentle rhythm.

Stepping past the blond, who looked a little battle-worn at this point, Harry unlocked his door. "You might as well come in," Harry offered without turning around.

Draco got up, following Harry into the house. Draco made his way into the parlor, sitting in the middle of the couch. Harry came back with a plate of sandwiches and set them on the table. He looked the other man over. Draco was sitting with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands.

"What'd you do?" Harry said before picking up a sandwich and collapsing gracelessly on another couch, putting his feet up after toeing off his shoes.

Draco unlatched the satchel, and the small head of his little white and blue dragon popped out almost immediately. "You don't mind?" Draco wanted to let Lodus out; he'd been trapped in the satchel for hours. Harry's eyes lit up at the sight, and he nodded.

Once Lodus was winging gently from bookshelf to bookshelf, Draco looked up and sighed. "Everything was fine. We were out shopping. The third store she comes out looking..." Draco trailed off, and seeing Harry's skeptical face, stopped to consider his next words, "She looked bloody brilliant, Potter. We started snogging, and got carried away, and she had a very nice time, if I do say so myself. Anyway, after, we're having a bit of a cuddle..." Draco stopped to see what, if any, reaction Potter might have to this before continuing. "Then she started to cry, and it was all high-pitched nonsense from there. She took the cat and Disapparated. I was too shocked to follow her. She is not at the Manor, the Burrow, or back at the colony, so I have to assume she's here."

"You would be assuming wrong," Harry said as he popped the last bite of sandwich into his mouth.

"Where else could she be?" Draco ground out through his teeth. How he hated asking Harry Sodding Potter for *anything!*

"I have an idea. Why don't you have a sandwich, Malfoy? Kreacher makes excellent sandwiches."

Draco narrowed his eyes, but took a sandwich nonetheless. It was excellent, not that he'd ever say anything of the sort to Potter.

"So, Potter, what is your *idea?*"

"Oh, she's probably at her parents' place."

"In Australia?"

"No."

"So her parents aren't in Australia?"

"Oh, no, they are."

"Talk bloody straight, Potter, where the fuck is she?"

"I *could* tell you, but I'm not sure she'd want me to. It may, in fact, be the one place on the whole planet she's safe from you. Ironic that it's on this little isle we call home, yeah?"

"Potter, we are to marry in three days; I have to find her." Draco scrubbed his face with his hands, trying to hold back the burgeoning fury his frustration was building into.

"She'll get in touch when she's ready. For someone who has been allegedly studying her for nine years, you sure miss some major things about Hermione."

"I'm staying here until something happens," Draco said, sitting back on the couch and scowling at the doorway, as if any second Hermione might appear in it.

"Have it your way, but be a sport and shower first. You look like hell." Harry stood and took the now empty plate into the kitchen.

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Draco did take a shower. He also poked about in the room that Hermione had been in the night before. He noticed a bookshelf, which was full of advanced books. *Clearly Hermione's.*

He and Lodus wandered around the old Black house, thinking about his family. Draco found himself on the old family tree. The Malfoy branch was gilded in bronze, and he gently traced his family's names with his finger.

"If I understand it correctly, yours and Hermione's kids will magically appear on that," Harry, who had been leaning in the doorway watching Draco for a long moment, finally said to announce himself.

"That is correct," Draco confirmed without turning. All he wanted was to get to Hermione, and it was slowly gnawing at him.

Harry walked into the room and set a bottle of Muggle tequila on the little table between the two chairs. Then he put two shot glasses, two limes, and a salt shaker down.

"Hot date?" Draco said as he turned to watch the Boy Who Lived.

"I have heard that you might be considered an attractive chap, Malfoy, but I don't swing that way. You ever had tequila before?"

"Indeed, I have."

And so, the two young men sat down to drink and wait for Hermione to surface.

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"Harry, It's Hermione. This is my Patronus now, apparently. Cool, eh? Anyway, I fought with Draco, and I'm at my parents' place, and I'm gonna order in, and I'll let you know."

The two men, both five shots in, stared blearily at the chimera before it dissolved into the air.

Harry turned to Draco, whose body visibly relaxed upon hearing the message.

"Fuck, you were really worried, weren't you?" Harry said, splashing liquid into their glasses.

"Obviously, Potter, or I wouldn't have sat at your door for hours." Draco stood, looking like he was about to leave.

"You going someplace?"

"Yeah, I'm bloody going someplace! I have to talk to her." Draco tripped as he kicked a chair.

"You don't even know where it is." Harry leaned back in his chair, salting his hand in preparation for the next shot.

"Right, where is it?" Draco turned to Harry, clapping his hand onto the other man's shoulder.

"I'm not telling." Harry handed Draco the salt shaker.

"Fine, I'll find it myself." Draco turned to leave.

"No, you won't," Harry called after him.

"Why not?" Draco yelled from the doorway.

"It's Secret-Kept."

"Who's the Keeper?" Draco turned back into the room.

"Me." Harry smiled beatifically and offered Draco his shot glass.

"Merlin's balls, Potter! Haven't I waited long enough?"

"Mmmmaybe." Harry looked at the floor waiting for his pickled thoughts to fuse together. "I could send my owl, she knows, too."

"Yes! Brilliant." Draco moved to pull Harry out of his seat. They lumbered up the stairs to where Harry's owl was. Harry pulled a parchment and quill out of the writing table he kept outside the owl's roost in the attic and scribbled a note to Hermione. He sent the owl and flopped on an old couch that was up in the attic. Draco followed suit, and the two sat to wait for its return.

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Hermione had just folded the outdated cell phone she kept in the house when Harry's owl tapped on the kitchen window. Hermione was relieved that her Patronus had worked. She was not so pleased by his return message.

*Malfoy's here, dying to talk to you.*

She pulled a pen out of the kitchen drawer, and, turning the parchment over, scribbled:

*No. No. NO.*

The owl had been waiting patiently for her response, and stroking it softly, she attached her reply. As soon as bird flew away, Hermione sat down at the kitchen table, releasing a cloud of dust. She could hear Acara coming across the linoleum floor and met her halfway, leaving the dusty kitchen for the dusty sitting room.

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"Shite!" Malfoy crumpled the parchment and punched the wall, plaster crumbling below.

Harry thought he should say something, but as he was well and truly pissed, he just sat back and tried to keep the attic from spinning around him.

Draco looked down at his hands to inspect for damage, and seeing the ring his godfather had given him, he was struck with brilliance. Retrieving another piece of parchment from the table, he cast a spell to make it fold into a little box. He sealed the box with the ring inside and sent it with the owl.

"That's an ugly ring to send to a bird, Malfoy."

"It's not just any ring, Potter."

"Oh, really? How so?"

"It's got the last worldly remains of Severus Snape in it."

---

Hermione stared at the little paper box for a long time. Written on the outside was 'Please?' in Draco's now familiar handwriting. Sighing, she scrubbed her nails through her scalp and began to pace the kitchen once more.

She had been able to ignore the box long enough to finish her delivered dinner. Now, it just stood there taunting her like a beacon of... Malfoy-ness.

What could he have sent that was so small that he thought could help him now? Help her now. Help *him* now! Hermione didn't need help; she needed her loathing of Ferret Face back. She stopped pacing and stared at the little parchment box on the table until she was shoved forward by Acara's head on her bum.

"Is that what you think? Really? Fine, but you'll be accountable when it all goes to pot." Hermione scowled at the beast. Acara's mouth dropped open a little bit, and Hermione could imagine she was smiling. Or about to eat a small dog for supper. It was thrilling and creepy in turn.

Hermione unfolded the parchment, dropping the contents into her palm. *What an ugly ring.* And then it struck her; it was Severus! Draco had sent her *Severus!* It was just the right thing right now, and as much as Hermione hated to admit it, Draco had known. Pushing those thoughts aside, she smacked Acara's ribs affectionately and ran to her room.

---

Hermione found herself and Acara in a library with a roaring fire blazing.

"Hermione?" Severus asked from the couch, his book dropping softly from his hands into his lap. "Where's Draco? What's happened?" Severus' immediate concern for Draco was touching, and Hermione began to feel foolish.

"He's fine. I mean, I think he's fine. We had a bit of a tiff. Well, really, I yelled at him, and I was crying, and then I took Acara to my parents' house, and apparently Draco camped out at Harry's place, and then he sent me the ring, and now I don't know what to do, because he's turning out to be not only not bad but kind of good, and I hate him, Severus, I hate him!"

Hermione crumpled into a pile on the floor, her legs twisting awkwardly underneath her. She tried to wipe the tears off of her face but they were falling too fast, and she was further humiliated by feeling like such a ninny in front of Severus.

Severus had marked his page in the book at the beginning of her little speech and began to glide his way over to her. With the grace she had become accustomed to, he picked her up and carried her to the couch where Acara was already sitting and placed Hermione over his lap.

He wiped the tears away from her face and looked her over. Sighing, Severus asked, "Why don't we begin again and breathe this time?"

"Today we went shopping," Hermione began, swallowing loudly as she curled up in Severus' familiar body. "And he was snogging and... stimulating me all day, and finally I just cracked. I ended up in his lap, Severus, in a shop! And I had the best orgasm I've had since you died." Hermione explained, tucking her head under his chin when she finished.

"Consequently, you feel that you've betrayed your promise not to let Malfoy 'get' you."

Hermione nodded, enjoying the feel of his button-down shirt on her cheek. "Draco has a way of doing that; something about him just slinks into your heart." Severus' fingers stroked up and down her arm, his arm rubbing her back soothingly. "That is why I made the ring."

"Hmmm?" Hermione sniffled and rubbed her eyes, looking like an over-large child.

"Albus and I were researching Horcruxes. We had many discussions about magic and motive and what makes dark and what makes light. The Dark Lord always split his soul to serve his own purposes, and the homicidal part of him was such that there was never any ambiguity in the magic.

"I, however, killed Albus possibly out of pity, but mostly out of love. Additionally, I cast the spells to put myself in this ring for Draco's benefit. When his mother charged me with his care, I took it to mean something so much further beyond completing his task for him. I did so because I feel that, despite, or perhaps because of, his failings, Draco Malfoy has the capacity for good, if someone can provide him the opportunity to prove himself."

"It was so much easier when I could just hate him, Severus," Hermione muttered into his shoulder.

"Your own issues are what makes it so difficult now, Hermione," Severus pointed out, and seeing Hermione's indignation flare, he quickly added, "For just reason, of course.

"You *must* marry him, Hermione. The brand and the contract require it. However, I also believe you require it. All things considered, I can think of very few people who are worthy of you, and while my opinion may be biased, I do feel confident that Draco is one of those few."

"What is it you suggest I do, exactly?"

"Simply make yourself open to the possibility that he might delight you. I'm sure you can think of at least one instance right now."

"He did send the ring when I wouldn't let him come for me," Hermione reluctantly admitted.

"Always the show-off, Miss Granger. That will be ten points."

"No detention?" Hermione looked up, batting her eyelashes at him and squirming a little on his lap.

"You, *mademoiselle*, are a saucy wench who needs a man who can keep you in line."

"I wish it were you, Severus."

"No, you don't; I'm dead and necrophilia is not *en vogue* these days." Severus sneered down at her.

Hermione giggled and sighed. "We still could have made a good show of it."

"You are too supple for an old bastard like me, Miss Granger. Now, stop teasing the dead and go find your fiancé."

With those words Hermione woke up, sitting perfectly upright in her little bed. Indeed, she had to find Draco, and she knew where to look first. Shaking Acara awake, she picked up the beast and was off to number twelve, Grimmauld Place.

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Hermione Apparated directly to the kitchen of Harry's house, holding Acara tightly to her chest. When she got there, Kreacher was waiting with a pot of tea.

"Master said I is to be expecting you. Master and Mister Malfoy is in the study."

"Thank you, Kreacher," Hermione said after taking a long swallow of a decidedly excellent cup of tea and scratching Acara's head absentmindedly. Feeling slightly revived, she began the longest walk to the Black family study of her entire life. With every step her chest tightened and her breathing became shallow. Her hands became clammy, and by the top of the stairs, Hermione was beginning to question her decision.

Unfortunately for Hermione, Acara had sniffed out Draco and Harry, and she moved quickly through the door. The light in the hallway poured in, and both boys let out pained groans. Now that the door was open, Hermione could smell the tequila they'd imbibed earlier, and once she appeared in the room, she found the bottle tipped over on the floor. Harry was sprawled across a couch that was decidedly too small for him. Draco was face down on the floor by the Black family tree, Lodus spread out across his back.

"Mione, turn off the light!" Harry moaned piteously.

"Harry James Potter, why do you insist on drinking tequila? You know what it does to you!" Hermione chastised quietly, righting the bottle and vanishing the mess.

"Get us a potion, love?" Harry said, mindless of the drool running over the cushion under his head.

"One day, Harry James Potter, I'm not going to get you potions. Then what will you do?" Hermione said, mostly to herself, as she walked to the loo down the hall. She grabbed a phial for each of the men and began to shake them. This was so not how she planned to be spending her pre-dawn hours.

As she walked into the room, she lit a fire in the hearth and passed Harry the first phial. Then she transfigured the couch into a bed, making the mattress soft and warm, even if it was still a little on the small side.

Harry burrowed himself under the blankets Hermione had put on the bed and thanked her sleepily. Then she moved to the side of the room and knelt beside Draco.

"Up, Lodus," Hermione began, stroking the dragon down his spine before turning to her fiancé. "Drink this, and I'll put you to bed," Hermione offered shyly. Without opening his eyes, Draco put the phial to his lips. He tipped the phial up and drank it all in one go. He stifled a loud belch and pushed himself off the floor. From the way he was

moving, it was clear that he was not enjoying the results of the potion yet. Hermione had given him a dose of her special midnight blend; it would hydrate and cleanse the body without forcing him to stay up. It was perfect for passing out after a long night of drinking.

Leaning over, Hermione took Draco's arm and helped him stand up. She even put his arm around her shoulder, which he leaned on at first, until he could really feel the potion take effect. By then they were in the hallway, and Draco stopped her. He easily turned her to face him, his arms hanging nervously by his sides.

"What are you doing?" Hermione whispered.

"What are you doing?" Draco responded incredulously.

"Putting you to bed, of course. You need to sleep tequila off." Hermione took his hand and turned to lead him down the hall to a guest room.

"I want to talk to you, Princess." Draco's voice managed to be surprisingly authoritarian although he still let her lead him. He wasn't about to draw attention to the fact that she was voluntarily holding his hand.

"Draco, it's half four in the morning; we need to sleep. We'll talk tomorrow." Hermione said, opening the door and walking into the room.

"We'll talk now," Draco said once he, Lodus, and Acara were inside. He locked and warded the door, feeling the tingle he knew to be familial blood magic working. Finally he turned and faced Hermione, smirking as Acara found her spot in the middle of the large, soft bed. Lodus perched on the bookshelf in the corner. "Why did you run?"

Hermione looked away from him. She wasn't in the right state of mind to do this anymore. She wished she had stayed at her parents' house and gotten a good night's sleep instead.

Draco took a few steps and stood over her. Tilting her face up to his, he insisted, "Answer. Me."

"You ruined my life for years, Draco. I promised myself that I wouldn't let you..." Hermione stomped her foot as the tears began to fall again. Bloody Malfoy, always making her cry.

She was extremely shocked to find his arms come up around her, holding her close to him. He didn't try to soothe her with words, only held her firmly while she wept. Finally, when she seemed to have emptied herself completely, he looked down and said, "You won't regret this, Hermione; I swear it."

The room was lit grey with pre-dawn light when Draco lifted Hermione on the bed. As a force of habit, she curled up around Acara. Then Draco climbed into the bed behind her, moving to spoon her from behind. Hermione had already fallen asleep by then, but Draco lay awake a long time, savoring their first night together.

## Settling In

### Chapter 20 of 25

Thus began what Hermione would recall as the Bridal Fitting from Hell.

The sun was barely over the horizon when Bria popped into the bedroom where wizard, witch, and beasts slumbered soundly. She kneaded her hands together, hating to wake them, but her mistress had sent her to retrieve Hermione, since the seamstress was being welcomed into the Manor at that very moment.

"Master Draco," she tried quietly, her voice shaking.

"Bria, for the love of Merlin, what the bloody fuck are you doing in here at this hour?"

"Bria is to bring the young miss to Mistress for the fitting," the little elf said, trembling all over.

Draco let out a few choice swears and gently shook Hermione awake. Hermione on three hours of sleep had never been and would never be a pretty sight, and she grumbled menacingly.

"Sorry, Princess, you have to be fitted. Don't keep Mother waiting. I'll bring Acara in a moment." Draco maneuvered Hermione out of bed and into the grateful hands of Bria, who popped out of sight with Hermione as soon as she got a hold of her.

Thus began what Hermione would recall as the Bridal Fitting from Hell.

Upon arriving back at the Manor, Hermione was plied with several potions, including two doses of Pepper-Up and some that made her skin tingle and her hunger dissipate.

Then she was led into a room where she found Ginny and Luna being handed cups of tea. Acara came in after about half an hour. In the beginning, it seemed pretty standard. However, two hours later, the seamstress and her three assistants...all of whom were French...and Narcissa officially put Hermione on the war-path.

The five women all chatted in French. Only Luna knew any French, but Hermione and Ginny could pick up on the conversations from names they recognised, the gesticulations of the other women, and the general air of disappointment that the others displayed towards Hermione and her friends.

Hermione felt that she got the general complaints down to some very simple, petty things. Ginny was finely shaped enough, but her red hair *was difficult*. Luna was thin and willowy and couldn't fill out the robes Narcissa had chosen. Hermione was too tan, too rough in her feet, elbows, and hands, and most of all, wasn't pretty with short hair. They kept picking up her ringlets as if they were the most foreign of all things. Sometimes, the seamstress would pull on them none-too-gently to see how long they would go.

Finally, around ten-thirty, Narcissa mercifully summoned tea. When Hermione reached for a sandwich, Narcissa shoved a potion into her hand as they locked eyes. Hermione scowled but took the mysterious potion anyway. She drank it quickly, the little sandwiches teasing her with the promise of food, *real food*.

Hermione's pleasure in the first sandwich was short lived. It only took three minutes, but Hermione quickly realised that her easy, bouncy bob had turned into nearly five pounds of ringlets cascading down her back. Hermione jumped up, nearly upsetting the tea tray. Hermione roared at Narcissa, so shocked at what had happened that she couldn't even articulate.

Narcissa, on the other hand, merely sipped her tea in response, not even looking at Hermione. Hermione threw her arms up in exasperation and stormed out of the room, mindless of the fact that she was wearing only a sheer linen shift that had to be worn under the robes the seamstress was working on. Acara was all too happy to follow her



out the door.

Fifteen minutes later, Hermione finally found Draco. He was in Lodus' addition of the aviary, lying on a hammock with Lodus on his chest. Draco was holding up little pieces of fish for the little hatchling to jump up and catch. If Hermione hadn't been incensed, she would have been charmed by the sight.

"Draco Calpernius Malfoy, I swear upon all things holy, if you don't stop your mother, so help me...!" Hermione stood a few feet away with her hands upon her hips and her hair streaming with little cinders. She had no idea that the light from the windows was hitting her in such a way that made the thin linen she wore totally and completely transparent.

From somewhere in the aviary, the quietly smug voice of Lucius rolled over Hermione's senses. "Ah! The dulcet tones of my son's bride!" Lucius chuckled, and the sound of a newspaper being fanned out followed.

Draco, whose blood had rushed toward his prick upon seeing Hermione storm the aviary, was completely dumbfounded until Lodus bit his finger in addition to the large chunk of fish that dangled from it. Draco groaned and scowled at his beast, who shied away guiltily. Draco, who had never really had a pet before, couldn't stay mad at the little dragon and was soon stroking the blue scales down its back. Lodus arched up into Draco's fingers as though he were a cat.

Having soothed the first wild beast, Draco turned to his fiancée. "What happened now?"

Hermione recounted the events of the morning, finishing off with the hair-growing potion, and then stood with her arms crossed and her toe tapping, silently fuming.

"But your hair is beautiful long," Draco said as he moved to stand in front of Hermione. He had to try his hardest not to leer at her too much. He ran his palm down the new length of her hair, finding that it felt like satin. On his second pass, he put out the cinders with water from his hand, the steam curling Hermione's hair even further as it rose.

Hermione sighed. He'd never get it. "Thank you. Yes, it is lovely. The point is that she didn't have to trick me into taking the potion. She could have simply said, 'Hermione, I think it would be lovely to put your hair up for the wedding, don't you?' 'Oh, yes, Narcissa, I was just debating that myself.' 'Excellent. I'll have Bria bring a potion,'" Hermione explained, moving to act out the roles of both herself and Narcissa. "See? Easy. But *no*, she couldn't just be straightforward, she had to trick me and make me do it. And there is no reason to belittle my friends. Luna is beautiful, and Gin looks excellent in navy. They both do."

Draco was looking at Hermione carefully. A part of him had been worried that, once she got back to Britain, she would be stubborn about all of these things, but things had really gone along relatively smoothly, apart from yesterday's disappearing act. She wasn't holed up in her room, or constantly off with Potty and the Weasel as he'd feared.

Hermione started to fidget under his gaze, suddenly realising where she was, whom she was with, and what she was wearing. She looked down and was shocked to see her nipples jutting jauntily from her breasts. They made the linen peak out and drop down slightly before the stitches for her robes brought it back in. She took a step away from Draco as she asked, "Will you please just say something to her? There's no need for what she's doing."

Draco looked at the earnest expression on his bride's face. It was too good to be true! However, the few short minutes they'd been together had brought Draco's lust to the forefront. He swiftly lunged forward and pulled her body against him. Hermione struggled a little, but once his lips found her neck, she took his treatment stoically.

"I will, Princess," Draco panted against the wet spot where he'd just marked her neck, "but I want you to do something for me."

Hermione pulled away from him warily. "What?" The next thing she knew, she was swept up and Apparated into her suite. Acara, who knew just what was about to happen, jumped up on the hammock and curled up, making a small nest into which Lodus could also curl.

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In Hermione's suite, Draco pressed Hermione against the wall. "My father was in the aviary, and I didn't want him to... hear." Draco pulled away from Hermione's body only long enough to strip the linen dress off of her. Immediately after, he lifted her up and pressed her into the wall, wrapping her legs around him.

"Hear what?" Hermione asked, although even she had to admit that it was pretty obvious what was about to happen. Her friends were downstairs having to sit with Narcissa while she let Draco do whatever it was they were about to do, which was bad form on her part, but she'd make it up to them.

"I need to hear you cum again, Princess. Once was not enough, especially considering what happened after." Draco sealed his mouth over hers and palmed her breasts. She was ready for his kiss, though, and kissed him back. Draco moaned. "I could fucking slide my cock into you right now, Hermione," Draco said as he broke the kiss.

In response, Hermione rolled her hips into his, grazing the head of his cock. His hands clenched on her tits a moment. "Do it again, Princess." Hermione did, feeling deliciously empowered by rubbing the head of his cock with her core. Draco dropped his head and pressed his tongue flat against her breasts, laving them until Hermione shivered.

"Do you want me to fuck you?" Draco's hands slid to Hermione's ass.

Hermione nodded, squealing softly when his teeth scraped her nipples.

"Say it."

"I want you to fuck me," Hermione said slowly, letting the words drag out. Draco roared in approval and pulled her against him so they could move to the couch.

Once Hermione was under him, her hair fanned out over the pillow and armrest, and he'd literally ripped her knickers off, Draco began to lick and suck her whole torso. "Do you want to fuck me?" Draco asked again, needing to hear it when she wasn't pissed and hoping she wouldn't run. His hand slid over her pubic mound as he mapped her body by touch alone. What his fingers found was not the neatly trimmed hair from two nights ago, but a totally naked quim. Draco's head snapped to Hermione's crotch and then back to look at her face.

Hermione was shocked when his hand had covered her, and she became embarrassed by what Draco had found. She flushed beet red and closed her eyes tightly.

"No, no, no, Princess." Draco stroked her face gently until her eyes opened. "You shaved your beautiful quim for me, didn't you?" Draco could hardly control his lust-filled excitement. It was at this moment he became completely giddy that he was not marrying a blushing virgin.

"I like... erm, I like to really be able to feel it when there's something... ooh!" Hermione gasped as two of Draco's fingers sunk deep into her and moved immediately to work her skillfully. Hermione's orgasm crested shortly after, her body having been strung out to its limits in the past forty-eight hours. Draco pulled away from Hermione slightly. He enjoyed watching as her body arched upward in ecstasy. Her hair tossed softly and became mussed under her head, and her hands clenched the cushions. Slowing his fingers, he allowed her body to relax into the sofa.

Finally, Draco climbed off of Hermione and adjusted his erection carefully. He watched her the entire time. "It is taking every scrap of control I have to keep from taking you right now, Princess." Draco looked at his fingers; they were glistening with her release. He was in sensory overload. There were too many things he could do with those fingers now.

Hermione turned her head sleepily, her eyes only opening halfway. She lay across the sofa in post-coital glow until finally, rubbing her face with one hand, she tried to sit up. "I have to go rescue Gin and Luna from your mother."

"No... I think you need a nap." Draco was waiting for Hermione to realise that she was sitting in front of him totally naked. She must be at her wits' end to have overlooked such delightful, yet glaring, negligence. "I think we should put you to bed for a few hours."

"But my friends..." Hermione tried to reason, but she couldn't really think clearly enough to argue the point.

Draco Conjured a blanket and, after discreetly drying his fingers, wrapped it around Hermione. He easily lifted her up, and she curled into his body as he carried her from the sitting room to her bed. Once she was settled, he called for Bria.

"Please retrieve Acara and Lodus from the aviary."

Bria's eyes grew large, but she popped away nonetheless. Once she had popped back in with both beasts in tow, Draco looked thoughtfully at her for a moment. Acara had climbed into bed, and Draco thought that Lodus was more than tempted to join them; Draco could whole-heartedly sympathise.

"Please alert Mother that I will be downstairs in five minutes," Draco requested before making the necessary preparations to attend to his mother after bringing Hermione off. Finally, as Hermione was dozing on the bed, Draco sat down gently beside her. He fanned her hair out on the pillow.

Thinking she was already asleep, he caressed her cheek with the back of his fingers. He almost leapt out of his skin when she spoke.

"Is this what it was like the night after the Law passed?"

Draco paused to detect any negative emotions embedded in the query. Mostly, she sounded exhausted.

"Well," Draco swallowed loudly before continuing, "you are more beautiful now."

Hermione snorted before pressing her cheek further into the pillow. "Are you sorry for any of it?"

Draco let out a heaving sigh. "Princess, you ha..."

"Not Princess. Hermione." Hermione rubbed her eye, trying to sit up.

Draco stopped her, batting her hand away from her face and pressing her shoulder gently until she was lying down. "Hermione, I have done, and will do, everything I can think of to have you, and I don't regret a moment of it. I may have been misguided in convention, but I can't think of a better way of starting a life with you than what you have given us at the colony."

"So... no." Hermione turned away from him, curling around Acara instinctively. Her voice was definitely dejected now.

"This is not the time for this conversation," Draco sighed and pressed his fingers through the thick, dark chocolate-coloured curls. "Do you remember what I said at Potter's place this morning?"

"Mmmm..." Hermione mumbled, nearly asleep.

"You won't regret this, remember?"

Hermione nodded softly.

"Do you believe me?"

"I believe that you will try..." Hermione sighed. Draco knew from the hours he'd watched her sleep that she was completely asleep now. Would she remember any of it when she woke?

"I will do better than try." Draco stroked his hand through her hair once more before dimming the light and popping out of the room with Lodus curled in his arm.

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When Hermione woke up, Acara was not in bed with her. Hermione panicked; she had slept so soundly that she had forgotten where she was, and the dimly lit room didn't register in her sleep-addled mind.

"Acara?" Hermione asked, trying to keep the fear out of her voice.

"She's over here," Draco called quietly. As Hermione's eyes adjusted and her brain caught up, she could make out the profile of what looked to be Draco Malfoy brushing her spirit beast. Apparently, she'd been teleported into an alternative universe.

On the pillow beside her, Lodus screeched softly, and Hermione turned her head. He turned and looked up at her with his head almost upside down. Hermione mimicked back to him, and he hopped three times to land in her lap before curling up.

"I sent Ginny and Luna shopping on my accounts and told them you'd catch up."

"Oh. All right." Hermione rubbed her eyes. Noticing that she was naked under the blanket, she covered herself up as well as she could without disturbing Lodus.

"Getting modest on me now? That's certainly a shift from traipsing through the Manor in, well, a shift." Draco stood up and set the brush on the coffee table.

Hermione's face flamed. It was even worse as Draco brought the lights up. It looked to be about mid-afternoon based on how the sun was beginning to set. The dull grey light was overcome by the warm heat coming off the torches.

Draco was pulling clothes out of her closet, though still paying very close attention to her. "I find it very endearing, Princess, that you'd shave your pretty cunt but then get embarrassed about your bosom being exposed, especially considering the last twenty-four hours."

Hermione scowled at him, but the arse simply smiled back as though they were old friends.

"Bria?" Draco asked as he walked from the closet to Hermione's bed, carrying the dusty blue robes that had caused the second snogging session the prior day. The house-elf popped in.

"Bria is here, Master."

"Are Misses Weasley and Lovegood finished shopping?" The elf popped away, coming back a moment later.

"Yes, sir, they is."

"Excellent. Do something with Miss Hermione's hair, please, while I find shoes. Nothing special, she'll be meeting her friends at the spa."

Bria snapped her fingers, and Hermione's hair was in twin knots low on either side of the back of her head, the knots themselves made up of loose braids. When Draco turned around, he stopped suddenly. Hermione was lovely.

He looked at the lace-up boots in dark blue suede, and Draco couldn't wait to see the ensemble on her. The robes would end just below the knee, fanning out in gentle swirls when she walked. The torso was fitted and was made of fabric spelled to not need any undergarments. Setting her things inside the loo, Draco lifted Lodus from her lap and moved to let her pull the light blanket around her protectively.

"Get ready, and I'll Apparate you." Draco looked her with a smug grin and mirth in his eyes. "Don't worry about being too fresh, you are going in for a full treatment. Same

as you were supposed to have yesterday."

Hermione looked at him and then at the floor guiltily. Without a word, she went to the loo to change and get ready to see her friends.

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"You should have seen her face when Draco quietly threatened to elope!" Ginny squealed from her mud bath. She was recounting the parts of the morning that Hermione had missed. "I thought his mum was going to implode, starting at her pinched lips. Honestly, Mione, I have never seen a man stand up to his mother like that before."

"You just mean that your brothers don't stand up to your mum that way. You forget that this is Malfoy." Hermione gently poked the eye mask to keep it in place. "Tell me again about what he said to the seamstress; you got sidetracked."

"Oh! Yes! Right!" Ginny couldn't help but sit forward and pull the mask from her face, setting it atop her hair. "So, Draco comes in, and he motions for her to come over, and they start speaking in French. Draco kept asking questions, and the woman's face got sourer and sourer."

"Sourer? Rerer Erer?" Hermione giggled and teased Ginny.

Ginny pulled a face and continued her story, "Finally, Draco says something about Blaise, and all of a sudden, it's as if he'd threatened to tear her limb from limb, and she couldn't do enough to apologise!"

"Luna...Blaise? Really?" Hermione turned from Ginny to the girl across the room. They were alone in the room despite the fact that it could easily serve twenty.

"Possibly. I've made it very clear to him that I am not going to settle down any time soon, though."

"Why didn't you ever tell me?" Hermione asked, pulling her mask off as well.

"You had enough on your plate, with *the Dragon*." Luna giggled and moved to ring the bell for service. "It's really much more casual than Ginny and Malfoy make it sound. We only became exclusive a few days ago. Before that, I was also entertaining two or three other blokes. The Marriage Law has certainly made my blood status much more desirable."

"Just barely a half-blood." Hermione nodded grimly. "I would have loved to know, though, Luna. I feel horrible that you felt like you had to censor things from me. Promise you'll tell me in the future?"

Luna nodded as a witch and three house-elves came and ushered the girls to the next phase of their treatment.

## Where the Heart Is

*Chapter 21 of 25*

"Have you been brushing twice a day as your dentist recommends?"

Hermione took the veil and smiled as she placed it atop the braids that formed a crown around her head.

"Thanks, Mum." Hermione smiled, feeling warm hands resting softly on her shoulders.

"Of course, darling."

Hermione froze. Turning, she saw Narcissa Malfoy standing behind her. Hermione began to scream, waking up moments later. Sweat dripped from her brow, and Hermione clutched her chest over the satin chemise Draco insisted she wear even if he wasn't sleeping with her.

Shaking Acara awake, Hermione threw on a traveling cloak, grabbed a magazine out of her satchel, and scribbled a quick note before Apparating away.

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*I've gone for my parents.*

Draco read the note for the millionth time. Muggles were coming to his ancestral home. He didn't particularly care for the thought. Worse, he would have to tell his parents. *Worst, he'd have to meet Hermione's parents.* Draco swallowed, his throat dry and his palms sweating.

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"Monica Wilkins? Have you been brushing twice a day as your dentist recommends?" Hermione asked, near tears. Her right hand held a clipboard, and her left hand was clenched on Acara's Disillusioned scruff. Part of her mind was aware that she looked ridiculously conspicuous. Her traveling cloak was badly Transfigured into a dress, her extremely long hair was ratty from half a night's sleep, and she could feel her emotions playing across her face.

The woman on the inside of the doorway blinked quickly several times and upon setting eyes on her daughter, pulled her into a crushing hug.

"Hermes, Hermes, Hermes!" The older woman repeated again and again. Hearing her old nickname and feeling the tight embrace of her mother's arms, Hermione wept uncontrollably.

"Who's at the door, dear?" a man's voice echoed from inside the house. He held a kitchen towel in one hand and a plate in the other.

As he came into Hermione's tear-filled view, she hiccupped and tried to compose herself. Swallowing and wiping her face furiously, she was finally able to ask, "Wendell Wilkins, have you been brushing twice a day as your dentist recommends?"

In as much time as it took the plate to fall to the floor and shatter, Hermione's father had her swept up in his arms, crushed once again in a loving embrace.

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It took Hermione, Elise, and Nathaniel Granger half an hour to release all of the pent-up emotions their years apart had caused. Once they untangled limbs, Hermione's mum fetched tea and cool, damp towels for everyone. Hermione sat next to her dad on the couch, his arm draped around her shoulders. They sat in easy silence, enjoying

the simple proximity of each other.

"What on Earth is Crooks sniffing at?" Nathaniel asked amusedly.

Hermione turned to see what her dad was looking at, and Hermione noticed the shimmering outline of Acara leaning up at where Crooks sat on top of the telly. "Dad! I totally forgot! It's Acara!" Hermione flicked her wrist and the beast was revealed as the spell faded away.

From the doorway came a loud shaking of cups on a tea tray. "Jesus Christ, Hermione!"

Hermione smiled and wiped a few more tears from her eyes. "Sorry, Mum."

"It looks like Crooks is about to be lunch!" Elise noted as she sat on the other side of Hermione, giving her a quick sideways hug.

"I know! When her mouth is open like that, I find Acara to be positively horrifying, the way her lips are black on the inside. Very eerie." Hermione picked up a cool cloth and wiped her face. "Mum, Dad, I'm really sorry I don't have more time to do this, but there's no other way. Can you get me your collection of dentistry journals?"

Nathaniel's face darkened. He rose to the bookshelf to retrieve the collection of journals. "What did this *Malfoy* do now?" he asked, the surname falling from his lips like the worst profanity he could think of.

Hermione let out a relieved sigh. She'd been sending her parents letters over the years disguised as professional journals. Embedded in the articles were letters from her, written in code, which could only be understood by her parents' subconsciouses. It had taken a fair amount of magic to modify the Obliviates she'd cast to be only at the conscious level; it had been double the challenge to create and encode the letters as she had. However, it was all worth it, since her parents seemed to be fully apprised of the situation.

Watching her father set a large stack of magazines on the coffee table, Hermione pulled one more out of her pocket.

"I, erm, couldn't send this one..." Hermione muttered, ashamed that she'd not sent it, even though it was mostly happy news. It talked about the colony, Draco's matriculation, and seeing all of her friends again back in Britain. The catch was, it talked about the wedding; she just hadn't been able to send it. She'd tried a couple of times, but when it came time to cast the spell, the words had gotten lodged in her throat.

Hermione set down the last issue of the magazine on the stack. Taking a deep breath, she twisted her wrist and ended the spell. As the stack shifted from glossy photos of various dental diseases to parchments and pages of papyrus, Hermione's shoulders fell.

"I'm getting married in just over twenty-four hours. I can't put it off any more. It's too real. I don't know what it will be like to bring you to the Manor, but I couldn't imagine getting married without you. I just... couldn't."

Hermione's father pulled her against him as her mother picked up the pages from the 'latest edition.' There were detailed drawings of the dresses and the layout of the wedding plans. There were moving photographs of Malfoy Manor. Luna had put it all together while she was waiting on the seamstresses the previous day.

"You planned all this in a week?" Elise asked.

"No. Draco's mother has had it planned... Probably since the moment she had a baby, from the way she goes on about it. I can only imagine what it would have been like for her daughter!" Hermione shivered, the idea of the domineering matriarch having her clutches in some poor girl's only wedding.

Hermione was pulled out of her thoughts as her father lifted her hair up so he could see her neck.

"It's sort of punk rock..." Nathaniel said tracing it with a finger.

Hermione shook her head, smiling. Nathaniel Granger had a nearly complete set of every punk album made before what he called 'The Turn.' He had spoken with Hermione at great lengths about how Synth Pop had ruined music for eternity. "Yeah, Dad, my neck tattoo is totally punk rock. You should see what I've got pierced."

"Elise, Hermes is making fun of me!" He pushed Hermione's shoulder gently.

"Now, children!" Elise fell happily into the old rhythms of her family's life.

"She got a neck tattoo; can I have one?"

"No. I will not have some love-struck witch steal my husband from me! Besides... think of the practice," Elise chastised primly.

"Think of the practice," Nathaniel mimicked back like a snotty teenager.

"Oh! The practice! Do you think you'll be able to reschedule your appointments?" Hermione looked worriedly between her parents.

"Dear, it's Friday, and we are only open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays here. We are doing twice what we did in Britain! I'd feel guilty if the work wasn't so..." Elise made a face that clearly conveyed that general oral hygiene of their patients was absolutely gross.

"Okay. Well... care to spend the weekend in Britain?" Hermione smiled at them wearily. It would still be early morning in England, and Hermione certainly hadn't gotten enough sleep.

"Of course. If you'll see to Crooks, I'll pack some bags." Elise turned to Nathaniel and nodded.

In short order, Crooks was hissing from inside his carrier, Nathaniel was locking up the house, and Elise was flitting about, trying to think of any last-minute things. Hermione sat on the couch, closing her eyes for a moment and taking a reprieve. She breathed in deeply; it smelled like home. It sounded like home. Hermione's body settled into the couch, feeling at peace.

"Ready, Hermes?" Nathaniel asked as he helped his wife with her jacket. They had both changed into clothes that were suitable for England in October.

"I s'pose." Hermione rubbed her eyes sleepily. She stood up and looked at her parents as they stood together, her father holding Crooks' carrier. "If you'll recall, it's going to feel like you're getting sucked through a straw. Don't panic."

Hermione was having an intense feeling of déjà vu. This was creepily similar as to when she'd sent them away. Trying to keep her mind clear, Hermione breathed deeply. "Go home," she commanded. The Grangers' wedding rings lit up brightly, and they disappeared moments later.

"Come, Acara, let's go." Hermione heaved a great sigh and picked up the cat before Apparating once again to her parents' house.

# The In-Laws

Chapter 22 of 25

"This once, just this once, I have to say, bugger propriety!"

To say that Bria was amazed at the sight of Harry Potter when she opened the great doors of the Manor would be a vast understatement. In fact, the little elf was so impressed that she promptly fainted.

"Malfoy? Anyone?" Harry looked down at the little elf worriedly. He pulled off his hoodie and began to fold it, leaning over the elf.

"Trying to free more of my elves, *Potter*?" Lucius sneered from the doorway of his study, which was many feet from the door.

Harry's gaze turned to ice. Refusing to be baited, he folded the jumper into a little pillow and lifted the little elf so that she was resting comfortably.

Draco came barrelling down the stairway opposite his father. "She's back?" he inquired as he pulled a cloak around him. He had been explaining the situation to his parents when Hermione's owl had come, telling him to be ready for Harry to bring him to her parents' house. His stomach had been so tied up that he had had to skip lunch, and he had posted Bria at the door to make sure Harry was let in promptly.

"Draco," Lucius chastised his son's urgency and lack of decorum as he stood next to Harry, obviously aching to leave.

"Yes, Father, I know. Only cretins run. This once, just this once, I have to say, bugger propriety! *Potter*?" Draco asked as he pushed the black-haired wizard out the door. Once they were at the Apparition point, Draco grabbed Harry's arm and urged him to go. Harry smirked, disbelieving that the Slytherin Prince was such a mess. Finally taking pity on him, Harry turned on his heel and took him to Hermione.

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"Draco Malfoy, Hermione's parents live at one-four-one Pauling Way, Sutton, Surrey." Harry turned to watch Draco as the large home came into view for the first time.

It was a typical house for the area, three well-kept storeys of brick in the Tudor style. The neighbours' houses complemented it, and there was a large garden in the front. It was well maintained and gave off a sense of pride without being audacious. Draco swallowed; he hadn't been this nervous in many, many years.

Draco was startled by the sound of a bell. Harry had pressed it as Draco gaped at the house. Harry smirked. He remembered when Ron had come with him the first time, and it had taken quite a while to explain the bell to him.

"Harry James Potter, give us a hug!" Elise beamed at the young man. She held him for a long time, patting and rubbing his back and kissing his cheeks. When she seemed to have gotten her fill, she pulled back and brushed his hair back, exposing a now unmarred forehead. She pulled it to her for a close look and ultimately kissed his forehead several times. "Oh, Harry! I'm so happy for you! I'm so, so happy!" She pulled him in again, never noticing that Harry was beginning to get truly embarrassed.

"Oh, and look how tall you are! Shot up late, did you?"

"Elise! Let the boy go!" Nathaniel yelled from inside the house.

"Nathaniel Brian Granger! I haven't seen him in three years; leave me be!" Elise pulled him down for another motherly hug, as if to ensure that Harry really was in front of her and intact.

Hermione came into the doorway to pry Harry out of her mother's arms. "Mum!" Hermione was starting to feel embarrassed as well. Draco was watching the whole display with avid curiosity. As Elise finally relinquished her hold on the Boy Who Lived Twice, he quickly moved to shake Nathaniel's hand, which was followed by a manly hug with a solitary clap on the back.

Seeing that Harry was settled on the couch, Elise turned back to Draco, giving him a look of deep disapproval as she pursed her lips. "Mr Malfoy, I presume?"

Well, it could have been worse. Draco was able to keep from flinching, but only just. After seeing such an... exuberant display of welcome, minimal courtesy seemed to be rather insulting.

"Yes, madam. It is an honour to meet you." Draco tried to stealthily wipe his sweaty palm on his Transfigured jacket before delicately shaking her hand.

"Do come in." Elise moved aside and Draco walked into the sitting room. Nathaniel stood and moved to shake his hand. Once introductions were made, everyone sat down. Elise and Harry were on a longer couch, Hermione, Acara, and Nathaniel sat on a love seat, and Draco reluctantly moved to one of the two armchairs remaining. He definitely felt like the odd man out.

Elise served tea, and Draco was shocked to find her manners were nearly as prim as his mother's. After a few excruciating minutes when only the clink of saucers could be heard, Nathaniel cleared his throat.

"Well, Mr M...Draco. Are you pleased with yourself?" The older man's tone clearly suggested that he was not.

Draco's heart skipped a beat. He took a long swallow of tea, choosing his response carefully. "I am extremely pleased with the outcome, sir. I do, however, have the perspective now that illuminates what some would consider to be objectionable behaviour."

"That's a very intricate response, Draco. On the whole, I take it to mean 'yes'," Nathaniel stated, staring at the blond with unflinching neutrality. "Is 'yes' what you mean?"

Draco blinked slowly. "Yes."

"To all of it, everything you ever did to Hermione, you are pleased with?" Nathaniel insisted.

"At the end of the day, sir, I am."

"How interesting." Nathaniel leaned back and turned away from the boy he was interrogating. His face turned thoughtful, and he began to worry his lower lip in deep concentration. Frustration was quickly beginning to show on his face.

"Would you not agree, sir, that Hermione is the cleverest, most innovative, most beautiful witch... girl that there could possibly be?" Draco asked seriously, his eyes never leaving Hermione's father. Though, in the periphery he could see Hermione blushing as she drank daintily from the fine china. "I've known for nearly half my life that she was all of that and more."

"Then I am to understand that you find it necessary to treat our daughter like rubbish out of admiration?"

Draco took another long drink from his cup, nearly emptying it. "Regrettably, it is not as simple as that."

"Yes, Nathaniel. Additionally, persons closer to the situation seem to be amenable. You said that that... Arulio, is it?" Elise turned to Hermione for confirmation.

"Ariulo," Hermione corrected.

"Yes, that's right. Ar-i-u-lo has said he is impressed by Draco's work in the colony."

Draco couldn't help but be grateful that someone was playing what most clearly thought to be the devil's advocate. However, he also couldn't shake a sense of irony from Hermione's mother.

Nathaniel seemed unmoved. Having decided he needed more information, he turned toward the other young man present. "Harry? What are your thoughts?"

Harry choked on the biscuit he'd just put in his mouth. He quickly drank some tea and pounded on his chest.

"Well, he's not a total git, like he used to be," Harry said uncertainly, unsure of whose side he was on.

"Dad, Mum, it doesn't matter; we're getting married, I signed the contract."

"It's not as simple as that, Sweeting, I'm sorry." Nathaniel delicately set his cup and saucer down and abruptly walked out of the room. Hermione felt cold without the warmth of her father beside her on the small couch. There was an awkward silence for a few moments, until the sound of Nathaniel's footsteps became louder.

When he came back, he was holding a leather-bound letterbox. Nathaniel pointed it accusingly at Draco, who had no choice but to take it with his free hand. He cast an Immobilize Charm as well as a Hover charm on his teacup and saucer and carefully opened the box on his lap.

"Dad?" Hermione looked between the box and her father with her brow furrowed.

"It's letters from you when you were at Hogwarts," Draco explained quietly.

"Not all of the letters, Sweeting, just the tear-soaked ones. The happy ones are in a different box. Mr Malfoy seems to be at the centre of most of these." Nathaniel moved his hand over Hermione's back a few times before he ended up holding her firmly where her neck met her shoulder. The butt of his palm rested on the brand, and Draco could feel it pressing on his chest.

He could also feel a definite constriction of the muscles in his chest, but he refused to let the others know.

"Blimey, Hermione. There's got to be, like, a hundred letters there," Harry said from his seat, amazed again at his prolific friend.

Hermione was in awe. She couldn't believe that her parents had saved all of those letters. She'd saved theirs as well, but she figured it was because she was a young girl away from home in a very, very strange land. She also knew that Draco was not as unmoved as he was hoping to portray, but the only other person in the room who seemed to notice, or care, maybe, was her mum.

"I was extremely unpleasant as a child," Draco admitted stoically. He delicately replaced the envelopes he'd lifted to their original places before shutting the box. He heard Harry scoff quietly, but didn't think much of it. Draco took a deep breath and continued, "I can only assure you, as I have assured Hermione, that this..." He gestured to the box in his lap. "...is not what the future holds."

Silence hung heavily in the room. For a few moments, no one moved. Finally, Acara got up and moved to lie beside Draco's chair, her head resting heavily against his ankle.

More long, quiet minutes passed until Nathaniel made his excuse to leave. "Harry, show me what's been done on the house outside, if you don't mind?" he asked before giving Hermione a kiss on the cheek and leaving the sitting room unceremoniously. Harry scampered after him after pilfering a few biscuits to nibble as the two men talked.

"Hermione, if you'd help me in the kitchen a moment?" Elise requested, seemingly desperate to break the tension.

Hermione immediately got up, and she and her mother worked to clear the tea things away.

When Draco was alone, he dropped his head into his hands, shaking it softly. How two people could hold him captive, without magic, using only the weight of their judgment to pin him down, he did not know.

As he was trying to bolster himself, Draco felt a delicate hand push through his hair. He looked up, surprised to find Elise standing beside him. He hadn't really noticed it before, but she looked nothing like Hermione. She did not have a heart-shaped face or cupid's bow lips. The shape of their eyes was the same, but Hermione definitely took after her father.

"Can I trust that you've changed?" Elise asked quietly, the sound of Hermione doing the dishes wafting into the room. She pushed her fingers through his hair again, a distinctly maternal essence working to smooth his rough nerves.

"I am certain I have, and will continue to change, although she will always be the centre of my world. That will never change." Draco closed his eyes slowly, feeling simultaneously sedate and alert in extremes.

Elise's small hand slid down his cheek. "Be sure I do not regret this." She patted his cheek softly a couple of times. "She could use some help in the kitchen with the drying."

Draco nodded, walking fluidly into the kitchen to help Hermione finish cleaning up.

## Signed, Sealed, Delivered

*Chapter 23 of 25*

Hermione Jean Granger, do you enter into this marriage willingly and in good faith?

The next morning...

Hermione took the two hair combs and smiled as she placed them into the braids that formed a crown around her head. The combs were gold encrusted with diamonds

and had been worn by Granger brides through six generations.

"Thanks, Mum." Hermione smiled, feeling warm hands resting softly on her shoulders. Bria had outdone herself minutes ago, and Hermione's dark hair fell down her back in large curls. They seemed to flow endlessly from the thick plaits that stemmed from her temples.

"You look beautiful, Hermes," Elise said quietly. She had been sniffing more and more as the morning progressed. Luna and Ginny had been keeping her distracted, but they had gone to look for Nathaniel, and now the waterworks were starting.

"Mum, it'll be all right." Hermione turned and held her mum's hand. She had expected that her mother would be emotional, but Hermione had prepared herself to be censoring her anger, not drying her tears.

Elise sniffed. "I know, I know. You're a big powerful mage now. However, you're still my little Hermes. You just look so beautiful, and I'm just so proud—"

Hermione watched as her mom broke down into full sobs. Hermione stood up and pulled her into her arms. She was shocked and didn't know what to do besides rub her back.

Fortunately, Hermione's father came in with Ginny and Luna after a few moments and relieved Hermione of her burden. She could hear her mother sniffing and trying to compose herself as they walked down the hall.

Hermione grabbed the chair from in front of the vanity and moved it to sit in front of the empty fireplace. She sat and sighed, centring herself to play with her fire. Bouncing fireballs off the back of the fireplace wasn't nearly as satisfying as playing catch with another mage, but it was better than nothing.

"Everything all right, dears?" Molly Weasley asked, poking her head in. She moved immediately to Ginny, who was sitting at the vanity, and began to fuss.

As always, the Weasleys had shepherded her parents concerning the dealings with the Malfoys as they explained the traditions, which was invaluable. Of course, the Malfoys had their own wedding traditions, which Hermione had had outlined in the contract. Her wedding day would be singular simply by virtue of joining with Draco.

"Homesick, I think is all." Hermione turned and absorbed the ball of fire. She stood, her dress flowing behind her.

Molly quit straightening Ginny's robes and turned to Hermione. "You do look lovely," she sniffed, tapping a handkerchief to the corner of her eye.

"Not you, too." Hermione grimaced and reached out to embrace the matriarch.

"Just try to stop me!" Molly clucked and gave Hermione a full-out Weasley hug. Hermione was overwhelmed by the outpouring of love she was receiving but was delightfully relieved when Luna rescued her, pressing a cup of tea into Molly's hands.

Nathaniel came back into the room. "I believe we are ready to begin," he said, moving to take Hermione's hand as they'd been practicing. They had had three hours the night before and three hours that morning to familiarise themselves with the motions.

"Define ready," Hermione snorted, she and Molly moving to the mirror one last time.

"You are beautiful; trust me, young Mister Malfoy will not notice anything else once you are in front of him." Her father moved and began to drag her out of the room. Luna and Ginny fanned out the train of Hermione's dress behind her before trotting out to stand in front of them, Ginny at the head followed directly by Luna.

"That's right, dear. I hardly remember my own wedding, and I practically had to move Arthur's mouth for him, he was so dumbstruck." Molly fluffed Hermione's hair as she spoke, her actions in direct contradiction to her words. "I'm going to find my seat. Good luck, dear." Molly kissed Hermione on the cheek and hurried away. Once in the proper positions, they proceeded to the ballroom.

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Hermione could feel every eye in the room on her as she advanced along the aisle that led from the grand doorway. The audience filled the room inward from the walls, and the room was sectioned off into quarters. In the centre of the room stood the men of the ceremony. Blaise and Theo Nott stood at what Hermione had been informed were the east and west points of a compass inlaid on the floor. Draco, Lucius, and a Ministry official stood in the interior circle of the compass.

Behind Theo sat a crowd of Draco's friends and associates, and behind Blaise was a crowd of 'important' wizards and witches Hermione had never met. As the procession entered the hall, Luna went to stand at the northern point, and Ginny went to the southern. Behind Luna were people Hermione could name but had never spoken to before, and behind Ginny was the final small crowd, which was filled with Hermione's loved ones.

Hermione's father led her down the path between Ginny and Blaise in the direction of Lucius. When they arrived, the ceremony officially began.

"I present my daughter to be united with your family," Nathaniel spoke clearly and loudly.

Lucius felt a wave of magic wash over him and had to take a heartbeat to compose himself.

"It is an honour to accept your line into mine," Lucius replied with arrogance that was undermined by a sense of overwhelming verity.

Hermione had protested the language of the presentation. Since she hadn't anticipated having her parents attend the ceremony, they hadn't discussed what would happen if her father were actually present to give her away. She had certainly never thought that the transaction would be so literal.

Another wave of magic passed through them as Lucius moved Hermione into place.

"Draco Calpernius Malfoy, do you enter into this marriage willingly and in good faith?" the Ministry official asked the young man.

Without looking at Hermione, Draco replied, "I do."

"Hermione Jean Granger, do you enter into this marriage willingly and in good faith?" the Ministry official asked, turning his attention to her.

Hermione swallowed dryly. Taking a deep breath, she answered, "I do."

Everyone in the ballroom gasped as a wave of magic pulled through the bride and groom.

Draco moved to take Hermione's hands in his, left holding left and right holding right. From the other side, his father began to chant the Malfoy marriage rite. As it progressed, the whirl of magic grew faster and faster, coiling around Draco and Hermione. As it grew up around them, Draco pulled Hermione ever closer. By the end of the chanting, only a thin line of air separated them.

When the only sound around them was the intangible crackle of magic, Draco dropped his head to Hermione's. The tip of his nose brushed softly against hers as he whispered, "Sealed with a kiss."

Draco's lips were pressed gently against Hermione's, and she soon pressed back, returning his chaste kiss. When they broke apart, Draco Apparated them to the Manor's Newlywed Suite, holding her tightly until they landed at the foot of the bed.

# Mine

## Chapter 24 of 25

"It's time you really take what's yours."

Draco immediately advanced on Hermione, forcing her to walk backward as he peppered her face with kisses. He was holding her jaw gently, his thumbs stroking over her cheekbones. Just as Hermione felt her dress push against her calves as she stood next to the bed, Draco stopped.

"Can't have you ruining the dress, Princess," he mumbled as he licked up her jaw-line and into her ear. The next moment, Hermione was standing before him in nothing but her shoes and undergarments: a white brocade corset, matching knickers, and stockings. She had goose flesh up her arms and down her back.

Hermione put her hands on Draco's chest, looking up at him nervously. She watched him devour her with his eyes and couldn't help but feel more than a little turned on. Fortunately, she was able to find her voice. "Draco, maybe we should take a step back and go slow." She looked at the floor, feeling rather unsure of herself. She was shocked when, in her periphery, Draco's robes vanished as well. Hermione couldn't help but notice the huge tent in his shorts.

Draco slid his hands down the curves accentuated by her corset, resting his hands on her deliciously full hips and pulling her to him. Holding her lower half against his, he pressed his lips against her temple. "I want to make love to my wife."

"Draco..."

"Say 'husband'."

Hermione swallowed. His fingers were gently teasing the top of her thighs, drawing warm circles and occasionally moving into the territory of her arse. She looked up at him, her eyes wide. Hermione tried to speak, but couldn't.

Draco sighed, unable to enjoy the shiver that ran down her spine with his breath. Taking time to enjoy one last caress, he drew his hands away from her. He crawled onto the bed. Once he was settled and sitting against the headboard, he patted the bed beside him, giving her a curious look.

Hermione ran her hands up and down her arms a couple times as she debated with herself. When she finally drummed up the courage, she moved onto the bed, kneeling awkwardly while facing Draco. They looked at each other, much as they had done during the contract negotiations. Hermione could easily read his facial expressions now. She knew he could read her too, whether or not she wanted him to.

After a few long minutes, Draco dropped his hand into his shorts and began fisting his cock slowly. "Gods, you are beautiful. Kneeling like that. Mm. I just want to fuck you 'til you scream my name as you cum." Draco dropped his head against the wall, watching her with heavily lidded eyes.

Hermione felt her face flame hot in embarrassment over what he'd so lewdly said. However, she could also feel a flush along her neck and the top of her chest, and it certainly wasn't because she was embarrassed. She didn't know whether to watch his hand or his face or to look away. She wanted to avert her eyes, but there was something in his attention on her that kept her focused only on him.

Draco noticed her attention and wasn't surprised when his cock started to weep. She looked so good, flushed as she was. He wanted to press his lips against her hot skin. He wanted Hermione in his lap, taking care of his cock. "Princess... oh, gods, do you see what you do to me?" Draco pulled his cock out over the waistband of his shorts, stroking it slow and hard.

Seeing Draco's cock for the first time shocked Hermione. She knew it was big and hard, but now it wasn't hidden in his pants as it had been before. Frankly, she was astonished.

Draco's voice slowly pulled her gaze back up to his face, "It's all for you; always has been." Draco watched another wave of heat push through her skin. "Hermione, just live a little, for fuck's sake. I can practically hear your thoughts. It's okay to fuck me. I'll make it *so* much better than okay." Draco licked his lips at the end and watched as Hermione stared at him.

Draco reached out his free hand for her. Hermione looked at it for a moment before wiping her sweaty palm on the bed cover and resting her trembling fingers in his outstretched palm. Draco held her hand gently with his thumb and pulled it to his lips. He kissed the backs of her fingers, looking into her eyes the whole time.

Hermione let out shuddered sigh. Draco's tongue was coiling down her ring finger, but he never broke his gaze. Hermione let out a reluctant whimper, which seemed to ignite Draco's lust. His brows turned down in a serious way, and what was once an open and joyful countenance quickly became full of lascivious promises.

"Say 'husband'," Draco practically moaned when he finally pulled his mouth from her fingers. He was leaning forward to pull her body against his. When Hermione was finally leaning against him, he wasted no time in licking and nipping her neck and ear. His arm was strong around her, holding her in place.

Hermione was overwhelmed by his passion and pacified by the things he was doing with his mouth. She was more than happy with what he was managing. She was quite surprised when he pulled back from her.

"No more until you say it," Draco panted. It was almost painful to stop, but he didn't want to spend the rest of their lives dragging her along into everything.

"Draco..." Hermione whined softly. She licked her lips and found herself pressing against his chest.

"Wife." Draco stroked his hands through her hair, reveling in the silken curls.

Hermione huffed.

Draco smirked.

Hermione scowled.

Draco smiled broadly, beautifully.

Hermione rolled her eyes. Fortifying herself with a deep breath, she sighed, "Husband."

Draco's face lit up. He leaned into her and kissed her mouth soundly. It was so aggressive that Hermione soon found herself on her back, her legs twisted toward the edge of the bed. Draco Vanished his shorts and moved to get Hermione centred on the large marriage bed. Once he had her where he wanted her, Draco insinuated himself



between her thighs, holding himself over her and drawing deep kisses again and again, pulling back only to begin again.

"Say it again, and I'll eat your beautiful naked pussy until you can't take any more." Draco was kneeling slightly and had moved his hands down to fold open the cups over Hermione's breasts. He was rolling her nipples one at a time. Draco had to balance on one hand, since he wasn't nearly done snogging her yet.

Hermione was brilliantly close, and at the thought of receiving cunnilingus, she threw her legs open. However, Draco was too busy to notice because he had pulled back, sitting on his heels as he pulled and twisted Hermione's nipples. Her eyes were shut tight, her head tossing when he made the smallest change in treatment; her back was arched and beautiful underneath him.

"Who do you want to eat your quim, Wife?"

"Draco!" Hermione couldn't keep her hips from rolling forward; she needed something between her legs.

"Ah-ah!" Draco stopped ravishing Hermione's nipples and began soothing her breasts with his palms.

"Oh! Husband!" Hermione opened her eyes and scowled at the blond. In return, Draco Vanished her panties and grabbed her thighs.

Hermione felt Draco's hands slide up her thighs and smooth up to her arse. When his tongue unfolded her labia, Hermione moaned. Draco's fingertips were pressed soundly into her arse cheeks as he palmed them. Hermione's hips rolled forward when pulled his teeth gently over her clit before sliding his tongue deep into quim.

This was no gentle tongue fucking like he'd given her in the dream. It was evident that he wanted her to finish as soon as possible, and he was working steadily toward his goal.

Draco pulled back, his lips and chin covered in Hermione's juices. He deftly began fingering her with two fingers, licking the juices from his palm, only pausing to watch his fingers disappear inside of her.

"Who's going to make you cum, Hermione?"

"You!" Hermione moaned. She was frantically trying to get off on his hands. Her efforts were fruitful, but it still wasn't enough. Draco was holding her back.

"Guess again, Wife." Draco made a couple passing swipes at her clit with his tongue before sitting back.

Hermione's fists hit the mattress twice. She opened her eyes, pleading silently with him to just let her cum already. Draco wasn't looking at her face; he was hypnotised by the roll of her body on the bed. Hermione's tits bounced as she tried to fuck herself with his fingers, and with her thighs spread widely, she was a sight.

"Husband?"

Draco's gaze returned to Hermione's face. "Whose husband?"

"Mine!" Hermione cried as Draco's hand moved into the perfect position.

"Again!"

Hermione was out of her mind as her orgasm finally swept over her, her body racked in ecstasy.

She moaned the word again, and Draco's cock twitched when he heard her claim him for the second time. Pulling his hand out of her, he moved to lie beside her, wrapping his arm around her and pulling her pliant body on top of his so they were chest to chest. Once she was settled, he began to play with her hair, delighting in her aftershocks.

Draco was aching to bury himself inside of her, his cock throbbing between her legs. He was also enjoying the novelty of being aroused by her and being near to her naked, post-orgasmic body. Most of all, he'd planned to take this very slowly. He knew Hermione would dig in against anything if she felt she was being pushed too much. If he prompted her little by little, she would wander into his way accidentally.

"I'm cutting it when we get back home," Hermione said against his shoulder. "A metre of my hair is too much work."

Draco smirked. She wouldn't ruin his fun, though. He'd play with her hair if it were metres long or centimetres long. Draco combed his fingers through it and wrapped it around his hand. Pulling very gently, he watched as her face turned up towards his.

"Say it again?"

"Husband," Hermione mumbled sleepily.

Draco tickled his hands up her sides. "The other word."

Hermione looked up at him, drawing a deep breath. He held her gaze for a long moment. Finally, she relented. "Mine." Hermione tried to look cross about it, but seeing the boyish smile that spread across his face, she felt the corners of her lips curl up just slightly.

Draco ducked his chin down and kissed her temple. He Summoned a light blanket and spread it over them. Hermione was already sleeping softly on his chest. Draco let her rest; she'd need the energy for what was to come next.

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Hermione woke up thinking Draco was asleep beside her. She turned to look at him. Her husband. *Hers*. He was beautiful, although that might have been the endorphins talking. As her eyes scanned down his body, she saw a large tent peaked up over his middle. Had he cum with her earlier? She couldn't remember for sure, but she didn't think so. Checking to see that his face was still soft and relaxed in sleep, she pulled the blanket away gently.

Hermione was not surprised or intimidated by his penis anymore, but she knew her limitations, and this was probably slightly beyond them. She shifted gently on the bed to get a better look at it.

"That's yours to enjoy anytime you want," Draco said, peering out through one eye.

Hermione shrieked and slapped him in the middle of his chest. "Bloody hell, Draco, you scared the crap out of me! I thought you were asleep!"

Draco caught her hands up and pulled her on top of him. "No bloke can sleep with a prick as hard as mine, Wife. It's time you really take what's yours."

Hermione looked up into the playful eyes of the lascivious man under her and couldn't help but smile. She moved to straddle him and began to get in position, mumbling, "This is just sex, I still mostly hate you."

Draco arched his back as he let out a loud barking laugh. Hermione slapped him again but smiled softly as well.

Draco sobered as her core brushed against his knob.

"I'm not wet enough," Hermione said sourly, looking down at him.

Draco pressed his hands up her thighs and sighed contentedly. He situated her so that she sat with her open quim wrapped around the underside of his cock.

Hermione could feel the pulsing heat of his penis, and she fought to suppress a shiver, ultimately failing.

"Love, it's never *just sex* when it's with a Malfoy." He chuckled softly, mostly to himself, and began to trace the dragon tattoo on his chest. He watched as her skin rose to goose flesh and her nipples stood on end. He tossed the hair over one of her shoulders and reached up to roll one of her nipples.

When she moved to lean forward into him as he pulled her tender flesh, he braced her with the other hand, keeping her in place. "I'm going to make you so wet, Princess," he promised, the certainty in his tone making her shiver. Hermione was surprised when her core started to moisten.

"Once I get my prick in you, I'm going to fuck you out of your brilliant mind and back into it," Draco said as he started working the other side.

Hermione's breathing was beginning to deepen, and while she'd initially been relieved when he switched nipples, the first was now throbbing for more attention. Hermione reached up to pull it herself, and soon Draco was working fastidiously on her right nipple as she worked her left. Her hips began to slide on Draco's hot, hard cock.

"Fuck, Hermione, you are so bloody, fucking gorgeous," Draco said, arching against her. He pulled her hips in a quick loop that forced him deep inside of her and she moaned in delight.

"Draco! Oh, gods."

"Is that a good prick, Wife?" Draco asked, gently moving her hand away from her nipple so he could work them both himself. Hermione thrust her chest out and let her head loll back.

"Oh, yeah."

"Whose prick is it, Princess?"

"Oh, yours!" Hermione moaned breathlessly. Her hips were starting to roll into his.

Draco pinched Hermione's nipples hard, and she whimpered, pouting down at him. "Guess again," he said and smiled.

Hermione looked into the deep grey eyes of her husband and whispered, "Mine." She was rewarded with a hard thrust up and a playful twist of her nipples.

"Bloody well right it is." Draco smiled and pulled her down on top of him, kissing her soundly as he fucked her. The probing of his tongue was hot and hard as his cock drove into her again and again.

Hermione was quickly overwhelmed. The next thing she knew she was on her back, Draco still kissing her thoroughly. His cock was somehow encased in her completely, utterly still. It was maddening; she wanted to get fucked already. It had been a long time since she'd been properly laid out, and now that she was here, she was damn well going to get laid.

"Draco," she whined, breaking the kiss.

"Hermione," Draco responded, his voice heavy with lust.

"Fuck me."

Draco smirked and shook his head softly at her.

"Please?" Hermione asked, trying to be sweet and coy despite the fact that he was in her to the hilt.

Draco's eyes blazed but he didn't move.

*Fine, if it's dirty talk he wants....* Hermione thought. "Draco, I need you to fuck me with that big, hard prick. It's time."

Draco shivered and began pumping slowly, using his whole length to tease her.

Hermione arched her back. It felt so good. "Yes, just like that. But harder. Fuck me harder, like you mean it!"

Draco's nostrils flared, and he smiled. His breathing was starting to get shallow. Unexpectedly, he flicked his hips into her, causing Hermione to shriek in delight, the pace quickly picking up.

"Mine," he growled, palming one of her breasts.

"Yes!" Hermione clutched at his arms and shoulders.

The squelching sound was back, and as Draco fucked her, trying new angles to see what was best, it only got louder. After a few minutes of experimentation, he hit her in just the right way and her back arched, an unexpected orgasm coming on hard and fast.

Feeling her clench around him, in addition to waiting all those hours, days, and years broke his control, and he shot his load into her with an almost pained grunt. He held her hips still as he came and came, and into the aftershocks. He relaxed on top of her, and they panted together for several minutes.

When their bodies were completely stuck together with sweat, Draco finally slipped out of her, rolling to lay at her side.

"Mione?" Draco asked wearily.

"Hmm?" Hermione had just enough energy to turn her head and look at him.

"Did you want to use a charm...?" Draco trailed off and moved his hand to delicately rub her belly.

She was too dazed to pick up his meaning.

"If we don't wait to have the children we can... live like the others sooner," he offered quietly, remembering the stipulations that were in place to allow them to marry.

Hermione felt suddenly cold and cast the charm on herself before rolling to wrap herself around Draco's chest and pulling the blankets around them. "I think I can wait for heirs if you can," she whispered.

Draco smiled sleepily and stroked her hair. It had only taken nine years, but he had gotten Hermione, and she wasn't necessarily in a hurry to leave. At that moment, Draco couldn't be any happier.

# The Magnitude of His Actions (The Missing Chapter)

## Chapter 25 of 25

Draco hadn't wanted to incur disfavour so early on; his belly tightened. He knew there must be a word for this. He'd heard about it before. Guilt.

Hermione woke up the next morning wondering how everything would work out. She had tried to avoid Lucius since the contract had been signed. They would meet again after lunch to make the amendments. This meant that the young initiates had only the morning to clear the field. It would be the last day for them, anyway; the colony only supported twenty fields, which had all been cleared. Draco had been a valuable asset to accomplishing that; he was very efficient once he got the hang of it. Such were her thoughts as she moved to the initiates' cottage and breakfast area.

Draco had breakfast with the men exactly as he had in the scant days before the contract was signed. It was highly disappointing to be away from Hermione, and even, surprisingly enough, away from the other initiates. He'd spent every waking moment in the presence of the other novices that being around the main table with the men was jarring.

Draco silently ate his breakfast, listening for clues to what happened in his absence. Maank was on his father's other side. They sat close enough to each other that it was obvious he was his father's favourite. A man Draco did not recognise on his other side spoke animatedly with the other men at the table.

Ariulo sat quietly, occasionally feeding his cat little bits of meat from his plate. He seemed calmer, but also stern. Hermione must have relayed the entire evening's events. Draco hadn't wanted to incur disfavour so early on; his belly tightened. He knew there must be a word for this. He'd heard about it before. Guilt. Draco swallowed as his mouth watered in clammy reaction to his feelings. *What a Hufflepuff you've become, Draco!*

Once breakfast was done, Draco sat a short while with his father. He relayed all that he had done, his meditations and his progress in the language. When he demonstrated his verbal skills for his father, he chuckled. Apparently, through the translator medallion at his neck, Lucius had heard Draco use the incorrect verb tense, and soon the chuckles evolved into a guffaw. Lucius tried to explain that Draco had sounded like a house-elf, and Draco couldn't help but roll his eyes at his father smiling softly when Lucius clapped him on the back.

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Before lunch, Draco took a nap so he could meet with Severus. He loved his godfather very much, but knowing now what an insight he could have on Hermione was too much to pass up. When he found himself dreaming of Snape Manor in the summer, Draco breathed a sigh of relief. Sometimes he really missed the English countryside.

"That was brief. Given up already?" Severus flared his nostrils at the young man who took his leisure on an antique chaise on the patio.

"No, I've finished already. However, your vote of confidence is truly touching." Draco scowled and plucked sullenly at the hem of his shirt.

"Ah, you've been disciplined." Watching Draco's eyes narrow to slits, Severus added, "By Hermione nonetheless!" His warm chuckle kept Draco's scowl from deepening.

"What am I to do with her, Uncle? I could save a thousand kittens from a raging fire and she'd still think I am white."

"Well, now, what have you been doing? Tell me about this latest, specifically."

"It was during my language lesson, and I was having a problem with the sounds, Sev, I really was, and she came over and put her hand on my neck. I could smell her, and with her touching me, it all came out perfectly. She touches me, and it's perfection. Don't look at me like that."

"Anyway, she was so close to me and I could smell her, and I can't take it! When she moves her hand away, I catch it and press it against my cheek. I swear, Uncle, I almost shot my load then, feeling her fingers on my cheek."

"You touched her without permission? Did you leave your worthless excuse for a brain in Britain with your mother?"

"You've got to be kidding. I've seen firsties get more action than that."

"I mean that it is tantamount to you grabbing McGonagall's arse in front of everyone in the Great Hall. Draco, you must understand one thing, if you get nothing else. Hermione is your better here. You are *nothing*; Maank could kill you and your father, and let that damned bird eat you so there would be no remains left to find." Snape paused to pinch the bridge of his nose. "What are they going to do with you now?"

Draco stared out over the dreamscape. "We are renegotiating with the Council; if I release Hermione from training me at the early initiate levels, she offered to make my lessons at night more... comfortable."

"Of course!" Severus shook his head at the boy and threw his hands up subtly by his sides. Somehow, Draco could do no wrong, even when he was doing wrong, the little pillock. Did Hermione realise that she'd be compromising infinitely more than Draco would?

Maybe she was softening her position; more's the better for her.

The two Slytherins sat for what seemed like a great while in the dream world before Draco finally talked himself into asking the question that had been weighing on his mind since he'd brought Hermione in to talk to Severus. "How'd you do it?" His voice was so quiet that he wasn't sure that he'd asked loud enough.

Severus arched an eyebrow at the boy. "I'm afraid you'll have to be more specific."

Draco cleared his throat, never daring to turn his attention directly to Snape, and clarified, "How did you... keep her... around?" Draco's face looked so struck with pain by the time he croaked the last word, Snape didn't have the heart to berate the boy for his impertinent question.

"Contrary to the opinion of students of Hogwarts, I am not without *mycharms*. However, what I think you are lacking in this situation is a common ground. Among the things that Miss Granger and I have in common are being isolated due to academic drive, relative isolation from our peers, our work for the Order, and having to maintain non-magical ties whether by choice or chance.

"You spent all of those years isolating her; your presence was always labelled for her as 'bad'. I was cruel to her, but she was able to decipher my motives with little additional information. Additionally, there was the botched potion."

"So, you're suggesting that the way to turn Hermione my way is...?"

"For you to figure out yourself, Draco," Severus sighed. Teenagers were always so thick. "I have every confidence that you can accomplish anything you put your mind to."

Now, I'm sure the meeting with the council approaches. You should probably wake up."

As soon as Severus had uttered the command, Draco's eyes popped open. Indeed, his father was gathering his copy of the contract. Draco rubbed his eyes, his mind busy with all that had happened that morning.