

Broken

by potterbrat

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Punishment for a Malfoy

Chapter 1 of 27

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Punishment for a Malfoy

Chapter 1

"Lucius, where is your prodigal son?" Lord Voldemort hissed at his most loyal follower. Lucius Malfoy crawled to Lord Voldemort and kissed the hem of his robes. He was terrified, to say the least.

"My Lord, Draco has chosen the side of the light. He left me a note. He will be punished," Lucius spat.

"Indeed. I believe a few bouts of the Cruciatus and then perhaps an Avada Kedavra?" Voldemort laughed manically.

"You want me to k-kill my only son?" Lucius was stunned. He knew that Voldemort was cruel, but he didn't think he could kill his only son. Draco was his flesh and blood. If he killed him, there would be no one to carry on the Malfoy name. Draco was the last born son of one of the oldest pureblood families in the wizarding world.

"You refuse? Oh, well... perhaps I should punish you instead." Voldemort raised his wand, and with a menacing smile, he hissed, "*Castratio!*"

Back at the Malfoy Manor, Draco was desperately trying to pack a few things before his father came home. He knew his father was with the Dark Lord and would be home in a couple of hours. That didn't leave him a lot of time to get everything he needed. His mother had left the manor a few weeks ago to go on holiday, but Draco knew she would not return. He had overheard his mother on the Floo with someone he didn't recognize, telling them that she was leaving Lucius.

That was when Draco had decided to leave. He'd wrestled with the decision to join Harry Potter for years. But when he put his mind to it, he weighed his options very carefully: a wizarding world without Muggles or Mudbloods, or a wizarding world without a freak who looked like a snake and would kill you on the spot if he didn't like your cologne. The choice became pretty clear at that point. That's when he decided to make it official and join Harry Potter. He pledged his loyalties to Dumbledore and, in doing so, put his life in the crazy old wizard's hands. Funny, Draco thought, he felt safer with the old coot than he did with his own father.

Draco was made a member of the Order of the Phoenix a week later and began training with Harry, Ron and Hermione. When the comment was made by Madam Pomfrey that there were more "soldiers" than healers, he, along with Ginny, decided that was where he was most needed. During his seventh year, Draco and Ginny both started training with Madam Pomfrey. When he graduated Hogwarts, he started an internship at St. Mungo's, and as soon as Ginny graduated, she joined him. However, now she

was no longer Ginny Weasley. The day after graduation, she married Harry Potter.

Of all the members of the Order, Draco was closest to Professor Snape, but he had quickly befriended Ginny regardless of the fact that she now carried the surname "Potter." He had never had a sister, but he thought she made a good stand-in. She had a lot of practice in being a sister, after all.

Since he became a member of the Order, he stayed at Malfoy Manor simply because that was where his things were. He failed to inform his father that he had changed sides and thought nothing of it until the day Lucius came to him and told him it was time for him to get his Mark and take his place in the Dark Lord's inner circle. He thought it might be a good time to leave. But in order to leave quickly, he needed help packing. He wouldn't ask Wonder Boy or his Dynamic Sidekick for help, and Ginny was working a shift at St. Mungo's, so he asked the only person around, who was currently sipping tea and reading the *Daily Prophet* in the kitchen of number twelve, Grimmauld Place.

Now he was in his bedroom with Hermione Granger. It wasn't that he didn't like her. He spent most of his life being told to hate her kind and everything about her. It was more like he was indifferent. But he needed help, and she said yes, so there they were.

Hermione was helping him pack just the essentials and some childhood memorabilia. They were working together in companionable silence when they heard a noise. They both looked up and caught each other's eyes.

"What was that?" Hermione asked with terror in her voice. "You don't think your father is already home, do you?"

Draco started to tell her it was probably just one of the house-elves when he heard someone clear his throat. Turning slowly, he saw, to his horror, his father standing in the door frame. And even more disconcerting was the look of boredom on his face.

Instinctively, Draco stepped in front of Hermione. "What do you want, Father?"

Ignoring his question, Lucius asked, "Why are you packing, Draco? Are you and your little Mudblood going somewhere?"

Even though Lucius was using a bored tone, there was no denying the evil glint in his eyes. He was blocking the doorway now, and Draco knew they couldn't get passed him. He just prayed that he could talk his way out of there. He knew both his and Hermione's lives depended on him.

"Actually, Father, we were just packing up a few of my things. I didn't think you'd want me here anymore. We're finished now, so we'll be on our way." He knew he wouldn't get anywhere, but he thought he'd give it a try. He started toward the door, being careful to keep himself between Hermione and his father.

Lucius just smiled in a way that people who didn't know any better would think was charming. "Surely you don't think I'm going to just let the two of you leave. No, Draco, I have other plans for you and your Mudblood. You see, Draco, the Dark Lord was a little put off by the choice you made. As a matter of fact, he decided it was my fault. And can you believe that he wanted me to kill you? Imagine killing my own son. I was outraged by this, and the Dark Lord assumed that I was refusing, which of course, I wasn't. So, instead of giving me time to wrap my brain around it, he punished me instead."

Draco was feeling sick. He could hear a small whimper from the girl behind him. He ignored her. He didn't want anymore attention sent her way than there already was. He didn't fancy her, but he didn't want his father to do anything to her either. They were on the same side, after all. The Order knew she was there. He also knew that Weasley didn't really trust him yet. Hopefully he could stall his father long enough that Weasley would get worried about Granger and come looking for her.

"Draco, why are you trying to hide your little Mudblood? I must say, she is easy on the eyes even if she is filthy." Draco didn't respond to his father's taunts. Draco stood his ground and looked his father in the eye. He liked to think that he wasn't the scared little boy anymore that needed the likes of Crabbe and Goyle to hide behind. But at that very moment, Draco was terrified. He was almost more terrified for Hermione than himself because his father believed there was more to her presence than simply helping him pack.

Draco was searching his mind for something to say when he heard the sound of a throat clearing behind him. "Er...hello Mr. Malfoy. We were just about to leave. I hope you have a good day." Damn Granger and her bloody Gryffindor bravery. Draco would have rolled his eyes if it wasn't such a dire situation.

"Ah, Miss Granger." Lucius put on his best fake smile that didn't reach his eyes. "You don't really believe that I'm just going to let you leave, do you? What sort of host would I be if I let you just walk out the door when I just got here? No. I have other plans for you my dear, after I deal with my son, of course."

It happened so fast that neither Draco nor Hermione knew what hit them. Lucius flung his wand at Draco, throwing him out of the way so he could have a clear shot at Hermione.

Advancing on her, he had a wicked grin spread across his face. "Well, now, it's just you and me, Mudblood."

Hermione was suddenly trembling with fear. She looked out of the corner of her eyes and noticed that Draco must have hit his head because he was out cold. Lucius picked Hermione up by her arms and threw her on the bed. The suitcases that contained Draco's clothes bounced onto the floor.

Lucius ripped Hermione's shirt off and whispered, "Now, I'm going to find out exactly what my son betrayed his family for."

Memories

Chapter 2 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: Thank you to my betas RobisonRocket and juliannanight! I own nothing but the plot.

Hermione was having a nightmare. She was in a tunnel, and she was being tossed from side to side. "Please stop," she said as she tried to open her eyes. But no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't get them to open. Then she heard someone calling to her.

"Miss Granger. Wake up. You need to wake up."

It wasn't a dream. She was being shaken. But why couldn't she open her eyes? She tried to sit up, but pain beyond anything she could have ever imagined coursed through her, and she felt like she was on fire. The pain was so intense that she leaned over the side of the bed and retched.

"*Scourgify*." She heard a low hiss from somewhere above her.

Hermione lay back down. When she finally pried her eyes open, she looked around. The only other person in the unfamiliar room was Professor Snape. She closed her eyes again. With her voice cracking, she whispered, "What's going on, Professor? Why are we here? Where is *here*?"

Snape didn't answer her. Instead, with an uncharacteristically soft tone, he asked, "Miss Granger, what is the last thing you remember?"

The last thing I remember? The last thing I remember? Hermione looked at Professor Snape with horror in her eyes. "All I remember is Lucius Malfoy laughing... and--" Hermione averted her eyes and mumbled something Snape couldn't hear.

"Miss Granger, I understand this might be difficult for you, but you must tell me exactly what you remember. Did he hex you? Did he make you drink a potion? Did he say something that might be of importance?"

"I don't remember anything he said. All I remember is being hit with a Stunning Spell. Lucius brought me out of it, but I don't know how much time had passed. I remember...OH MERLIN!" Hermione looked under the sheet and realized she was naked. She looked at Snape and pulled the sheet tighter to herself. Snape sighed. "This is how I found you. I'm sorry, Miss Granger. I covered you as soon as I saw you." Snape shifted in his seat, apparently uncomfortable.

"It's alright, Professor. I appreciate you covering me up."

"Think... uh... nothing of it. Please continue."

Tears stung her eyes as she fought to remember. "Lucius knocked Malfoy out with his wand. Oh no! Malfoy! Is he alright?"

"He's resting. Please, Miss Granger, I need to know everything." Hermione noticed that Snape had a sad look in his eyes, but decided it was best to just to carry on.

"I remember Lucius tearing my clothes off." Hermione spoke without looking at Snape. She proceeded to tell him what she could remember, and then she stopped. "Professor, there is something missing. There's so much I don't remember. Please, can't you just look into my mind to get the rest of my memories? It hurts too much for me to try to remember."

Again he didn't answer her. Instead he moved his wand over her face and performed a healing charm. He looked at her with sadness and asked, "Is that better?"

"A little...thank you. What is the matter with me? Why am I in so much pain?"

"Lucius must have roughed you up. I'm sorry. I can only ease the pain. The bruises and the swelling will have to go away on their own. If I tried a Concealment Charm, it might cause the pain to reemerge.

Are you quite sure you want me to use Legilimency on you? Sometimes, if there is something you don't want me to see, it can be quite painful."

"Professor, you've seen me starkers. I doubt there's anything left of me that I need to hide." Hermione was trying to make light of the situation, but Snape understood her discomfort.

"Miss Granger, sometimes there are things inside one's mind that are much more revealing than the bare skin. However, I will only look for your memories with Lucius Malfoy. If I venture elsewhere -- I give you my word -- I will pull myself out."

With the nod of Hermione's head, Snape pointed his wand at her and whispered, *Legilimens!*"

When Snape entered Hermione's mind, the first things he saw were the images that she had already described. It seemed he didn't have to actually look for them. He could tell that Hermione was pushing the images forth as best she could. He smiled at that. He didn't know if she was doing it to make sure he didn't find anything else or if she wanted to make sure he knew she trusted him. He decided he didn't care, but appreciated the help nonetheless.

When he came to the part where she stopped her account of the events, his stomach turned. He knew that Lucius had beaten her because he'd seen her face, but he didn't know how passionate Lucius was about his beatings. Anger rose up in Snape as he watched. He had seen horrors in his life, but this was his student. This was someone he actually cared about on some level. As hard as it was, he had to continue on in order to see exactly what happened to Hermione.

After watching Lucius rip Hermione's clothes off and put his hands where they didn't belong, he expected Hermione to make a move to get him out of her head. Instead of pushing him away, however, she seemed to be trying harder to show him her memories. Snape was so focused on Lucius, he nearly missed Draco. Hermione must have seen him because these were her memories.

Draco approached Lucius slowly, but before he got to her, everything went black. Snape assumed that Hermione was trying to block this memory from him. He was about to leave when there was another scene presented before him. Hermione was on the bed, crying. Her face was bloody, and her clothes were torn off of her. Lucius was standing up, refastening his trousers -- Snape cringed -- he knew what that meant.

What it must have cost Hermione to show him this memory, he didn't want to know. He was sure this would break her, but she kept pushing. He found himself fascinated by how much trust she had in him. He had to stop himself from pulling out of her mind. It was hard enough for him to watch; he couldn't imagine what she must've been going through.

Just then, he noticed Draco was coming from a different direction. He seemed to be slightly dazed. In an instant, Lucius raised his wand toward Hermione. As the jet of black sparks flew toward her, Draco jumped on top of her and covered her completely. It was a strangled cry -- barely above a whisper -- but Snape heard Lucius say, "No... Draco!" And the memory ended.

Snape stayed for a brief moment to see if anything else would appear, but nothing happened. As he made his way to pull out, there were flashes of Hermione's memory that he couldn't help but notice. He became mesmerized as he watched a young girl with bouncing brown curls, playing on a swing set. The memory changed, and the same little girl was walking into what must have been her house. She was just a couple of years older...maybe 7 or 8...Snape wasn't sure. The minute she came in, her attention was drawn to the sound of her mother on the phone, crying.

The memory shifted again. Hermione was the same age, but sitting in what looked like a church. She was wearing black and staring blankly ahead. There were other people around...some crying -- others wearing solemn expressions. Snape assumed they were at a funeral.

The memory shifted again. This time, Hermione was getting on the Hogwarts Express. She was asking Harry and Ron if they'd seen a toad. The memory shifted again, and she was at school. She sat alone in the Great Hall and got the occasional sneer from the Slytherin table. The memories were starting to shift more quickly now.

Snape knew he should be pulling himself out like he had promised, but something told him that he needed to stay. There was a purpose to all of this.

Now they were in the courtyard at Hogwarts, and Hermione was crying. She ran past Potter and Weasley. Weasley had said something that Snape couldn't hear because he was focused on Hermione. The memory shifted again, and Hermione was in the bathroom with the Mountain Troll.

The memory shifted again, and they were in the Department of Mysteries. A 15-year-old Hermione was fighting against a group of Death Eaters.

The memory shifted again, and it showed an 18-year-old Hermione in a church again. But this time, it was her father's funeral. He had suffered a heart attack just weeks after Hermione graduated from Hogwarts. Snape was standing at the back of the church with Tonks. They had attended so they could stand guard. Hermione was sitting in a pew with silent tears falling down her cheeks. She was flanked on each side by her mother and Ron Weasley. Potter and his new bride were sitting behind her.

Snape waited for her memories to shift again, but they didn't. Hermione didn't try to push him away, but there was a feeling of finality the air. Snape eased himself out of her mind with a whispered, "*Finite Incantatem.*"

Snape stood, staring at Hermione with bewilderment. Then he asked with one word, "Why?" Hermione had the grace to look guilty, but she turned her chin up in defiance.

Instead of answering his question right away, she said something that caught him completely off guard. "You've always taken care of me. You've always been there, haven't you? Not because of Harry. I know that you've always looked after Harry on Dumbledore's orders, but that's not the only reason you did it. And that's not the only reason you've always looked after me." This was not a question. Hermione wasn't looking for confirmation, so she continued.

"You've had other reasons for looking out for Harry Potter. I've known it for a while now. I remember the look on your face when you were trying to do the countercurse to keep him from falling off of his broom. Remember? At the time, we thought *you* were the one trying to curse his broom. I didn't really think about it much at the time, but in retrospect, I saw your face. You weren't merely trying to pay some wizard's debt that you owed his father. There was something else. You *wanted* to keep him safe. I can imagine all of the times that you tried to keep yourself two or three steps ahead of him, just to keep him safe. It was more than a duty to Dumbledore, and it was more than a debt repayment to James Potter."

Snape's eyes narrowed at the mention of James, but he allowed her to continue without interruption.

"And, of course, looking out for Harry would give you the job of looking out for his closest friends as well. But you were always extra careful with me. I know that you requested to attend my father's funeral. I remember the look on your face when you saw the troll in the girls' bathroom. I also know that you came to visit me, if only for a moment, while I was petrified."

"There are times when you relax your shoulders or your eyes. And there are times when you remove your scowl from your face, even though you put it right back in place. I notice these things because I look for them. I have always admired you, Professor. I realized, a long time ago, that you sort of drew the short straw in this life. So, just like everything else, I have studied you. And, I've noticed that you are a bit *soft* when it comes to me. One day, I hope that you will tell me why. But I know that day isn't going to be today."

Hermione looked at him with confidence, but he just stared back at her at a loss for words. She sighed and continued, "So, being that you have been quite protective, I know this incident with Lucius is probably harder to swallow than you'd like to admit. I wanted you to see me at my weakest moments so you would know that *this* will not break me."

There was silence once again, and Snape knew that the interview was over for the time being. He stood as the flames in the fireplace came to life, signaling a Floo call. He was expecting Dumbledore, but he drew his wand just in case. When he saw the old man's face, he put his wand back in his robes and knelt down. He exchanged a few brief words with Dumbledore and stood.

"It is safe for us to return to the castle. We will have you looked over and then move you and Draco to the Black house where you will remain until Lucius has been apprehended."

Hermione made a move to protest, but Snape put a hand up. "This is not up for discussion, Miss Granger. Right now, you and Draco are in more danger than you realize. Now, I will leave you for a few moments while I retrieve Draco. Here." Snape removed his outer robes and laid them on the bed at Hermione's feet. "You can wear this until we get to Hogwarts."

When Snape reached the door, he stopped. Without turning to look at Hermione, he spoke softly, "Incidentally, I did not perceive those memories to be your weakest moments. Quite the contrary..." Snape stopped himself, afraid his voice would betray him.

"Professor?" Hermione asked, concerned by the change in Snape's demeanor. He sighed and turned to fix her with a piercing look that would scare any first year.

"They were your strongest." With that, Snape walked out of the room, leaving Hermione shocked and confused.

The Musings of Dumbledore

Chapter 3 of 27

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A/N: Thank you so much to my wonderful betas, RobisonRocket and juliannanight! I also want to thank carmille for the great reviews. In a perfect world I would get a review from everyone who reads.

The Musings of Dumbledore

Chapter 3

Hermione was sitting on the bed, going through the events of the day, when a knock at the door startled her.

"Miss Granger, it's time to go. Are you ready?"

Hermione stood and opened the door. Her eyes widened as she watched Professor Snape levitating an unconscious Draco Malfoy into the room.

"Is he g-going to be alright?" Hermione's voice shook as she moved out of the way, making room for Draco.

"I believe so. We just need to get him to the hospital wing at Hogwarts. Once he has been cleared by Poppy, the two of you will be taken to Black's."

"Professor, what exactly is wrong with him?"

Snape sucked in a breath. "I will tell you everything I know when we get to Hogwarts and when I know Draco will recover."

Hermione followed Snape and Draco to the Floo. Once inside, Snape took Draco's unconscious body into his arms. Hermione grabbed the Floo powder and looked at Snape expectantly. He stuck out his elbow, and Hermione laced her arm through his. As she threw the Floo powder, engulfing the three of them in green flames, Snape called out, "Dumbledore!" Moments later, they stepped into the private quarters of Albus Dumbledore.

"Ah. Severus, there you are. Poppy is expecting Mr. Malfoy. You may proceed to the hospital wing. Miss Granger, would you like a lemon drop?"

Dumbledore always seemed to make any situation better. No matter what the gesture, it always seemed to fit the mood and make it lighter. Hermione knew that was what he was doing now.

He didn't want her to worry about Draco, but she couldn't help herself. She didn't know what had happened to him, but she knew he was in this predicament because he was saving her from a curse sent by his father. And knowing Lucius, Draco knew the curse could have been fatal, but he took it anyway.

"Miss Granger, what is troubling you?" Dumbledore asked in a gentle voice. He glanced at Hermione and noticed her worrying her bottom lip.

"It's just... it's my fault, isn't it? Malfoy -- " Hermione sighed. "Draco... is in the state he's in because of me."

Dumbledore didn't immediately answer her. He looked at her, seeming to weigh his response, and sighed. "Miss Granger," he spoke softly, "I'm not sure you are seeing the whole picture. I remember, not so long ago, that you yourself were in the hospital wing. You were petrified. You had been the innocent victim of a Basilisk. Do you remember? Of course you do. On with my story... dear Ginevra Weasley was feeling much the same way you do right now. She thought all of what happened to be her fault."

"It wasn't Ginny's fault. It was Tom Riddle's fault," Hermione interrupted.

"I'm aware of that, Miss Granger. However, it took a while for Ginevra to acknowledge her own innocence. Why, I don't think she really realized it until she and Harry became an item. She tried so hard to make him stop blaming himself for Sirius that he forced her to take her own advice. You see, it was Tom's fault then, and it's Lucius Malfoy's fault now. You didn't ask young Draco to take that curse. He did it of his own free will. I will be much mistaken if he doesn't come out of this feeling quite guilty himself."

"It most certainly wasn't Draco's fault," Hermione said indignantly. "He saved my life."

"Ah... he did save you. Even though the curse didn't kill him, it could have. He didn't know what Lucius was going to do. However, if it had hit you, it might not have killed you either. But it probably would have left you with a fate worse than death. Therefore, Mr. Malfoy ensured that you not merely survived, but that you would live. Do not waste his sacrifice by dwelling on guilt, Miss Granger. He deserves better."

Before Hermione could respond, there was a knock on the door.

"Enter," said Dumbledore.

Snape had returned from the hospital wing. "Headmaster, Draco is resting now." Snape put a hand up when Hermione started to speak. "He will be fine, Miss Granger. You may go and see him. If you hurry, you can pester Madam Pomfrey with questions before she takes her leave."

"Her leave? Where is she going? Doesn't she need to look after Draco?" Hermione voice was rising.

Snape raised an eyebrow at the use of Draco's given name. Hermione ignored him and waited for an answer to her question.

It was Dumbledore who answered her. "Madam Pomfrey's sister is the nurse for Beauxbatons. She has taken ill and asked if Poppy could step in. The term has already begun for Beauxbatons. She should return by the start of our term. She was about to go when word came that Draco needed her attention. I am assuming, Severus, that she has given Mr. Malfoy the all clear or she wouldn't be leaving."

"Yes, Headmaster. He is sleeping right now. However, Miss Granger will not disturb him with her visit." Snape looked at Hermione pointedly.

"I'm going to see him." Hermione was out of Dumbledore's chamber in a flash.

Dumbledore turned to Snape. "Alright Severus, you've gotten rid of Miss Granger. Tell me. How bad is it?"

Snape gave Dumbledore a grim look before he sighed and sat down.

"Albus, to be honest with you, it's not Draco I'm worried about. Well, not his health anyway. I believe I know the curse that Lucius used. I didn't hear the incantation, but what I saw was unmistakable."

"What did you see, Severus?"

"Black light. It shot straight from his wand and engulfed Miss Granger and Draco. Draco jumped on top of her just as the jet hit them. I don't even think Miss Granger is aware of what happened. I'm not even sure that Draco is aware. But I am positive they are bound."

The twinkle was gone from Dumbledore's blue eyes. He sat heavily behind his desk and thought. "They are just children, Severus. They are already risking their lives for the cause. What happens after the fall of Voldemort? What will happen to them, Severus? I must say, I am deeply worried for them."

"I agree with you, Albus. I can't imagine what they will do when they find out. But what if Draco hadn't been there? Albus, she would be a slave to Lucius Malfoy. She would be no more than a house-elf."

"We need to speak to them as soon as Draco wakes up. They need to know what this means. Their lives will forever be changed by the circumstances of today. Severus, I am not sure what Miss Granger will do when she hears all of this."

"There's more, Albus. When I looked into her memories, it was apparent that Miss Granger was assaulted. Unfortunately, there were some memories missing, so I can't say for sure. However, the state that I found her in indicates that Lucius may have raped her as well."

Dumbledore sat up quickly. "Dear God, Severus! What has he done to that poor girl? I didn't think that was his style."

"I've never seen him like this, Albus," Snape continued as if he hadn't been interrupted. "Lucius has always been vile, but he's never lost control. I spoke with Narcissa by Floo earlier this morning, and she told me she was leaving, but she wouldn't say where she was going. After losing his wife, and Draco not taking the Mark, I expect Lucius has finally gone mad."

"Severus, Miss Granger is no doubt on the verge of going mad herself after being violated by Lucius Malfoy. She will need the support of everyone when she finds out that she is eternally bound to the Malfoy heir."

"Indeed," said Snape.

Dumbledore looked pensive for a moment, and then he remembered something that had been troubling him. "How did you come to find the two of them, Severus? How did you know they were at the Malfoy manor?"

"When Lucius failed to produce Draco, he was punished. After he fled, Voldemort called a meeting for all the Death Eaters. He told us that Lucius had fled after refusing to

kill Draco. I know Lucius. The first place he would have gone is the Manor, looking for Draco. I was pleased that Draco was at Black's, so I Apparated there immediately to warn him."

"When I arrived, Potter informed me that Draco had gone to the Manor and had taken Miss Granger there to help him get his things. That's when I went straight to the Manor. Being a *close* friend of the Malfoy family, I had no trouble getting through the wards." Snape looked unsettled for a moment, and then he continued. "I found them in Draco's bedroom. Draco's trunk was packed and undisturbed, while his suitcase and clothing were strewn all over the floor. They must have been surprised."

Dumbledore regarded him for a moment. With a gentle voice he said, "Why don't you go to the hospital wing and look in on them? I have a couple of letters to write. I think we need the services of the only two people who have ever been able to break through Miss Granger's tough exterior."

Snape grimaced. "Yes, of course. I will go while you write your letter to Potter and Weasley. I believe I saw that bloody owl of Potter's hunting the grounds this morning."

Dumbledore gave Snape a sad smile. "She will be traumatized, Severus. The circumstances of what she's been through will hit her, and when it does, she will need those boys."

Snape nodded and stood to leave.

Before he reached the door, however, he was stopped.

"Oh, and Severus?"

"Yes, Albus."

"It's alright to feel a sense of betrayal. Lucius is your oldest friend. You have known Draco since he was born. Whether you want to admit it or not, I know all of this bothers you. However, you did the right thing, Severus. Your actions got those children out of there as quickly as you could. Merlin only knows where Lucius is."

Snape chose his words carefully. He didn't want the old man to think he was getting weak. "Albus, my concerns are not for Lucius. To be honest with you, they are not completely for Draco either. Miss Granger, as you say, will probably suffer more than anyone."

Dumbledore raised his eyebrows at this admission. Snape knew the Headmaster could see right through him without using Legilimency.

Snape sighed. "She was one of my students, Albus. She is also a child who shouldn't be involved in a fight that started so long ago. None of these children should. Not even Potter. And yet, here we are. So if it makes you happy, yes, I am concerned. And before you give me any more praise, I should have gone straight to the Manor as soon as I left the Dark Lord. If I had, perhaps none of this would have happened."

"Severus."

"No, Albus. I will take my leave now. I want to check on Draco and the girl. Write your letter."

Sleeping Beauty

Chapter 4 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: Thank you again to my wonderful betas, Juliannanight and RobisonRocket!

Sleeping Beauty

Chapter 4

Hermione made her way down to the hospital wing at the same time Madam Pomfrey was leaving.

Madam Pomfrey gave Hermione a sad smile, which Hermione returned. "How is he?" The nurse smiled again and said softly, "He'll be alright. He's sleeping very peacefully right now. He should be up and about in a couple of days."

"A couple of days? What do you mean, 'a couple of days'? What's the matter with him? If he's just sleeping, he should be up in a few hours, shouldn't he?" Hermione was in a state of shock.

"Oh, it will take at least a couple of days in order for his magic to be replenished. Mr. Malfoy is a pureblood wizard, Miss Granger. The hit he took, although not fatal, was very powerful."

Hermione nodded her head and asked, "Madam Pomfrey, may I see him? I won't disturb him. I just -- I need to see him."

"Of course you may see him. You won't bother him. He won't wake until his mind is ready."

"Thank you, Madam Pomfrey. I hope everything goes well with your sister."

"Thank you, dear. She'll be fine. She just got into a nasty bit of Bubotuber pus. I should be back by the start of term. Take care of yourself, Miss Granger."

Hermione entered the room quietly. She looked around the room to see if there was anything out of the ordinary to contradict what Madam Pomfrey had said. There weren't empty potion bottles around his bed. There were no vials littering the trash can. There was only Draco.

She stood stock still for a moment. Slowly, she walked over and took the chair next to his bed. Gone was the sneer that was usually in place even though they were friends now. Gone was the look of superiority that he had held in their school days. Also gone was the laughter in his face and the light in his eyes that she had grown to adore in their recent years. Hermione sighed sadly and whispered, "Oh, Malfoy, what I wouldn't give to see that superior sneer that you once graced us with."

"I can't call you Malfoy now, can I? No. You stopped being Malfoy the second you stepped between your father and me. If I were being honest with myself, you stopped being Malfoy the day you came over to our side. When you wake up, we'll talk. I need to understand what motivated you to do what you did."

"You have to be alright, Draco. You have to be. You have to wake up and be alright so I can hit you for putting your life in danger just for me. You knew what Lucius was capable of. Why would you take that curse? You have to wake up because I need answers. You know me, 'little miss know-it-all.' I have to know what he did to you -- what he tried to do to me."

Hermione didn't realize when the tears had started to pour out of her, but when she did, she couldn't stop them.

Hermione was being shaken. "No. Not again. Please."

"Miss Granger, you need to wake up. Come now. You need to lie down properly so you can get some rest. This has been a most stressful day for you."

Hermione raised her head and looked around. She had cried herself to sleep, and her head was lying on the mattress next to Draco. She didn't even remember taking his hand, but she was holding it with her fingers interlaced with his. She didn't let go immediately as Professor Snape's face came into focus.

"Professor, I don't want to leave him. I need to be here when he wakes up. Can't I stay?"

Snape eyed her for a moment and then nodded. "You may sleep in the empty cot next to Draco." When Hermione didn't move immediately, Snape looked at her questioningly. His eyes darted to their clasped hands and then back to her. "Miss Granger, may I ask you something? Why did you refer to Mr. Malfoy by his given name? I understand, until recently, that you and Draco were still on a surname basis. I know it's trivial and somewhat juvenile that I would be interested, but I am curious."

Hermione stared directly into the professor's eyes and answered, "After everything we have been through together, it would be trivial and juvenile for me to continue to call him 'Malfoy.' It's just right, isn't it? It's just seems right for me to call him by his name."

Snape regarded her for a moment and then nodded. "Indeed. Good night, Miss Granger." Then he swept out of the room.

Getting into her own bed, Hermione sighed. Speaking to an absent Professor Snape, she muttered, "And one day, Professor, perhaps you could call me 'Hermione.' After all, you've seen me naked."

Just outside the entrance to the hospital wing, a very tired Professor Snape cursed himself for actually blushing at the young woman's words. *What am I...a first-year?* With his scowl properly in place, he left the corridor and headed to his own quarters. A nice glass of Firewhiskey was in order. He needed to prepare for what tomorrow would bring.

Sometime during the night, Draco stirred and opened his eyes. He looked around him and felt a wave of relief hit him when he realized he was at Hogwarts. As he replayed the events of the previous day, his mind raced. He heard a muffled cry and turned to see Hermione asleep in the cot next to him. Instead of waking her, he turned his head back to stare at the ceiling.

Draco almost woke her, but thought better of it. She would wake soon enough, and when she did, he would have to tell her everything. He knew this wasn't going to be easy; he just hoped she wouldn't hate him. "Oh, bugger. What have you done?" Draco was speaking to himself.

At the sound of Draco's voice, Hermione woke with a start. She looked around her, and her eyes landed on the boy in the cot next to her. It took a moment for her to realize that he had his eyes open, staring at the ceiling. As she looked closer, she noticed that he had a single tear falling from the corner of his eye into his hairline.

Before Hermione could react to his waking, Draco spoke. "There's something... something I have to tell you. You need to know..." Hermione finally snapped out of her daze.

"No, Draco. Shh! Don't talk. I need to get the Headmaster and Professor Snape."

"Granger, wait..."

"I will just be a moment. I can Floo call them."

"But, I have to tell you something important."

"It can wait."

"Damn it, Hermione. Just listen to me." Hermione stopped in her tracks. In all the years she'd know him, he'd never used her first name.

"You just called me Hermione." It wasn't a question.

Draco looked at her, confused. "I had to get your attention. Besides..." He managed a slight smirk. "You called me Draco earlier. I heard you."

Hermione schooled her features. "Yes. Well, you saved my life. I couldn't very well keep calling you by your surname." Hermione looked at her hands and added, "I owe you my life."

"You don't owe me anything. I, however, owe you an apology, and I also owe you an explanation."

"You want to apologize for saving my life?" Hermione was appalled.

"No, no. You see, there's more." Draco tried to sit up, but he was very weak.

"No. Lie back down. I really need to get Professor Snape."

"I'm fine. I'm just a little tired. I really need to tell you something important." Draco sat up and turned to look at Hermione. "Do you have your wand? We need some light in here."

Hermione hesitated for a moment and spoke softly. "Draco, your father broke our wands when he attacked us."

Draco sighed. "No problem, this might be easier to say in the dark. It's about the spell he used. I know what the spell was, Hermione. I think I knew what it was going to be even before he cast it."

"Are you sure we don't need the professors?" Hermione was beginning to get nervous and impatient. She wanted to know what it was, but at the same time, she was terrified to find out.

"No. Just let me finish this, please. I may not have the nerve to tell you later."

"Okay. But budge over, will you?"

Draco furrowed his brow at her, but did as she asked. Hermione sat down on the edge of the bed, facing him.

Draco didn't comment on this sudden move. "The curse Lucius used on you is an ancient curse that was once used by some of the oldest pureblood wizards. They don't

use it anymore. It is a curse that binds a house-elf."

Hermione was a very captivated audience. Her eyes widened at the thought of a house-elf being hit with such a curse. Then it struck her as odd. "Why is it not being used anymore?"

"They don't use it anymore because most house-elves are already bound to a family."

"What about the ones who are free, like Dobby?"

Draco hid a wince at the thought of his childhood friend. Losing Dobby still hurt. "Actually, I was getting to that. Believe it or not, the Department for Control of Magical Creatures lobbied against this practice because was too barbaric."

"I remember hearing Lucius' reaction to your campaign against the mistreatment of house-elves. He mentioned something about wishing he could turn you into a house-elf. When he sent the curse at you, I knew what it was the second I saw it come out of his wand. He wanted to turn you into his house-elf, Hermione."

Hermione had gone pale. "He wanted to make me his slave? And you knew?" Hermione stood abruptly from the bed. She turned toward the window and just gazed out, lost in thought.

"Hermione, I'm sorry. I know this upsets you, but I couldn't let him do that to you. That's why I jumped on you. That's why we are in the situation we are in now."

Hermione rounded on him. "What do you mean *we*? The curse hit you. Now you're his slave -- because of me!" Tears were streaming down from her eyes now, but she didn't have the strength to wipe them away.

"No, Hermione. We are in this together. Don't you get it? I didn't take the curse. We took it together. However, the circumstances are not the same."

"What do you mean? Am I your slave now? Or do we both belong to your father?"

"We don't belong to anyone except each other. That's the other part of this being an *ancient* curse. When it's cast on two humans, it binds them together. It was sometimes used for arranged marriages to make sure the spouses stayed faithful to one another."

"You mean to tell me that you and I are slaves to each other?" Hermione sat down hard. She couldn't believe what was happening.

"We aren't slaves to anyone, Hermione. Didn't you listen to what I just said? The curse was used for arranged *marriages*."

"So we're... I mean, you and I are... married?"

Draco didn't answer her because at that moment, the door banged open, and they were greeted by two very worried men.

Promises

Chapter 5 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: I only own the plot. Thank you to RobisonRocket for getting this beta'd and back to me so quickly. I bow to your greatness. Please, if you read... leave a review. I hope you like this chapter. It is longer than the others, and it was a bit hard to write. I love Harry and Ginny. With not further ado...

Promises

Chapter 5

Harry Potter was sitting in his study at number twelve, Grimmauld Place when he heard a tapping at his window. He looked over his shoulder and saw Hedwig with a scroll tied to her leg. *That's odd*, thought Harry. He had let Hedwig out the night before, but he expected her to come home with a mouse, not a letter. Who would be sending *this* owl to him?

"Well, come in, girl. Let's see who's put you off your hunting and used you for post."

Hedwig nipped Harry's finger affectionately, appreciating his indignation on her behalf.

Harry unrolled the parchment and read the familiar handwriting of his former Headmaster.

Dear Harry,

I do hope this letter finds you and Mrs. Potter in good health...

Harry smiled to himself. He imagined he would love the term "Mrs. Potter" after being married for one hundred years just as much as he loved hearing it after only a year.

I need to speak with you and Mr. Ronald Weasley about some rather personal issues. I have already sent a notice to him. If Ginevra is available, please have her accompany you. I understand, however, if she isn't feeling up to it. If that is the case, please do not disturb her.

If you find yourself unable to attend, please send a reply with Hedwig. I hope you do not mind that I asked her to bring this to you. I spotted her this morning, hunting the grounds. She gets lots of attention from the staff and the students. I would like to think she has a loving connection with Hogwarts, but I believe it's more to do with the abundance of owl treats that she receives from her admirers. Nonetheless, she seemed very pleased to deliver this letter to you.

Sincerely,

Albus Dumbledore

Harry penned a quick reply, stating that he would be there at seven o' clock the next morning, and made his way to the bedroom to see Ginny.

As Harry entered, he took in the sight in front of him with well-concealed amusement. Ginny was sitting up in bed with her arms crossed over her chest, pouting like a five-year-old. "This is ridiculous, Harry. I don't understand why I have to stay in bed. My mother had seven children, and she was never put on bed rest. Besides, I'm eight months along already. It's not like I'll be doing strenuous activity anyway. I mean, honestly... what in Merlin's name is stressful about checking charts and delivering potions?"

Harry just stood there. He wasn't sure if that was a rhetorical question or if she really wanted an answer. "Gin, come on. You're a Healer now. You know you have to do what they tell you. You don't want to put yourself or the baby at risk. Please try to understand."

She knew he was right, but that didn't change anything at the moment. "What's in your hand? Is that a letter?"

"Oh. Yeah! Sorry... it's from Professor Dumbledore. He needs to see me and Ron. I'll Floo your mum and ask her if she will come and stay with you."

"I don't need a babysitter, Harry Potter!"

"I know you don't, Gin." Harry knew the only way to calm her down was to let her win. Or at least to let her *think* she'd won. "I think you are perfectly capable of taking care of yourself, and me, for that matter. But this isn't about your needing a babysitter, Gin. I just don't want you to be left alone in case you need anything."

Ginny didn't seem to be satisfied by that answer. "I'll tell you what...how 'bout I get Dobby to hang around until I'm back. You won't even know he's here, and if something happens, he can help you. Will that be alright?"

Ginny huffed. He was trying so hard, and it made her heart flutter, but there was no way she was going to give in so easily. It just wasn't her style. Besides, he looked so cute when he was practically begging her to agree. So she let him sweat...

"What does Dumbledore want to see you for anyway?"

Harry just glared at her. He knew she was changing the subject, but he would get back to it... eventually. "I'm not sure. He didn't say in his letter, but he sent for Ron as well. It probably has something to do with Voldemort. And it didn't say anything about sending one to Hermione, but I think she's off helping Malfoy pack his stuff." Harry suddenly felt uneasy. Shaking it off, he continued, "He wanted to see you too ..."

"Then I need to get dressed," Ginny interrupted.

"But... he said that if you were unable to make it, that would be alright with him. And, Ginny, you are unable to make it. You know what your Healer said. And I won't hear another word on the matter. You are to stay in bed and take care of yourself. Besides, you can't travel by Floo, Portkey, or Apparation. You know that."

He looked even cuter when he was taking charge. "Alright. Fine! I'll stay here... with Dobby. And I'll read Witch Weekly... again! I won't be happy about it, mind."

"Of course not, Love."

"But I'll stay. On one condition." Ginny grinned.

"And what's that?" Harry asked, a bit frightened of what her one condition was.

"You go into Hogsmeade and bring me back some Chocolate Frogs."

"You're on."

"Now, just because I'm imprisoned by this bed and this house, it doesn't mean that my husband can't join me for a snog. It's time for bed anyway, so stop talking and come here."

Harry couldn't argue with logic. He made his way over to the bed with a devilish grin plastered on his face. Ginny turned so that she was on her side. Harry lay down beside her and removed his glasses. Then he proceeded to snog the daylight out of her.

After a few moments, he pulled away from the kiss, but not from her. "You know, this is sort of how we got into this mess in the first place. It all started with a kiss that was an awful lot like that one."

"Mess, Harry? I hardly think our child would appreciate you calling her existence a mess!" Ginny was amused.

"You know -- what did you say? What do you mean by *her existence*?"

"Caught on, have you? I know we wanted to wait until the baby was born before we found out, but while I was being examined, Healer Roberts let it slip. She said, 'Your baby is doing well. She is turned and ready to go any day now.' You should have seen the look on her face after she said it."

"Anyway, I didn't feel right being the only one who knew. I was just waiting for the right time, and the right time seemed to present itself."

Harry was completely gobsmacked. *A girl... a baby girl... a beautiful little girl with long red hair just like her mother's... a clever and beautiful witch who won't be able to keep the boys away from her. GITS! I'll kill them if they hurt her. She's mine. I'll make sure they'll wish they were never born!"*

"Harry? Are you alright?"

Harry was cut off from his reverie by Ginny's voice. He shook himself mentally and smiled at her.

"Ginny..." Harry's sudden change to seriousness took Ginny by surprise.

"Ginny, I want to promise you something. And I want to promise her something." Harry put his hand on Ginny's belly.

"I will do everything in my power, and the power of whatever gods will help me, to destroy Voldemort so that you and our little girl will have a happy life. I will do everything I can. Do you understand me?"

Ginny suddenly had tears in her eyes. The sincerity of Harry's words put her off her guard. *Bloody hormones.* "Harry, you forgot to include yourself in that mix. You take care of old Voldy, and then you live! That is the only way to ensure our happy lives. Now, do you understand *me*?" Ginny said this with a conviction that Harry had never heard before.

"I love you, Gin," was Harry's very passionate response. Moments later they were both lulled to sleep, holding tightly to one another.

The next morning, Harry woke and moved gently out of bed so he wouldn't wake his wife. Closing the bathroom door after his morning ritual, he tiptoed over to a still sleeping Ginny. Harry brushed his lips across her forehead and whispered, "I love you."

Before he made it to the bedroom door, he heard a soft, "I love you, Harry." When he turned toward her, she was already back to sleep.

Harry tumbled out of the Floo at exactly 6:59 a.m. As he stood, he noticed that the only people present for this little meeting were Snape, Professor Dumbledore, Ron, and himself. He assumed they were waiting for others, so he moved to stand next to Ron and clear the way for anyone else who was traveling by Floo.

"By her absence," Dumbledore began, "I would venture to guess that Mrs. Potter couldn't join us?"

"No, Headmaster. She's been put on bed rest. Healer's orders." Harry almost revealed that he was having a daughter, but decided against it. He didn't have his wife's permission after all.

"Is my sister alright? Is there anything wrong with the baby?" Ron asked with wide eyes.

"No, no. Not at all. Healer Roberts just wants her to stay off of her feet. And you know Gin. The only way to keep her off her feet is to keep her at home. There's no way they could keep her at a desk."

Ron smiled at the thought of the hospital having to make such arrangements because they couldn't control his sister's spirited temper. *That's my girl!*

"Well, then, everyone is present. Let's be seated," Dumbledore said.

"Professor, where's Hermione? I thought she would be joining us?" Ron asked, perplexed.

"Actually, Mr. Weasley, Miss Granger is one of the reasons we are here. She is currently in the hospital wing," answered Professor Dumbledore.

At that moment, Ron and Harry both started for the door. They were stopped by Snape.

"Mr. Malfoy is the one who is injured. Miss Granger is holding vigil at his bedside. And before you start questioning why he's there, that's what we are here to discuss. So sit back, relax, and try to keep your mouths shut until we're finished."

Harry and Ron gave Snape matching glares, but did as they were instructed.

Dumbledore cleared his throat. "Now, I think the best place to begin is at the beginning. You know that Miss Granger had gone with Mr. Malfoy to the Malfoy Manor. While there, they were surprised by Lucius. Needless to say, he wasn't a very... er... *welcoming* host."

"What happened?" Harry's heart was pounding in his ears.

"They were attacked, Potter." Snape said simply. "Lucius came home early."

Ron had his head in his hands, and Harry sighed deeply. Ron looked up with unshed tears. "Where is he?"

No one needed to ask who *he* was.

It was Dumbledore who spoke this time. "We are not sure, Mr. Weasley. Professor Snape informed us that Lucius had been punished by Voldemort, so he wouldn't have gone back voluntarily. Which brings me to our next order of business; Harry, I understand that your baby is due any day now. Are you sure that you want to continue with the plans?"

"Yes, Professor, we are both sure. And I am ready to get this over with. I want to get on with my life. I'm tired of looking over my shoulder. I'm tired of always wondering if I'm going to go home to an empty house ... that he took my Ginny and our baby." Harry concluded in a soft, but firm, voice.

While trying to find the right time to confront Voldemort, it was Ginny who came up with the ultimate plan. Remembering something that Dumbledore had said to Harry regarding Lily's sacrifice and that Harry's greatest power over Voldemort was his ability to love, she thought the best time for the final confrontation should be after the birth of their child.

"Your wife was right, Potter," Snape provided. Everyone looked at him for his most un-Snape-like comment. "If it is love that will win this war, and there is no greater love than a parent for a child, then she is right. When it comes down to it, your heart, like your mother's, will be full of love. The Dark Lord won't stand a chance."

Silence descended on the room. It was probably the most profound statement the Potions master had ever made.

Dumbledore finally spoke up. "Well, Severus, that was very well said. You have my permission to go back to being dark and gloomy for another twenty years."

"Now back to Mr. Malfoy and Miss Granger ... Harry, would you be so kind as to allow them houseroom in the unoccupied portion of number twelve?"

"That would be fine, Headmaster. Ginny and I have separate living quarters, so they are welcome to use the Order's portion of the house. Does this have something to do with the attack?"

Dumbledore sighed. "I'm afraid Lucius might try to find them. And that could be a much larger threat than Lord Voldemort."

There was silence again as everyone was awash in their own thoughts. Then Dumbledore stood and clapped his hands together as if preparing to get them dirty. "I believe that is all. You are welcome to go to the hospital wing and visit with your friend. I daresay she would be more than pleased to see the two of you."

"Professor," Ron started, "what exactly did Lucius do to Hermione? You said she was attacked, but you didn't tell us what he did."

"Mr. Weasley, the exact circumstances of what happened remain locked away in a memory that has either been buried so deep that we can't get to it, or it has been stolen from her. We believe it's the latter since Miss Granger had Professor Snape perform Legilimency on her. However, we can only speculate. And it is her story to tell when she is ready."

"And Malfoy? What's happened to him?" Ron asked.

Professor Snape answered this question. "My godson took a curse thrown at Miss Granger. He is currently sleeping so that his body can replenish his magic. He will be alright. He is magically exhausted."

As Dumbledore walked out of the room, Ron followed. Harry was about to follow Ron out when Snape stopped him. "Potter." Harry turned and saw something akin to weariness in his former Professor's eyes. He didn't answer; he just allowed Snape to finish.

"I don't know how long Mr. Malfoy will need to stay with you. Even when you defeat the Dark Lord, he might need to remain until the apprehension of his father. I trust that Miss Granger will be in good hands, but with the history that you and Mr. Malfoy have..."

Harry put up a hand. "After what he did for Hermione, I will protect him with my life. I owe him my life. Professor, you said *when* I defeat the Dark Lord. Do you really think I can beat him?"

Snape regarded him for a moment. "Potter, if you tell anyone I said this, you will pay dearly..." Harry nodded, and Snape continued. "I believe, with my last breath, that not only are you *able* to beat him; you are the only one who *can* beat him -- Prophecy be damned."

To Snape's great annoyance, Harry grinned. "Professor, nobody would believe me if I told them what you just said." Harry turned to leave, missing the twitch at the corner of Snape's mouth.

Love from Friends

Chapter 6 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N I would like to thank my beta, RobisonRocket for her help with this story. She is the BOMB!! I also want to thank all the people who have reviewed so far. I really appreciate the interest you are taking in this story. You should like this chapter and the cliffy at the end.

Love from Friends

Chapter 6

As soon as Harry and Snape emerged from Dumbledore's chamber, all four men made their way down to the hospital wing. When they rounded the corner, and the door to the hospital wing was in sight, Harry and Ron broke into a run. Regardless of the early morning hour, they burst through the door.

As soon as the door opened, light penetrated the room. Draco only got a glance at Hermione's face before her friends got to her.

"Hermione!" Ron was the first one to her. Hermione spun around and wrapped her arms around her friend. Not waiting for them to let go, Harry stepped in and wrapped his arms around both of them. Hermione couldn't speak. This was exactly what she needed.

Entering the room, Dumbledore gave Snape a knowing glance that clearly stated, *"I told you so."* Snape rolled his eyes accordingly. They waited for the emotions to die down before anyone spoke.

Ron pulled back and looked at her. "Is that what that bastard did to you, Hermione? I swear I'm going to kill him." There was no venom in Ron's voice, just honesty, which seemed more frightening.

Hermione just nodded and pulled away from her best friends. Although she was still crying, she gave them a genuine smile. "You two... have... no idea... how happy... I am... to see... you." Hermione sat down and buried her face in her hands. She shook with suppressed sobs.

Clearing his throat, Dumbledore spoke up. "Ah. I see you are awake, Mr. Malfoy." Snape jerked his head in Draco's direction. He was so caught up in the scene before him that he didn't even notice that Draco had awoken. He rushed over to Draco's side. "How are you feeling, Draco?"

But Draco was staring at Hermione. It had been so dark in the room that he couldn't see her before. "I'm fine, Severus. I'm just a little weak. I want to see what he did. Hermione, I want to see your face."

Hermione raised her head and looked at him. Draco winced and said softly, "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Hermione gave Draco a weak smile. "You know it's not your fault."

Snape looked somberly at Draco. "No, it's not your fault. Draco, we need discuss... things."

"I don't really remember much."

Snape furrowed his brows. "Miss Granger seems to be missing some of her memories as well. I performed *Legilimency* on her, and there is a hole in her memories. I wonder... "

"Go ahead. I don't have anything to hide from you. It would be easier than trying to explain things."

Snape turned to the headmaster, who gave him a nod. That was all the encouragement he needed. Snape looked into Draco's eyes and then entered his mind.

Draco wasn't as generous with his memories as Hermione was. Snape saw, from Draco's perspective, the same memories that he had seen in Hermione's mind. When he came to the moment of the curse, he got quite a shock.

Snape pulled himself out of Draco's mind and exchanged a look with his godson. "Well, the two of you seem to be missing the same memories. I'm not surprised, actually. I had a feeling that Lucius did something, but I don't really understand why. Why would he not want you to remember?"

As Snape sat in thought, something clicked with Ron. "Hermione... what, exactly, did Lucius Malfoy do to you? What is so bad that he didn't want either one of you to remember it?"

Hermione looked surprised by the question. "Well. I don't know. Obviously, I can't remember. All I know is that he tried to send a curse at me that would turn me into his slave."

Ron and Harry both drew an audible breath, but Snape was in complete shock. "You mean you *know* what he did? Miss Granger, do you understand the consequences of Lucius' actions? You and Draco are *bound*."

"WHAT?" Ron yelled in outrage.

Harry looked at Snape. "What are you talking about, Snape?"

Draco had had enough. "Will you all stop shouting? I'm not going to explain things in detail because I've already done that once this morning. I'll give you the gist of things though, with Hermione's permission."

Draco glanced at Hermione, who nodded in affirmation. Ron and Harry exchanged a look at the mention of Hermione's first name, but didn't say anything.

"Alright, there is a lot in between, but in the end, Hermione and I... um... we're married sort of. My father used the binding curse for a house-elf."

Ron paled. "You mean to tell me that your father used *Necto Infinitas*?"

Everyone gaped at Ron except for Dumbledore and Draco. Draco and Ron shared an understanding look.

Hermione was visibly shaken. "Ron, how do you know what that means?" Before Ron could answer her, Draco did. "He knows because he's a pureblood."

"My great-great uncle had an arranged marriage. My mum told me. I just don't understand why Lucius would want to hit Hermione with it."

"That's an easy one, Weasley. He would want to physically harm her whilst he psychologically harmed her. It was his way of being clever." Draco spoke with obvious disgust.

Harry's eyes were darting from Draco to Ron. "Hang on. What is this Nito Infito?"

"Not 'Nito Infito.' It's *Necto Infinitas*. I'm surprised that you don't know what it is, seeing how close you are with MY house-elf." Draco tried to keep the bitterness at bay. "It means *eternally bound*."

The room was silent for a moment. Harry walked over to Hermione and put his arm around her. She buried her face in his neck, but didn't cry. Ron came over and put his hand on her back. "Hermione, we're here for you. You know that. You don't have to be alone. No matter what happens, we'll always be here for you. We're your family."

At Ron's words, Hermione did start to cry. Harry wrapped his arms tighter around her, but didn't say anything. He just made soft shushing noises and rocked her a little.

"Oh, this is so sweet." Snape was back in prime form. "I think what Miss Granger needs is a nice hot bath and an examination. She and Draco need to get hidden as soon as they can."

Harry and Ron both turned angry glares at Snape, ready to protest.

Dumbledore raised his hand, and the room went silent. "Miss Granger, you and Mr. Malfoy will need some time to talk things over. I'm sure you can come to some sort of arrangement. For the meantime, Harry has kindly offered for the two of you to stay in the rooms of the Order's headquarters. I think, as Professor Snape suggested, it would be best if you could get there immediately. I know that Mrs. Potter has to stay in bed, but perhaps she could give you an examination whilst you are there."

Hermione gave Dumbledore a strange look. "What is this business about an examination? I told you that I'm fine. Professor Snape healed my wounds when he found me. I would like a shower though. And I'm sure you'd like your robes back, Professor Snape."

Professor Snape exchanged a very confused look with Dumbledore.

"Miss Granger, you do understand why you need to be examined, don't you? After what Lucius did to you... don't you remember?"

The look of confusion on Hermione's face was all the answer he needed. He would speak with her about it in private. "You and Draco need to get going."

"We will. I just need to go to the bathroom. I'll be right out."

As soon as door to the bathroom closed, Snape turned to Dumbledore. "She acts like nothing happened. But, when I found her... she must know."

"Perhaps she blocked it out, Severus."

At that moment, Dobby the house-elf popped into the room.

"Dobby!" Harry and Draco both shouted together.

"Dobby is sorry, sir. But Harry Potter must come now. Harry Potter's Ginny is having a baby."

Harry paled. "I have to go." Harry was out the door, closely followed by Ron.

Dumbledore and Snape exchanged glances. With no twinkle in his eyes, Dumbledore sighed. "It seems we have some plans to make."

Snape nodded. "Indeed."

There was silence once again. Then a bloodcurdling scream filled the castle.

A/N: I got "Necto Infinitas" out of an English-Latin Dictionary on the Internet. Necto means "bound" and Infinitas means "eternity."

A Witch's Intuition

Chapter 7 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: Once again, I want to thank my wonderful beta, RobisonRocket. I hope everyone enjoys this chapter. I moved quickly through the Harry/Ginny moments with this one, but that's because this is a Draco/Hermione story. And, thanks again for all the reviews. They are very encouraging.

A Witch's Intuition

Chapter 7

Once outside the gates of Hogwarts, Harry Apparated to number twelve, Grimmauld Place. He ran up the stairs two steps at a time. By the time he reached the bedroom door, he was clutching the stitch in his side. He opened the door with mixed feelings of fear and excitement.

Ginny was sitting up in the bed with Healer Roberts at her side. They were speaking quietly to one another, which confused Harry immensely. Wasn't Ginny supposed to be screaming her head off, sweating bullets, and calling him names? She looked fine.

"What's going on? Dobby said you were having the baby. Aren't you supposed to be yelling at everyone about how this is all my fault?" Harry took a tentative step inside and closed the door.

"Oh, believe me, Harry, I have been. I was having some pretty bad contractions earlier. Healer Roberts gave me a potion for the pain so the contractions wouldn't hurt so much." Ginny smiled at Healer Roberts, who smiled back.

"I thought you weren't supposed to take potions, Gin."

"Actually, Mr. Potter, the potion that your wife took is specifically made for contractions. She'll be alright. As a matter of fact, she should be starting another one in," the Healer consulted her watch, "about two minutes."

At that moment, the fireplace roared, and Harry drew his wand. Mrs. Weasley stepped out and waved her hand toward Harry, indicating him to put his wand away.

"Sorry, Molly," Harry muttered sheepishly. "Habit."

"It's alright, Harry, dear. I completely understand. Now, what's going on in here? Is my grandchild ready to greet the world yet?"

"Your grandchild is being right stubborn," replied Ginny. "I don't know what's taking so long. I was in quite a lot of pain. I had hoped this wouldn't take long."

Molly chortled. "Ginny, dear, you need to learn to have patience. These things take time. That precious grandchild of mine wants to make sure the timing is just right. Now, is there anything I can get you?"

"No, Mum. I'm Fiiiiiiiine!" Ginny was suddenly hit with another contraction. Harry started for the door, but Ginny stopped him. "Oh, no... you don't... Harry... Potter. You got... me into... this mess... You will stay... where you... are." Ginny was panting hard at this point.

Half an hour later, Ginny was sitting up in her bed, holding a small bundle wrapped in a pink blanket. She was looking down at her daughter, tears in her eyes. Harry was sitting next to her, holding her hand. He had tears of joy in his eyes as well.

Ginny looked up at Harry and gestured for him to take the baby. Harry reached down and took his daughter from her mother's arms. She still hadn't opened her eyes, but she had a tuft of dark, auburn hair. Her little nose was slightly turned up, and her lips were pink.

"Gin," Harry ventured nervously. "You know what I have to do now, don't you?" He looked up from his daughter to his wife.

"Yes, Harry. But, I don't really want to talk about it right now."

"We have to, though. I will have to leave in a couple of days. And when I'm finished with him, I will have to go after Lucius Malfoy."

Ginny was puzzled. "Why would you have to go after Lucius? Is he a special Death Eater or something?"

Harry suppressed the urge to roll his eyes. "No, it's because of Hermione." As Harry went into the story, Ginny paled.

"Is Draco alright? He wanted me to go with him, but I had to work a shift. Of course, as soon as I got to St. Mungo's, Healer Roberts dismissed me to bed rest."

Harry let out a breath he didn't know he was holding. His mind raced at the thought of Ginny being in the same predicament as Hermione. He fought the wave of nausea that was creeping into his throat. He needed to change the subject.

"So, what are we going to call our little princess?" Harry was once again entranced by his daughter.

"Harry, I don't want to name her. Not yet, anyway. You are going to come back to me... to us. We'll name her together -- when you return."

Harry just stared at her for a moment and looked at his baby again. "Gin, I may not come back for a while. I don't know how long this is going to take. I don't even know how we'll find him. She can't go without a name for so long. What will you call her?"

"I'll call her 'baby.' And you *will* come back, Harry. I know you will. I know it like I know my own name. Anyway, until then, you can be thinking of something."

"Alright, Gin." Harry thought for a moment. "I think everyone expects me to call her Lily. I love the name, but I want her to have her own name. From the photographs and the stories, I know that my mother was a beautiful and phenomenal witch. She was one of a kind. I know that she would want her granddaughter to be her own person as well. I don't know why; I just feel it. I think my mother would have been a wonderful grandmother." Harry was suddenly overwhelmed by sadness. He never even had a chance to mourn his parents the way a child should.

Ginny, noticing the change in his emotion, raked her fingers through his hair. "Harry, I think your mother would have been a terrific grandmother. I also agree with you about giving Baby her own name. We can always honor your mother in a different way."

Harry looked at her, puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"Lily can be her middle name. So all we have to think about is what we'll call her for her first name." Ginny smiled sweetly at Harry.

Harry grinned back, feeling much happier. "You're brilliant."

Snape and Dumbledore shared a quick glance before they bolted toward the door to the bathroom. Draco was trying to get out of bed, but he was still pretty weak. He managed to slide off of the bed, and he followed Dumbledore and Snape toward the direction of the scream.

As Snape prepared to blast the door off the hinges, it creaked open. All three men watched as Hermione walked toward her bed. She was stone-faced and silent, not noticing anyone else in the room. When she started to pass Draco, he grabbed her wrist.

"Hermione?" Draco asked tentatively.

Hermione's defiant chin jutted upward. Not meeting Draco's eyes, she whispered, "I need to get to Ginny. Lucius... he... I need to get to Ginny."

Draco looked inquiringly to the other two. Dumbledore was frowning, and Snape was showing no emotion. Snape stepped forward, and Hermione looked at him.

"Miss Granger, Mrs. Potter can't help you right now, I'm afraid. She went into labor a while ago, so she is currently incapable of giving you an examination. We cannot risk taking you to St. Mungo's either. We will have to try to get Madam Pomfrey back here."

Hermione looked from Snape to Dumbledore, then back to Draco. "You'll have to do it then."

Draco felt a chill travel up his spine. "I c-can't."

Hermione's mind was made up. "You're a Healer, aren't you? You are the only one who can check for any damage. I need you to do this for me, Draco. I trust you. After everything that's happened in the past couple of days, I need you. Please, Draco."

Draco looked at Snape and Dumbledore, hoping they could come up with some brilliant plan to get him out of this. At Dumbledore's nod, Draco knew he'd lost. "But, Sir, this is highly unethical."

"Why?" Hermione asked, frowning. "You're a Healer. If you were working a shift at St. Mungo's and I came in for an examination, would you turn me away?"

"Well, no. I would have to do it. But this is different."

"How is it different? Is it different because we are here? Is it different because we are bound? Or..." Hermione's voice cracked a tiny bit, but she continued. "Or is it different because it was *your* father who did this to me?"

Draco looked down at his feet and whispered, "Don't call him that. He's not my father. I don't want anything to do with him ever again." Then Draco looked Hermione right in the eyes. "Okay. I'll do it. I'll give you the examination. But how do you know he did what we all think he did? Neither one of us remember anything."

Hermione's eyes never left his. With unshed tears, she gritted her teeth as she spoke. "Chalk it up to a witch's intuition, but I think I'd know when my virginity has been taken."

Draco took a step back. "Oh, Merlin, Hermione, I didn't know."

"Well, now you do. So, are we going to get started then?"

Dumbledore cleared his throat. "I think I am going to head to Grimmauld Place and check on the progress there. Mr. Malfoy, I'm assuming you have everything you need?"

"Yes, Sir, I believe Madam Pomfrey has everything on hand. Give Ginny my best. Severus, are you going too, or are you staying?"

Before Snape could answer, Hermione looked up at him. "Please don't go, Professor. I would really like for you to stay."

Snape narrowed his eyes at her. "I don't know how I could be of assistance. I'm not a Healer, and Madam Pomfrey's cupboard is packed with all the potions you would need for pain or discomfort."

"It's just that, well, you've been with me since the beginning. You are the only one who doesn't treat me... who doesn't treat me like I'm... broken."

Snape gave a slight nod. "I will be right outside the door."

Hermione thanked him and turned back toward Draco. Draco handed her a hospital gown and pointed toward the bathroom door once again. "I'll need you to... to... change."

Hermione took the robe and went into the bathroom, returning seconds later. Draco motioned for her to lie on the bed. "Do you want me to give you a potion to calm your nerves or put you to sleep?"

Hermione just shook her head, unable to speak.

"Let's get started, then," Draco said as he sat in the chair at the foot of Hermione's bed. Once he was seated, Hermione took a deep breath and spread her knees apart.

All That Glitters

Chapter 8 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: As always, I want to first thank my beta, RobisonRocket. I also want to thank the wonderful readers who have taken the time to review. The title to this chapter is from an old country/western song by Dan Seals called "Everything that Glitters is not Gold." It's a really sweet song, and I couldn't help but think of it while writing this. Pay close attention to this chapter. There are two places where "All that Glitters" comes into play. Can anyone guess what they are?

Everything that Glitters

Chapter 8

Severus Snape had been pacing back and forth for almost forty-five minutes when the door opened and Draco motioned for him to come back inside. Snape followed Draco into the room, trying not to appear too concerned for the girl. When he entered, he noticed that she had gone.

"Where is Miss Granger?"

"She's in the bathroom, putting your robes back on." Draco sat heavily back onto his abandoned bed and sighed, cradling his head in his hands.

"Is it... that bad?" Snape sat in the chair next to Draco's bed. He allowed Draco a moment's pause before he cleared his throat. "Draco, I asked you a question."

Draco looked up at his godfather, but before he could answer, Hermione reentered the room. "Draco, did you find anything?"

Draco shook his head. "I don't understand it. You appear to have been... Hermione, do you mind that we include Severus?"

"Of course I don't mind. Why else would I have wanted him to stay? But, Draco, you're starting to worry me. What did you find?"

Draco regarded her for a moment and sighed. "That's the thing. All my examination told me was that you were... uh... penetrated. You said you were a virgin. And I believe you. It's just that Hermione, I've seen rape victims before. They are usually heavily bruised. They are usually torn pretty badly. Other than the natural signs of one having sex for the first time, you don't have any marks. It's almost as if he was careful."

Snape looked puzzled. "I know Lucius. He's not careful. However, from what I saw in both of your minds, he was mad. I really don't know what any of this means. Draco, was there anything else that you could gather from your examination?"

Draco looked pensive for a moment. "No. I didn't see anything else. There is no sign of spell damage. There is no sign of *anything* other than penetration. I'm really sorry, Hermione. I'm sorry I couldn't do more to stop him."

Hermione sat on the bed next to Draco. With a trace of hesitancy, she patted him on the back. "I've already told you that I didn't blame you. I shudder to think of what I'd be doing right now if you hadn't taken that curse with me. I might not have even been alive right now. You saved me, Draco. For that, I will forever be grateful."

Draco was slightly uplifted by Hermione's words until the hard facts hit him. "I never should have asked you to help me. It was too dangerous for you to be at the Manor, and I should have recognized that."

Snape cleared his throat, standing. "I hate to break this up, but we really must be going. Miss Granger, I'm sure you'd like to take a shower and get into your own clothes. These last couple of days have been rather grueling for the both of you."

Hermione stood. "You are right about that. I'll ask Dobby if he'll have your robes cleaned for you."

Snape waved a hand, dismissively.

"Oh, I do hope that Ginny's had her baby." Hermione stopped dead in her tracks as a thought suddenly occurred to her. "Oh, Merlin, Harry! If Gin's had her baby, Harry has to... go. We will have to fight."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Miss Granger. You and Draco will be in hiding until Lucius is apprehended. I'm sure you recall the discussion we had before our arrival here."

"But you don't understand, Professor. I'm supposed to be by Harry's side. Ron and I pledged our loyalty to him when we were first years. I'm meant to be there."

Draco put his hand on Hermione's shoulder in an effort to calm her. "Hermione, if Lucius sees you, he might try to finish what he started."

"But Draco, that's not possible. You said that you and I are bound by the curse. If we are bound, how can he bind me to him?"

Draco looked at Snape for some guidance. This is something he was hoping to speak to Hermione about *after* they had settled in at number twelve.

Snape took his cue. "Have a seat, Miss Granger."

Hermione sat down mechanically. "What are you not telling me?"

Snape took a breath. "You and Draco *are* bound to one another. However, Lucius being the caster of the spell, he is the only one who can remove the spell. The only way to seal the bond is for the two of you to become legally married and consummate the marriage, thus consummating the bond."

"You mean to tell me that Lucius can take this bloody thing *off* of us?" At the nod of both wizards' heads, Hermione continued. "Well, let's find the bastard and *make* him do it."

If Hermione hadn't been looking at Draco when she said this, she would have missed the flash of hurt in his eyes. Hermione hesitated for a moment. "Draco, it's nothing against you. It's just that I don't want to be married to *anyone*. What your fath Lucius -- did was wrong. You are just as much a victim in this as I am. Surely you don't *want* to be married."

Draco shook his head. "Of course I don't want to be married. But right now, we don't have much choice. You don't know him. It's not safe for us to be anywhere around him. And I am most certainly not going to go looking for him. Hermione, he can't be trusted. We can't *make* him do anything. It's useless. We're stuck like this."

Hermione stood up abruptly, throwing her hands up in the air. "So you're giving up? Just like that? I don't believe you! I don't care what it takes. We can put the Imperius on him for all I care." Hermione shot a look at Snape. "And, yes, I know it's illegal. After what he did to us, I don't rightly care."

If the situation weren't so delicate, Snape would have laughed at her outrage. "I wasn't going to comment. To be honest with you, if I ever saw the man again, I would probably use an Unforgivable myself. I might even use some that *should* be Unforgivable." Snape was lost in his own thoughts for a moment when Hermione cleared her throat.

"Right, then. I say we get you two back to Headquarters. Then we can discuss things further. And, Miss Granger, you are not going with Mr. Potter. Do I make myself clear?"

"But, Sir!"

Snape gritted his teeth. "Do I make myself clear?"

Hermione hung her head. "Yes."

Back at number twelve, the kitchen was full of redheads. Fred and George were sitting at the table with Bill and Charlie, describing their latest invention a snitch that disappears as soon as you catch it.

They were hysterical with laughter until the fire blazed green, announcing new arrivals. The brothers sobered immediately and stood, pointing their wands at the fireplace. When they saw Professor Snape, followed by Hermione and Draco, they lowered their wands.

Fred went immediately to Hermione and engulfed her in a crushing embrace. "Fred, I can't breathe."

"Oh, Hermione, I'm sorry." George was right behind him and gave her a quick hug.

"We heard you're married to *this* git. George pointed his thumb in Draco's direction.

Draco frowned indignantly. "Hey!"

Hermione shrugged. "It's a little more complicated than that. But if you don't mind, I really don't feel like getting into it right now. I want to take a shower, change clothes, and check on Ginny. Has she had the baby yet?"

Fred and George both swelled simultaneously with obvious pride. It was Fred who answered. "She did. She and Harry have a beautiful baby girl. She looks exactly like us, except for the darker hair. We haven't seen her eyes yet, so we don't know what color they are. I'll tell you this, though, she looks right mischievous, that one. We have so much to teach her."

George sighed. "Better not let Mum hear you saying that. She chucked us out when Fred mentioned it. She said we were already corrupting her perfect granddaughter. If my niece is anything like her mother, we won't need to corrupt her. We got blamed for loads of stuff that Ginny did. She has always made us so proud."

Hermione beamed. "A little girl? How wonderful. I can't wait to see her. I wonder if they would mind if I just peek in for a moment."

"I don't think they'd mind at all," George said. "Mum, Dad and Ron are up there now." George grinned. "You should have seen the look on ickle Ronnieken's face when Mum tried to hand the baby to him. He was terrified. Imagine that. Ron can survive McGonagall's chessmen, but he's scared of a tiny baby."

"Well," Hermione reproached. "You can't blame him. He was probably just afraid to hurt her. What did they name her?"

Fred and George sobered. Bill quickly took his teacup to the sink, and Charlie cleared his throat, not meeting her eyes.

"What on earth? It can't be that bad, can it?" Hermione was looking from one brother to the other.

Charlie, still not meeting her eyes, sighed. "They haven't named her yet, Hermione. They're waiting until... until Harry gets back."

Hermione looked at Draco and Snape and then at the other men as if they all had a secret. "Until Harry gets back? Back from where? Where did he go?"

Charlie looked at her, puzzled. "Back from fighting You-Know-Who. You knew he was going, didn't you? He hasn't gone yet, of course. He's waiting for his cue from Dumbledore and Snape." Charlie nodded his head toward Snape and continued. "He's ready, Hermione. He wants to get this over with so he can live his life. So we can all live our lives."

Hermione straightened. "Then I suppose I should go and see him now. I want to wish him luck. Draco, would you like to come with me?"

Fred and George exchanged amused glances, which Hermione caught. "What? What are you two smirking about?"

Instead of answering Hermione, George addressed Draco. "The little woman is already telling you what to do, Malfoy? How very *domestic*."

The corners of Snape's mouth twitched. That's exactly the sort of thing *he'd* say. *Oh, Merlin*, thought Snape, *I'm comparing the Twin Idiots to myself*.

Hermione merely rolled her eyes. She'd had enough of the Weasley twins' humor to last her a lifetime. Draco, on the other hand, gave a weak smile, not really knowing how to take them.

Hermione turned walked out of the kitchen, and Draco, not wanting to be the butt of anymore marriage jokes, followed her. Snape stayed behind. He wasn't very keen on meeting a new Potter, no matter how cute and cuddly she may be.

As Hermione and Draco approached the bedroom, Draco stopped her. She turned to see what was up and felt taken aback by the sadness in his eyes.

"Draco, what's wrong? Don't you want to see Ginny's baby?"

Draco sighed. "Yes, of course I do. It's just Hermione, we haven't had much of a chance to talk since all of this happened. After we see the baby and get cleaned up, do you think that maybe you and I can sit down for a cup of tea and talk? I mean, you and I have so much to discuss. I know we won't be able to iron out any details of what the future might hold in one evening, but I think we need to get started."

Hermione didn't answer; she just pursed her lips and nodded. Draco gave her a grateful smile and gestured for her to go in.

Hermione gave a light knock and said, "It's Hermione and Draco, can we come in?" Ginny squealed. "Yes, of course!"

As they walked in, the happiness in the room lifted Hermione's spirits more than she thought possible. She and Draco were both pulled into an embrace by Mrs. Weasley. "Oh, there you are! I have been so worried. You just missed Professor Dumbledore. He had to go back to the school for something. How are you? Come, come. Sit down and meet my wonderful granddaughter."

Mr. Weasley came over and kissed Hermione on the cheek and shook Draco's hand. "Draco, I can't tell you what it means to us for what you did for Hermione. She's like another daughter to us. We just... well, thank you doesn't seem to cover it. If there's anything you need, anything we can do for you, let us know."

Not knowing how to answer, Draco just smiled shyly and nodded. He then turned his attention to Hermione, who was already holding the baby.

Mr. Weasley whispered something to Mrs. Weasley and she nodded. "Arthur and I are going to go down to the kitchen and get started on dinner. You all are probably very hungry. Besides, we've left Fred and George too long without adult supervision."

"Mum." Ginny gasped. "Fred and George are both adults." Mrs. Weasley raised her eyebrows at her daughter. Ginny giggled. "Well, okay. But Bill and Charlie are adults, and they're down there. On second thought, perhaps you should go down."

Hermione looked over the top of the baby's head. "Actually, Mrs. Weasley, Professor Snape is down there, so I think the house is safe."

Mrs. Weasley chuckled. "Come along, Arthur. Let's leave them be. As they headed out the door, Hermione was reminded of what George told Draco: "The little woman is already telling you what to do."

The room was quiet for a moment after Mr. and Mrs. Weasley left. Hermione noticed Ron throwing furtive glances toward Harry and then Ginny, who exchanged looks with each other. Hermione felt uneasy. "What's going on?"

Harry walked over and took Hermione by the hand. "We, that is to say Ginny and I, would like it very much if you would be our baby's godmother."

Hermione looked from Ginny to Harry. "Do you really mean it? Oh, Harry Ginny. I would love to. Thank you so much. So is Ron her godfather?"

Harry and Ginny looked at Ron, and Ron shook his head. Hermione's face fell. "I don't understand."

Ron grinned. "Hermione, I'm her uncle. Harry's my best mate, but we decided that it wouldn't be fair to all her other uncles if I was made godfather, they weren't. It comes down to this: if anything Merlin forbid ever happened to Harry and Ginny, this baby would always be taken care of, no matter who her godparents are."

Hermione's heart swelled at Ron's maturity. "So, who's her godfather, then?"

Harry smiled. "Well, we were hoping that Malfoy here would take on that responsibility." Harry stood and clapped Draco on the back. Draco's jaw dropped.

"You want *me* to be her godfather? I mean, I would love to, but are you sure?"

Ginny smiled at him. "Yes. Hermione and Ron may be Harry's best mates, but you're mine. And besides..." Ginny trailed off. Harry finished for her. "After what you did for Hermione, I know that my daughter would be safe in your hands, Malf Draco."

Draco fought the blush that threatened to expose itself. "Thanks... er... Harry. That really means a lot to me. Hermione, my I hold my goddaughter, please?"

As Hermione handed the baby to Draco, he felt a surge of happiness and warmth. He cradled her in his arm for a moment, and his heart skipped another beat when she

snuggled into him. *This is what we fight for*, thought Draco. The feeling of absolute trust and loyalty overwhelmed him as he fought to hold back tears.

Draco looked at the smiling faces around him -- the faces of his former enemies. He knew they would probably laugh at him, but he had to tell them how he felt. Hugging his new goddaughter closer to him, and knowing that everyone in the room was listening, he spoke quietly to her.

"I promise you, little one, I will look after you until my last breath. I never knew what it was like to have a good father, but I do know how to be a good godfather. You will have both. You are very lucky to be loved so much. How unfortunate for any boy who ever fancies you, though. He'll have your father, your uncles, and me... your godfather. I like the sound of that."

Wiping a tear that threatened to spill onto the baby's face, Draco looked up. He noticed that they all had tears in their eyes. Guessing that now would probably be the one and only chance he would give himself to be this emotional in front of a crowd, he addressed them all.

"I want you to know," Draco began. "I have touched the most expensive jewels. I have traveled to the most far away places. I have been exposed to vaults that would make a king cry. I have had and held riches beyond your imagination. I have always thought that I was worth something because of those riches."

Draco looked down at the baby again, who was sleeping soundly and holding tightly to Draco's finger. He went on with his dialogue. "Holding this baby in my arms, and knowing that she is *my* goddaughter, makes me realize that I have never held anything more valuable in my life. And I have never felt so unworthy. I promise you, I will do everything in my power to live up to whatever expectations she has for me. Ginny, H-Harry, this honor is the greatest gift I've ever been given."

Silence fell until Ron got up to retrieve the baby from Draco. "I take it back, Harry," Ron said jovially, wiping his eyes. "If it's that great of a feeling; I don't want to be her uncle, I want to be her godfather."

Everyone laughed at this and when Draco pulled the baby closer. "Get back, Weasley."

At that moment, there was another knock at the door, and Ginny, still half laughing, half crying said, "Come in."

The laughter died when Dumbledore came in, followed by Snape. Dumbledore was holding something, wrapped delicately in a sheet, and addressed Harry and Ron. "It's time." Harry looked questioningly at the package. Dumbledore pulled the sheet away, and Godric Gryffindor's sword blazed from the light of the candles that lit the room. Harry nodded his understanding.

Having already said their "goodbyes" in private, Harry kissed Ginny on the lips without a word. He stood resolutely and watched as Draco handed the baby to Ron. Ron hugged her close and kissed her on the top of the head. Harry took the baby from Ron.

Harry touched her cheek and whispered softly to her. "You, my little angel, are going to save us all." Harry held his breath as his daughter opened her emerald green eyes his eyes his mother's eyes. He knew, at that moment, that he would, indeed, hold his daughter again.

Silence

Chapter 9 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: Once again, I wouldn't be nearly this far if not for my beta RobisonRocket. Thanks also to my loyal reviewers. I appreciate all the feedback. Another chapter up shortly! Oh, by the way, in case you didn't know, I'm not JK Rowling, and I'm not getting paid. But Merlin! I wish I was!

Silence

Chapter 9

Hermione stepped out of the shower at half past nine in the evening. She felt much better, but she was very tired. After drying herself off, she donned her favorite terrycloth robe that her father had given her for Christmas the year before his death. It was baby blue and threadbare, but it made her feel close to her father. Hermione sighed. *What I wouldn't give to have my father right now*, thought Hermione.

As Hermione was walking out of the bathroom, drying her hair, she met Draco on his way in. They stared awkwardly at one another for what seemed like years until Draco broke the silence.

"Sorry. I didn't realize you were in there. I just wanted to take a quick shower before we have our nightcap."

"That's okay. I was just finishing up. I'm going to say goodnight to Gin and the baby, then I'll meet you in the kitchen. You should be finished by then, yes?"

"I should be. I just left Ginny's room. I'm worried about her. I know she was prepared for all of this, but she acts as if Harry's off patrolling the corridors of Hogwarts or something."

"I noticed that." Hermione grinned and added, "I also noticed that you are calling Harry by his given name, now."

Draco smirked back. "Now that I am his daughter's godfather, I can't very well keep calling him 'Potter,' can I? What kind of example is that setting for my wonderful goddaughter?"

"Correction! She is *our* goddaughter." Hermione suddenly found herself blushing. Draco noticed, but didn't comment. Finding himself fighting a blush himself, he strode quickly into the bathroom. Before closing the door, he told her he'd meet her in the kitchen.

When Hermione reached Ginny's room, she found the door open. "Gin, can I come in?" After being granted entrance, Hermione strode into the room to find Ginny sitting up, feeding her baby. *She's a natural*, thought Hermione.

"Hello, Hermione. Come on in and sit down. I'm just finishing up with this little angel."

"You're so good with her, Gin." Hermione bit her lip for a moment, which did not go unnoticed.

"Thank you. What's wrong?"

"What makes you think anything's wrong?" Hermione asked in high-pitched voice.

"Because, Hermione, I've known you since I was eleven. When you bite your lip, it's because you've got something to say, but you're not sure how to say without offending someone. And when someone asks you if something is wrong, you always answer in a falsetto, which is indicative that something is wrong. So, come on. Out with it."

Hermione let her eyes shift from Ginny, to the baby, to the door, and then back to Ginny. "Well, Draco and I are sort of worried about you. Harry only left a few hours ago, and you act like it doesn't even bother you. I mean, I know it *bothers* you, but it would seem like "

Ginny put a hand up to interrupt Hermione before she got carried away. "Hermione, I am scared to death. I am terrified of what the next few days, if not weeks, bring. But, I have to be strong for Harry and for my baby. I can't be out there fighting, so this is my only way to help him. He needs to know that I'm not wallowing in my fear. He needs to know that I'm not bawling my head off every second of every minute of every day." Ginny did everything she could to keep her temper and emotions in check before she continued.

"To be honest with you, Hermione, what bothers me the most right now is being alone. Even though I know I'll get visits from my family, most of them will be out fighting Death Eaters while Harry is getting rid of that idiot."

Hermione was sitting on the edge of the bed now and put her hand on Ginny's knee soothingly. "Ginny, you're not alone. Draco and I are both here, and we'll help you with whatever you need."

"But you two are staying in the guest quarters in a completely different part of the house. Unless --" Ginny stopped with an idea forming in her head.

Hermione eyed her suspiciously. "Unless what?"

"Unless -- you and Draco wouldn't mind staying here. Not *here*, exactly. But you two can stay in the guest room on this side of the house. You'll be close to us," Ginny nodded toward the baby, "and we won't feel lonely."

"But, Ginny, you only have one extra room. What am I suppose to do, crawl into the crib with the baby?"

Ginny giggled. "You and Draco can stay in the guest room together. There's plenty of room, and there's a loo adjoining the bedroom. You'll have all the privacy you need, and you won't be too far from me or your goddaughter. Come on, Hermione, what do you say?" Ginny made sure to end her invitation with a small pout.

"Ginny, you know that pout may work on your brothers, but it most certainly doesn't work on me." And then Hermione sighed. "I'm supposed to be meeting Draco for tea and a talk. I'll... um... ask him. Surely we can work something out. I wouldn't want you to be alone."

Ginny beamed. "Thank you, Hermione. I'll go ahead and have Dobby prepare it for you, just in case."

Hermione stood and kissed Ginny on the top of the head and then bent down to kiss the baby. "I can't wait until Harry gets back so that my goddaughter can have a name. Ah, well, goodnight. I'll see you in the morning."

"Goodnight, Hermione."

Hermione made her way into the kitchen with a feeling of foreboding. She knew they had to discuss things, so there was no point in avoiding it. When she entered, she saw Draco sitting in the chair with his back to her. His shoulders were slightly hunched, and he seemed so... defeated. Hermione sighed and walked through the door.

When Hermione entered, Draco stood and got her a cup of tea. Setting it down in front of her, he took his seat again. Hermione whispered a "Thank you," and nervously poured her sugar. Draco watched, waiting for the perfect opportunity. Then he spoke.

"I can't stand this, Hermione. I know you are miserable. I wish I could go back and not have you come to the Manor with me."

Hermione sighed. "Well, there's nothing we can do about it now. We need to figure out what we're going to do. If we find Lucius, maybe there is something we can do to make him reverse this spell. We can't erase what happened, Draco, and I don't blame you. You should stop blaming yourself. We have to move on from here."

Draco leaned back in his chair and looked up at the ceiling. "If we find him, do you really want him to use his wand on us? He could say that he's going to reverse it, but then he could do something else. He could kill us."

"You're right, Draco. I hadn't thought of that. So where do we go from here? Do we just live like this forever or do we make it official? I don't know much about this."

"That's really going to be up to you. We won't be able to marry another, and we won't ever be able to be unfaithful. You can take some time to think, Hermione, but I'd like to make it official."

At Hermione's shocked expression, Draco continued. "I will not live the rest of my life lost in the middle. Chalk it up to my pureblood beliefs, but I want to be officially married to my wife."

"Well, chalk it up to my Muggle beliefs, but I want to be married to someone who loves me." Hermione flushed with a mixture of embarrassment and anger.

"I don't want to fight with you, Hermione."

"And I don't want to fight with you. Listen, we are both exhausted and worried about our loved ones. We're not going to be able to figure out the rest of our lives tonight. I have something else to talk to you about."

Draco waited. Hermione hesitated. "Ginny wants us to stay in their private quarters. She wants us to be close by."

"Okay." Draco looked puzzled for a moment. "But they only have one extra room aside from the baby's room."

Hermione flushed again. "I know. She wants you and me to share the room."

Draco's mouth hung open. "But that would mean we'd have to share a bed."

"Yes. That's what that means. But, Draco, to be honest with you, I'm so tired right now, I don't even care. Ginny is going through a lot right now, and if being close to her is what she wants, then that's what she should have. It's just to sleep. I'm okay with it, if you are."

"Yeah, I'm okay with it. Like you said, it's just to sleep."

They put their mugs in the sink and made their way to the Potters' living quarters. It was already past midnight when they went into their room. The room was modestly decorated with a bathroom off to the side. There was a settee next to the large window and an armoire next to the large four-poster bed. The walls were a soft white, and the bed was covered with a green quilt made of silk.

Draco grinned. "I always knew Potter was a closet Slytherin."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Come on. You can use the bathroom first."

"I need to go to my rooms first and get my things. Did Dobby bring yours?"

Hermione opened the armoire. "Yes, he did. And it looks like he brought yours as well."

"How did he know? We just decided ten minutes ago."

Hermione grinned. "I think Ginny told him to do it. Anyway, you can go first, if you'd like."

Draco grabbed his pajamas and went into the bathroom. Hermione rummaged through the wardrobe on the opposite side of the room until she found her nightgown. Hermione listened for the water to turn on, and when it did, she slipped off her robe and started to put on her nightgown. It had just fallen over her head when the bathroom door opened, and Draco, clad only in black, silk pajama bottoms, emerged.

They both gaped at each other for a moment until Draco mentally shook himself. "You can... uh... go ahead."

Blushing furiously, Hermione made her way into the bathroom. Once she closed the door, she leaned against it and let out a breath she didn't realize she was holding. She couldn't help but get the picture of Draco out of her head. He was tall and lean. He had a nice muscular stomach and strong arms. His pajama bottoms were worn low on his hips, and he had a trail of blond hair lined down to his ... "Hermione squeezed her eyes shut. *Merlin, when did Draco become so sexy? Ugh... stop it, Hermione. You can't be thinking things like that right now.* Hermione grinned to herself. *Well, if I'm forced to be married to someone, at least he's good looking*

On the other side of the door, Draco had to catch his breath as well. Sitting on the edge of his bed with his head in his hands, he couldn't stop thinking of what he saw. The nightdress was falling down her body when he opened the door. It had only made it past her breasts, so he got a nice look at her body from the waist down. He had already seen her from the examination, but this was different very different. She had on pink knickers that barely covered her. She was slender, with toned legs, and a toned stomach. She wasn't tall, but she wasn't too short, either. She was beautiful. Draco looked down at himself and the evidence of his obvious attraction. *I have got to get her out of my head or I won't be able to sleep. She can't see me like this.* With that final thought, Draco crawled into the bed and drew the covers up to his neck.

A few minutes, and a lot of lip biting later, Hermione emerged from the bathroom. She watched Draco for moment before nervously going to the other side of the bed and crawling in. She turned so her back was toward Draco, and she closed her eyes, suddenly not tired at all.

Draco was lying on his back, staring at the ceiling. The only light in the room was the moonlight shining through the window. The silence was too much to bear. He felt like he should say something... *anything*. Clearing his throat, he whispered, "Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Draco." Hermione smiled to herself. "Pleasant dreams."

That shouldn't be a problem, thought Draco. "You, too."

Three weeks later...

The sun shown bright through the window of Draco and Hermione's room. Draco awoke with something heavy on his chest, and something bushy tickling his chin. He opened his eyes and looked down. Hermione was practically lying on top of him. She had one leg thrown over his, and her arms were wrapped around him. Her head rested on his chest, which would explain the breath he felt on his stomach.

Draco lay contented for a moment until he felt his traitorous body begin to react to her closeness. For almost a month, they had awoken like this, and Draco's attraction grew more with each passing day. Trying to keep his body parts and his dignity intact, he gently shook her.

"Hermione," he whispered. "Hermione, I need to get up. I need to use the loo."

Hermione opened her eyes and jerked away from him. "Oh, Draco, I'm sorry. I didn't realize "

Draco put up his hand to interrupt her. "It's alright. I don't mind. I just really need to use the loo."

Hermione nodded her head, and when Draco got out of bed, she couldn't miss what he desperately tried to hide. Instead of being disgusted, however, it made Hermione feel very satisfied with herself.

Several minutes later, when Draco came out wearing a t-shirt with his pajama bottoms, Hermione was already up with her tattered, old robe wrapped tightly around her. Draco couldn't help but feel disappointed. He knew he needed to process these new feelings he was having toward her, but now was not the time. Hermione's stomach gave a tiny growl, and he smiled.

"I guess you'd like some breakfast."

Hermione gave a small nod and grinned. "Yes, I think breakfast would be lovely. I'm going to brush my teeth first, and then I want to see if Ginny is up. I already miss my beautiful goddaughter. Maybe Ginny would like to have breakfast with us."

"*Our* goddaughter," Draco corrected her. "That sounds like a wonderful idea. Would you like for me to wait for you?"

"No, you can go ahead and see if Gin's up. I'll be along shortly."

As Hermione walked into the bathroom, Draco caught a hint of jasmine and vanilla when she passed by. With a resigned sigh, he made his way to Ginny's room.

Tapping lightly on the door, he waited patiently for Ginny to welcome him in.

"Who is it?" Ginny asked, frustrated.

"It's Draco, may I come in?"

"Yes, of course."

When Draco entered the room, he noticed his friend looked very tired and unsettled. "Hey, Gin, what's wrong?"

"A new baby that doesn't want to sleep at night, but we'll be fine. So, did you and Hermione stay in the room Dobby prepared for you?"

"You cut right to the chase don't you?" Draco smirked as he reached for the baby.

"Thank you. Of course, I cut to the chase. I'm glad you stayed. What are you smirking at?"

"Oh, Gin, I don't know. Can you keep a secret?"

Ginny beamed. "That depends on who I need to keep the secret from."

"Hermione." Ginny nodded, and Draco continued. "I've been having these... uh... *feelings* toward her. I don't know what it is. I've always thought she was pretty, but now there's this *attraction* that I've never felt before."

"Do you think it has something to do with the curse?" Ginny asked.

"I hope not. She's technically my wife. I really don't want to be attracted to her because of a curse."

At that moment, Ginny looked up at the door and noticed Hermione standing there. Draco flushed, praying she didn't hear anything.

"Hi, Hermione, come in. Draco and I were just " Ginny trailed off, noticing the pale face of her friend. "Hermione, what is it? What's wrong?"

Draco stood, still holding the baby, and went to her side. "Are you sick? You look like you've seen a ghost."

Hermione looked at Draco with unshed tears. Her voice shook when she spoke. "I n-need y-you to d-do another exam examination."

"Gods, Hermione. Why? If you're sick, we can get you something." Draco put his hand on her head. "You don't have fever, but you do feel clammy."

Draco took her hand and walked her over to Ginny's bed. He laid the sleeping baby in her crib. Hermione sat down on the bed, and Ginny stood, grabbing her wand. "Lie down, Hermione," Ginny told her.

She ran her wand over Hermione, and Hermione's body became illuminated by a blue light. Draco began to tremble with outrage.

Hermione looked between the two and asked, "What is it?"

Ginny sat down next to her and said quietly, "I'm so sorry, Hermione." Ginny paused, holding back the tears that threatened to spill. "You're pregnant."

Silence fell.

A/N: I know that a lot of you were expecting this to happen. Don't fret... all is not lost. I just want to apologize to mmesnape. Please don't hate me. I know you didn't want it to happen, but it had to.

~potterbrat~

It's Over

Chapter 10 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: HBP Warning! If you haven't read the 6th book yet, there are some references to it in this chapter. Thanks again to my excellent beta, RobisonRocket. All these characters belong to JKRowling, not me. However, if she would let me have Snape for a couple of hours... ahem... sorry. Enjoy!

Chapter 10

It's Over

Harry, along with Ron, Snape, and Dumbledore, Apparated into the graveyard near Little Hangleton. Harry took a deep breath. He couldn't help having flashbacks of this place. His eyes quickly found the spot where Cedric Diggory's lifeless body hit the ground. Harry squeezed his eyes shut. *Now is not the time, Potter. Get yourself together.*

Harry's thoughts were broken by Snape's voice. "He's here. I can feel him. Albus, you need to get out of sight. Where are the others?"

Dumbledore stood tall behind Snape. "Severus, I will fight. I may be an old man, but I think I can handle myself. The others are awaiting my signal." Dumbledore reached into his robes and pulled out his loyal phoenix, who perched himself on his master's shoulder."

Snape sighed. "Albus, I am fully aware of the fact that you can handle yourself. However, you've already had your fight. This is ours. Please, if something were to happen to you, old man, I "

Dumbledore put up his hand. "I understand, Severus. However, I'm not going anywhere."

Harry was listening to the banter between the older men until he heard something. Noticing the halted voices of the other two, he knew they heard it as well. Harry looked all around him until he spotted it on the ground. Without making a sound, he pointed to the rat scampering up the walk toward the Riddle house. He looked at Snape, who mouthed, "Wormtail." Harry nodded, and Dumbledore sent Fawkes with the signal.

Before they could make a move, they heard small pops all around them. They were surrounded. Harry looked all around him. He looked at Snape and whispered, "I guess your cover's blown."

Snape smirked. "It's about time."

They stood back to back, with their wands raised, but nobody made a move, not even the Death Eaters. Suddenly, from out of nowhere, Voldemort appeared in front of Harry.

"Well, well, well. It looks like you found me, Potter. It was nice of you to drop by. Oh, and you brought your little red-headed friend, I see." Voldemort gestured toward Ron. "How is your little sister?" Ron's face burned red with anger, but he didn't speak. Voldemort turned his attention back to Harry. "I was actually on my way to see you. It seems like we've left some things... unsaid."

Moving to Harry's right, Dumbledore held his wand at the ready. When Voldemort saw Dumbledore for the first time, he had the slightest intake of breath. Then, noticing Snape, he hissed, "I see you have decided to fight against me, Severus."

Snape glared back, but didn't answer. Before Voldemort could say another word, the members of the Order appeared, surrounding the Death Eaters. It was Bellatrix Lestrange who started the battle. She fired the first shot at Dumbledore, who effortlessly deflected it. While the battle was raging behind them, Harry and Voldemort simply stared at one another.

It wasn't long before Dumbledore had conjured ropes to secure most of the Death Eaters. The remaining Death Eaters were dead, including Wormtail. There was one that was missing: Lucius Malfoy.

Remnants of spells filled the air, and Harry and Voldemort raised their wands. "Harry," Voldemort started. "You know you can't kill me."

"Sure I can, Tom. And I'm going to kill you. I'm just surprised you let all your mates get caught or killed."

Anger rose up Voldemort's spine at the use of his given name. "It's no matter. I would rather get this over with without the distraction. If they let themselves get caught or killed, that's their problem. After I do away with you, I'll take care of the rest."

"I don't think so, Tommy," said Harry. "You know all those little pet Horcruxes of yours?"

Voldemort's eyes widened. Apparently, he didn't know that Harry knew anything about them.

Harry smiled. "You do remember those, don't you? You shouldn't have neglected them for so long. Don't worry, my friends and I have been playing with them. You know what that means, don't you?" When Voldemort's eyes started to dart around furiously, Harry added, "We got your slithery little friend yesterday. I must say, she was hard to get. It took us some time finding her, but we have our ways. I'll give Snape the credit for that one."

Without taking his eyes off Voldemort, Snape smiled wickedly. "It was my pleasure, Potter. I never liked that snake."

Voldemort laughed maniacally. "Do you really think you can beat me, boy? You are no match for Lord Voldemort. I will have two new Horcruxes when we are finished here. And once I get Dumbledore, I shall have yet another. You think you are all powerful because you have my traitor with you? I'm not alone, Potter. My only loyal servant is here. I've kept him safe until now."

Harry and Snape exchanged furtive looks. Snape eyed Voldemort. "Your little rat is dead. He tried to run poor thing but he didn't make it."

Voldemort laughed again. "Do you think I give a damn about that little piece of vermin? Lucius, you can come out now. Come and join our friends."

Lucius Malfoy pulled off an Invisibility Cloak and walked toward the group with his wand drawn. He looked thin and pale. His eyes had dark circles under them. "Hello, Severus," he sneered.

White, hot anger rose within Snape, but he quickly buried it. "Lucius, how nice of you to join us from your hiding place. We've been wondering what happened to you. Have you been living under a rock?"

Harry couldn't believe his eyes. He wanted to get this over with, but he wanted to deal with Lucius personally. Though he didn't know the depth of injury that Lucius had caused, he knew Hermione was viciously attacked, and that was enough. Turning his attention back to Voldemort, he smiled again. "Good of you to bring another guest, Tommy. I'd think it rather unfair for this to be two against one."

"Oh, I'm not going to fight you, Potter," Lucius said. He turned to Snape and for the first time, Snape caught a glimpse of the man Lucius used to be. "I'm not going to fight you either, Severus, my friend."

Voldemort turned red eyes toward Lucius. "What are you talking about, you fool? You will kill the traitor. Potter... is... mine."

Lucius, whose wand was pointing at Snape, turned it toward Voldemort instead. "You bastard... You have turned me into a monster. You have destroyed me, and everything that has mattered to me. I may not be able to kill you, but I will take pleasure in watching Potter do it. This boy, who has thwarted you over and over again, will finally get rid of you."

Voldemort hissed. "Lucius, don't be a fool. Kill the traitor."

Lucius raised his wand and shouted, "*Incarcerous*." Long, thin ropes flew around Voldemort, knocking his wand out of his hand. Harry and Snape were stunned.

Lucius yelled at Harry. "Kill him, Potter. Do it now."

Harry raised his wand and then he froze. Lucius gaped at him. "What is wrong with you, boy? Kill him, and be done with it." But Snape knew what the problem was. One of the reasons Potter wasn't a Slytherin was because he was too noble. He pointed his wand at Voldemort. Harry shook his head, but Snape just said, "I'm not going to kill him." Then, turning back to Voldemort, he whispered, "*Finite*."

When the bonds fell, Voldemort was ready. He *Accio'd* his wand in a flash. After throwing the *Sectumsempra* curse at Snape, he turned his wand on Harry, and hit him with the same. Harry hit his knees. Voldemort stood over him with his wand raised.

Meanwhile, Lucius had ended the curse put on Snape and cast a healing charm on him. He then cast the *Finite* on Harry. But before he could stop Voldemort from finishing Harry off, they heard singing from above. They all stopped and looked up. It was Fawkes. He was clutching something in his talons.

When he reached Harry, he dropped a dagger onto the ground next to Harry's knee. Voldemort didn't see the dagger because he was too focused on the bird. Voldemort hissed. "Really, Potter, you should get better friends."

But Lucius saw it. The moment Fawkes dropped it, Lucius said, barely above a whisper, "Dumbledore's bird."

Voldemort turned his attention toward Lucius and said, "What?"

Although Harry was weak from blood loss, he still had his wits about him. While Voldemort had his attention turned toward Lucius, Harry grabbed the dagger. The moment his hands touched the dagger, it turned into Godric Gryffindor's sword.

Harry looked up at Voldemort and grinned. "Let's dance." Voldemort turned back to Harry, who was still on his knees. "What did you say, Potter?"

Without wasting another second, Harry drove the blade through Voldemort's heart and said weakly, "*Amo Subvertio Pravus*."

Voldemort screamed and hit the ground. He was dead.

Harry was still sitting on his knees, panting. He grabbed his fallen wand and pointed it at Voldemort, just in case. Steam rose from Voldemort's body. Harry knew he was dead because in all the times he thought he'd killed Voldemort, there had never been a body.

Harry looked around him. Snape was trying to stand. Lucius walked over to Harry and performed a healing spell on him. "Potter, all I can do is heal the open wounds. You've lost a lot of blood." Harry looked up at Lucius, unable to focus, and he said, "I don't understand. Why? Why did you do it?"

Lucius didn't answer him. He turned to look down at Snape. Snape didn't have the strength to speak. Lucius gave Snape a small smile. "I have to kill the traitor." Without another word, Lucius Disapparated.

Snape crawled over to Harry. "Potter, can you stand? We have to get out of here. This place will be crawling with Ministry officials as soon as that bird of Dumbledore's gets the message out."

Harry noticed Dumbledore and Ron walking toward them. He knew they had been just beyond the perimeters, holding the captured Death Eaters.

"I think I can stand." Harry made to get up, but his head started swimming, and his eyes became unfocused. A moment later, Harry collapsed.

A/N: I know this was a shorter chapter, but I had to move on. This chapter was really used to get rid of Voldemort. He's such a pain. Amo Subvertio Pravus will be explained in the following chapter.

Lily's Legacy

Chapter 11 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: I would like to apologize for the time it's taken me to get this chapter out. I got caught up in some of Subversa's work. She's fantastic, check her out. Anyway, thanks so much to my beta, RobisonRocket. Once again, I own nothing but the plot.

Lily's Legacy

Chapter 11

Draco was sitting next to Hermione's bed, speaking in soothing tones. Hermione was staring at the ceiling, seeming not to realize that Draco was even there. Ginny walked into the room and sighed. "Any change?"

Without taking his eyes off of Hermione's tear-stained faced, he answered, "No."

"Draco," Ginny started. "You need to eat something. And I know you haven't slept properly in the last couple of days. Hermione needs you to be strong for her."

Draco got up from his seat and walked over to Ginny. "I've checked her vitals, Gin. She's not eating or sleeping, either. It's almost like she's *trying* to make herself sick."

Ginny gave Draco a sad look. "Draco, she's slowly killing the baby and herself. We have to get her to St. Mungo's. I know that we are both healers, but we don't have the resources here. She needs nutrition. I don't have the potions or the ingredients."

"But Gin, we aren't supposed to leave. You know Lucius is still out there."

"Draco, this is her *life* we're talking about. Her life and the baby's."

Draco gritted his teeth. "And why, *exactly*, do you think we are in hiding in the first place?" Seeing Ginny's scorned expression, Draco softened. "Listen, Gin. Just give me some more time with her. If I can't get her to come 'round, we can take her to St. Mungo's as a last resort."

Ginny smiled sadly. "Okay, Draco. But you need to eat something as well. You are no good to her if you make yourself sick."

Draco's next words were halted by the sound of Ron's voice. He was running up the stairs, calling to Ginny.

Ginny rushed toward the door, "Ron!"

Catching his breath, Ron grabbed Ginny by the shoulders. "Gin, it's over. It's really over."

"What's over? Ron! Calm down. Where's Harry?"

"Snape took him to St. Mungo's. Voldemort's dead. Harry did it."

Draco breathed a sigh of relief. "How did he do it, Weasley?"

"I don't know for sure. I was with Dumbledore, holding the remaining Death Eaters."

Draco jumped. "Remaining Death Eaters? Weasley, was Lucius..."

Ron closed his eyes. "I didn't see him. He wasn't with the Death Eaters that we had captured. I didn't see his body, either."

Ginny was busy gathering the baby's things. Ron looked at her, puzzled. "What are you doing, Gin?"

"I'm going to St. Mungo's, Ron. What do you think I'm doing?"

Draco looked into the crib at his sleeping goddaughter. "Leave her here, Ginny. I'll look after her. I'm not going anywhere without Hermione."

It was that moment that Ron looked toward the bed in the corner of the room and noticed his catatonic best friend. "What's the matter with Hermione?"

Draco sighed. "She's pregnant, Weasley. She hasn't eaten, spoken, or slept properly since she found out a couple of days ago. I keep trying to get her to come 'round, but she won't respond to me or Ginny. You've known her longer. Maybe you can try."

Ron furrowed his eyebrows in confusion. "She's pregnant? Who's the father?"

Ginny lowered her hood, and Petunia was taken aback. "Who are you?" Petunia asked breathlessly.

Confused by the woman's noticeable change of manner, she said proudly, "My name is Ginevra Potter. I am your nephew's wife." Then revealing the baby beneath the blankets, she added, "And this is our daughter. Mrs. Dursley, I need to speak with you. May I please come in?"

Petunia hesitated for a moment and then stepped aside to let Ginny enter. Before closing the door, she looked outside to make sure nobody saw Ginny enter. She turned on her heel the moment she let the door close. "I don't know what you're doing here, Mrs. Potter, but you can state your business and leave at once. I don't want anything to do with your kind." Although the words were cruel, they lacked the necessary venom to intimidate Ginny.

"You may call me Ginny, Madam. I will gladly state my business. Is it alright if we sit down? My baby's not heavy, but my arm is starting to cramp."

"Very well, you may follow me." Ginny followed Petunia into a small sitting room and sat on the sofa where Petunia had indicated.

Ginny didn't waste any time. "Mrs. Dursley, I know you don't want anything to do with us, and I wouldn't be here if it wasn't an emergency." Ginny fought to keep the tears at bay. "The thing is, Harry needs you. You are his only living relative besides our baby, here. He is at St. Mungo's, and he's dying."

This news didn't have the desired effect on Petunia Dursley. "What's St. Mungo's?"

"It's a Wizard's hospital. Mrs. Dursley, Harry needs blood. He has a rare blood type that we don't have within our reach."

Without meeting her gaze, Petunia asked, "And what makes you think/ can help him?"

Ginny narrowed her eyes at Harry's aunt. "Because you're Harry's aunt, and you're a Muggle. Mrs. Dursley, you know this because you share the same blood type, don't you?"

Petunia's head was spinning. All this talk about Wizards and Muggles right in the middle of a *normal* society. The whole time Ginny was talking, Petunia was playing with the hem of her blouse, but she couldn't ignore what the young witch was saying.

"Mrs. Potter, I don't know exactly what you want me to do." Then Petunia indicated the baby. "What about her? She's Harry's child. What kind of blood does *she* have?"

Ginny was starting to get angry, but she knew this was her only chance to save Harry, therefore, she had to control her Weasley temper. "Mrs. Dursley, my baby is only a month old. Even if she did have the right blood, which she doesn't, it would be too dangerous for her to extract it." Ginny stood and walked over to Mrs. Dursley, who was now standing next to the window. She hesitated to lay a hand on the older woman's shoulder, but thought better of it.

"Mrs. Dursley, you are Harry's only chance of survival. The blood that runs through your veins protected him for most of his life. Please, I'm begging you; your blood is all that can save him now."

Petunia didn't turn from the window, nor did she respond to Ginny's pleading. Instead, she took a deep breath and spoke resolutely. "When my sister got the letter to go to that school, I was crushed."

Ginny swallowed the irritation in her voice. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Dursley. Harry doesn't talk much about his mum. He doesn't have any memories of her, of course."

At the sound of the baby fussing, Petunia looked down at her. "Does she have a name?"

Ginny blushed. "Not yet. We wanted to name her when Harry finished off You-Know-Who. If Harry lives." Ginny's voice cracked, but she continued. "If Harry lives, we'll name her together."

Petunia furrowed her brows. "That's absurd. The child needs a name."

Ginny knew that Petunia was aching to hold the baby, but would never ask to. So Ginny, taking the initiative, asked instead. "Mrs. Dursley, would you like to hold her?"

Petunia flinched as if she'd been burned. Ginny rolled her eyes. "She's won't be able to hex you for a few years yet."

Ginny could see Petunia's battle going on in her head. Finally sat down in the rocking chair and held out her arms, still looking a bit frightened. Ginny felt herself bursting with joy, but wouldn't demonstrate that feeling in front of Petunia. She gently handed her the baby, who squirmed from being removed from her mother's warmth.

Petunia looked down at the infant in her arms. Without realizing it, she slowly started rocking. When the baby opened her eyes, she looked up at Petunia with mild interest. Petunia felt her heart skip a beat. "Lily's eyes," she whispered softly, but Ginny heard her. Ginny finally felt she was getting somewhere with this woman, so she didn't comment.

As if there had been no interruption, Petunia continued to recount days long forgotten. "I loved her, you know Lily. She was my baby sister. I took care of her like she was my little doll." Petunia paused in remembrance. Ginny didn't dare interrupt her. She had a feeling that Petunia had wanted to get this out of her system, but never had anyone to talk to about it. Petunia continued.

"I used to play with her out in the garden. The garden always held a special place for us. When my mother would ask about us, my father would tell her that his little flowers were out in the garden. Our lives were made of playing and giggling and telling secrets. I noticed that strange things would happen sometimes, but not believing in magic, I never suspected what it was. I assumed my eyes were always playing tricks on me. Then the letter came."

Petunia took a breath. "When my parents showed so much joy at Lily's *gift*, I became angry. Lily went off to that school, and I was left alone. I was sad at first, and then my sadness turned into anger. That anger got worse when she'd come for the holidays or summer. She had this exciting life that I was cut out of. My parents were so proud of her. I felt empty."

"Then I met Vernon. He helped turn my anger into disgust. He kept telling me what a freak my sister was. I was so besotted and happy that there was someone else who saw her for what I wanted to see her as."

"She would send me letters, and I would send them back. In her last year, she came home from school with that James. He had asked my father for her hand. She was so happy, and I was so angry at her happiness. She tried to embrace me before she went back to school. I turned from her, and told her I hated her. Imagine hating one's own sister." Petunia stopped long enough to wipe away a traitorous tear.

"I went on with my life, and she went on with hers. Then one day I opened my front door to find a baby boy in a basket, accompanied by a letter. Every time I looked at him, I saw Lily's accusing eyes. I felt as if she was punishing me. So the only way to get back at her was to punish her only son. I will never forget the way he looked at me the last day he stood in our foyer. Those eyes, so like hers, weren't accusing me of anything. When I looked at him, all I could see was sadness and regret. But it wasn't his sadness or his regret it was hers."

"You look like her, you know. When I opened my door and saw you standing there, I almost fainted. Then I saw your lovely brown eyes, and I righted myself."

Petunia became quiet now. She gave everything she had to hold in her emotions. She looked up at Ginny, who seemed engrossed by Petunia's revelation. Ginny still didn't speak, for fear of breaking this connection. Petunia took another deep breath and looked again at the baby, who was staring back at her.

"When I look into the eyes of this child, I don't see accusations, nor sadness, nor regret. I only see a beautiful baby with the eyes of her grandmother. I've always wanted a little girl. Vernon didn't want anymore children after Dudley was born."

Ginny cleared her throat. "Perhaps Dudley can give you a granddaughter, Mrs. Dursley."

Petunia sighed. "No. Dudley is unable to have children. Unfortunately, he became sterile due to an illness a year ago. I've often wondered if that was also a punishment. When Vernon died of a heart attack a few weeks after Dudley's recovery, Dudley moved to America, and we don't keep in touch very often as I'd like."

"I'm sorry you lost your husband, Mrs. Dursley."

Petunia brushed her fingertip down the baby's cheek and looked up at Ginny. After regarding her for what seemed like a lifetime, she finally stood and handed the baby back to Ginny. Only then did she finally let the tears fall silently. "Yes, I lost my husband. But he had a long life, Mrs. Pot...Ginny. Your husband, on the other hand, is barely an adult. I can't imagine this poor little girl going too much longer without a name. She will be her father's greatest joy; a joy which he never had while in my home. I have spent my life loathing magic and what I let it do to my family. My sister left a legacy, which she died to protect. If I can help her son, perhaps she'll finally forgive me."

Ginny shifted the baby in her arms and stood. She took Petunia's hand in her own and spoke softly. "Perhaps you can finally forgive yourself."

A/N: I know I told you I would let you in on what the spell is that killed Old Voldy, but I couldn't find a place to put it in this chapter. Next chapter: Snape's Confession...

Snape's Confession

Chapter 12 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: Thanks to my brilliant beta, RobisonRocket. I also want all of you reviewers to know how much I appreciate your kind words. They have really inspired me to write at least two chapters a week. You guys are incredible, even though some of you believe me to be twisted.

Snape's Confession

Chapter 12

Severus Snape was pacing the corridor to the hospital wing at Hogwarts. Hermione was out of the woods, but she was still weak. He knew the only way to get her better was to get her back to Hogwarts. He had the headmaster Floo call Madam Pomfrey to get her back to Hogwarts. He stressed to Dumbledore that, "A member of the Order needs her, and her sister is probably just milking her injuries so she doesn't have to work." Dumbledore chuckled when Snape added, "She needs to end her tea party and get her arse back to Hogwarts where she belongs." Then he left the room, closing the door with a resounding thud.

The door to the hospital wing opened, and a still disgruntled Madam Pomfrey waved the Professor in without a word. Hermione was sitting up in the bed with Draco sitting on the edge when Professor Snape entered the room. She smiled kindly when he came in and asked how she was feeling.

"I've been better, Professor. However, I'd be the worse for wear if you hadn't come when you did. How is Harry? I want all the details of how he got rid of You-Know-Who."

Snape pulled up a chair and told her all the details leaving out Lucius' involvement -- of the attack and how Harry had stabbed Voldemort with the sword. He told her of the incantation he used, and Hermione furrowed her eyebrows in confusion. "I don't know if I've heard of *Amo Subvertio Pravus*. What does it mean, Sir?"

"It means, 'Love Destroys Evil.' I believe he found it in a book called, All I Ever Needed to Know, I Learned in First Year."

Hermione grinned. "I gave him that book for his birthday last year. I didn't even know that spell was in there. I just thought it was funny."

"Well," started Draco. "It may have been meant to humor him, but it eventually saved the Wizarding world. You see, Hermione, you *did* help Harry."

"You still haven't told me how Harry's doing, or where he is."

"Mr. Potter is at St. Mungo's, Miss Granger. He had quite a bit of blood loss, but Mrs. Potter was able to procure a donor to save him." In answer to her unasked question, Snape added, "He has a rare blood type, therefore, Mrs. Potter convinced his aunt to donate her blood."

Hermione's eyes grew wide. "His aunt? But she hates Harry. She made his life hell while he was a child. Why would she do that?"

"That, Miss Granger," Snape countered, "is between herself and Mrs. Potter."

"Hermione, you need to get some rest. I believe they are going to bring Harry here to recover once he's awake."

Hermione gasped. "He's not awake yet? Are the Healers concerned?"

Draco calmed her by placing a hand over hers. "He is still unconscious, but they believe he'll be alright. They aren't going to even try to revive him until they know the blood will work. Don't worry, Hermione. He'll be fine."

Appeased for the moment, Hermione snuggled into her pillow. "I am pretty tired. I think I'll take a nap." She looked up at Draco shyly and asked, "Will you be here when I wake up?"

Draco flushed slightly. "Of course I will. I won't leave you until you ask me to." For good measure he added, "Of course, if you ask me to leave, I'll only be on the other side of the door. I'm in this for the long haul, Hermione."

Hermione blushed and closed her eyes, smiling. The room was silent for a while. When Hermione's breathing became even, indicating she was finally asleep, Snape broke the silence.

"Draco, what are you planning to do? Did you and Miss Granger talk of your future?"

Draco looked solemnly up at his godfather. "To be honest with you, Severus, I think I want to marry her and make it legal. I don't know what it is about her, but I want to take care of her. I can't stand to be away from her. Besides, you know Lucius will never sever this bond."

"Do you love her, Draco?" Before he gave Draco a chance to answer, he added, "I ask you this because Miss Granger is not the kind of witch that would succumb to

pressure."

"What do you mean by 'pressure,' Severus?" Draco asked, confused.

"What I mean is that she won't legally marry you or anyone else simply because a magical bond was placed upon her, especially if that bond was cast with malice. She is a Gryffindor, Draco, and she's Muggle-born. Most Muggles have fantastical ideas of love and marriage. You have been brought up in a household where marriage is for convenience. She will not understand that. So, I ask you again Do. You. Love. Her?"

Draco stared at him in silence. He wanted to put off answering that question for as long as possible. So instead, he asked, "How do you know so much about Hermione? How do you know how she feels about love and marriage?"

Snape sighed, exasperated. "For the most obvious reason, she was my student for seven years. In case you've forgotten, I've been a spy for most of my life. I make it my job to figure people out. And, as I pointed out already, she is Muggle-born. When are you going to answer my question?"

"With all due respect, Sir, I don't care to answer your question right now. As you pointed out, I was raised in a home where marriage is of convenience. Any discussion that we have, I want to have it with Hermione. However, I will let you in on the details as soon as I know what they are."

Snape smirked. "Then I shall take my leave so that you may work out the details when she wakes."

"Severus, have you had any word on Lucius' whereabouts? Now that the Dark Lord is gone, I don't know how much longer we can stay cooped up in hiding."

Snape shifted uncomfortably. Avoiding Draco's gaze, he answered, "No, I don't know where he is at the moment. I will find him, Draco. I can promise you that much. You just need to concern yourself with the situation you are currently in with Miss Granger. I will handle Lucius. Good day to you."

Snape left the room, and Draco turned back toward Hermione. Reflexively kissing Hermione's hand, he brushed some of her wild curls from her face. "I may not know how to love you the way you need to be loved, Hermione. But I believe I could learn if you were my teacher."

He had no idea that Hermione had been pretending to be asleep through his entire conversation with Professor Snape. She smiled inwardly and quickly fell into a deep sleep.

The sound of the hospital wing door opening pulled Hermione out of her sleep. Draco jumped quickly from his seat. Snape came through the door, followed by Ron, Ginny, Dumbledore, and a woman that Draco had never seen before. Behind them were Remus Lupin and Bill Weasley, carrying Harry on a stretcher. Madam Pomfrey, Mr. Weasley and Mrs. Weasley, holding the baby, brought up the rear.

"Thank you, gentlemen, you may place Mr. Potter on this cot here next to Miss Granger." Madam Pomfrey was in her element.

"I can walk, you know." Harry said irritably.

"No, you will not, Potter!" Professor McGonagall had just entered the room. Harry knew better than to argue with his former head of house, which Dumbledore found rather amusing.

When Harry was finally settled on the bed, he looked around him. His eyes settled on his aunt. With all the commotion, he had not yet had a chance to speak with her. He was completely gobsmacked when he found out that Ginny talked her into donating her blood to save him. He needed a chance to thank her.

"Er... I would really like to speak to my aunt alone, please, if we can please be excused. Well obviously not Hermione, and Ginny of course."

After everyone excused themselves, Harry regarded his aunt for a few moments, looking for the proper words. "Aunt Petunia," he finally started, "I don't really know why you did it, and I'm not sure I want to know how Ginny was able to get you to do it, but I really don't know how to thank you enough."

"You don't need to thank me, Harry. It's what was needed for you to live."

"I know that, Aunt Petunia. But, I never expected you would go to the extreme of coming into the Wizarding community." Seeing her standing in the hospital wing of his school was still so surreal to him.

Ginny put her hand on Harry's shoulder. "People change, Harry," said Ginny. She shared a furtive smile with Petunia, which did not go unnoticed by Harry.

Harry grinned, "Like I said, I don't think I want to know what Ginny did to convince you. But I'm glad she did it."

"Harry," Petunia said hesitantly. "There are a lot of things that I have done that I'm not proud of. I neglected my sister's only child because of my foolish jealousy. You were only an innocent child who was forced to take on the responsibility of grown men. I'm not going to pretend to understand the ways of your world, nor am I going to try to understand the full weight of what you had to do. But I know you suffered. I'll admit, ashamedly, that I've always known how much you have suffered."

"Harry, I know I have no right to ask you this, but I've become quite taken with your daughter. If you would allow me to, I would like to be a part of her life. And I would also like to start over with you and be a proper aunt." Petunia let her gaze go toward the ground.

Harry cleared his throat to speak, but the door to the infirmary opened before he could answer. Mrs. Weasley bustled in apologizing profusely. "I am so sorry. My precious granddaughter needs a diaper change, and I've left her bag. I'll be out of your hair in no time."

"Molly, can you come here for a moment?" Harry asked.

"Yes, Harry, dear. Do you need me to fetch Madam Pomfrey for you?"

"No, I'm alright. I just want you to meet someone. I don't think you've met my Aunt Petunia. She's my mum's sister," Harry said, hoping Mrs. Weasley would catch on.

Catching Harry's meaning, Mrs. Weasley stuck out her hand. "No, Harry, I don't believe I have. My name is Molly Weasley. I'm Harry's mother-in-law. It is a pleasure to finally make your acquaintance."

Petunia slowly shook Mrs. Weasley's hand. "It's a pleasure to meet you as well, Mrs. Weasley."

"Oh, pish posh, you will call me Molly. I want to thank you for bringing our Harry 'round. He is truly a remarkable young man."

"Aunt Petunia, Molly has been very kind to me. She's been my surrogate mother here in the Wizarding world."

"Well, Harry, it has been my pleasure. Now, Petunia, would you like to come with me to rescue that nameless child from Severus and Draco, so I can change her diaper? I daresay it's a lot of work being a grandmother. I hope you will be able to provide me with assistance in that department. A child needs to have a grandparent from both sides of her family after all."

Petunia beamed. "I would love to." Then, turning to Harry, she added, "I won't ever be able to replace Lily, Harry. But I will try very hard to make her proud."

Harry just smiled at her, and then something clicked in his brain that Mrs. Weasley had said. "Molly, why does Professor Snape have my daughter?"

"Oh, dear, Arthur, Remus and Bill went home to the Burrow. Albus and Minerva are at the Ministry, and Madam Pomfrey is in her rooms, unpacking her things. I told her to

get some rest and, if you needed her, we would call for her."

Petunia and Molly exited the room, and Ginny turned toward Harry. "That was very kind of you, Harry."

Harry shrugged. "She saved my life. I believe everyone deserves a second chance. If Uncle Vernon were still alive, I don't think he would have allowed it."

"Gin, I really think you should get some rest. Let your mum and Aunt Petunia watch over the baby. When you feel up to it, we can think of a perfect name for her."

"I am kind of tired, Harry. I think I'll take you up on your offer. If you need anything, you'll send for me right? I'm just going to kip on up to Gryffindor Tower and take a nap on the sofa in the common room. I'll just be a Floo call away."

"I'll be fine. You go ahead."

On Ginny's way out, she bumped into to Professor Snape on his way in. "Oh, excuse me, Professor."

"That's quite alright, Mrs. Potter. I was just on my way in to check on our patients."

"And I was just on my way out to get some rest. Where's Draco?"

"I had to force him to get some rest as well. He is currently in the Slytherin common room. I promised him I would sit with Miss Granger until he is refreshed."

"Okay. I think Harry's going to try to get some sleep as well. Hermione is already out like a light. I'll see you later."

Snape entered the room and walked over to Hermione's bed. He took Draco's vacated seat and withdrew a book from his robes. He read for a few moments, then said to the room at large, "Do you make a habit of pretending to sleep, Miss Granger?"

"H-how did you know?" Hermione asked, embarrassed.

"I'm old and wise," he replied.

"Professor, when am I going to get out of this ruddy place? I'm feeling loads better. I need fresh air." Hermione was absent-mindedly stroking her flat stomach.

"When you are safe, Miss Granger; now go back to sleep like a good girl."

Hermione had had enough. He was not going to ignore her wishes. He was not going to treat her like an insolent child. And he was bloody well going to start calling her by her name. She fished in her head for something to get him talking.

It was dangerous, she knew, but it was the only way to get his attention. Hermione took a deep breath and said, "Severus?"

Snape jerked his head up and Harry's eyes snapped opened. Snape looked incredulously at her. Hermione held her breath. When Snape planted the smirk to beat all smirks on his lips, Hermione grinned. Harry couldn't believe his eyes.

Without even turning to look at Harry, who was on the cot behind him, Snape said, "Close your mouth, Potter, you're creating a vacuum."

Harry couldn't help himself. He laughed. However, he was thunderstruck again by Snape's next statement. "Did you need something, *Hermione*?"

Hermione grinned even wider. Deciding to chance her luck, she asked him, "Are you ever going to tell us why you tried so hard to protect us? The war is over now, so you don't have to hide anymore."

Snape's smirked left his lips, and he sighed. Hermione thought she'd blown the moment until he said, "Yes, Hermione, I'll tell you."

Hermione laid her head back on her pillow, and Harry sat up so he could hear everything. Snape took a deep breath and began his tale.

"When I was a student at Hogwarts, I was not very popular. I was a Slytherin who was a little too interested in the Dark Arts. I usually kept to myself, so I didn't seek to make myself popular. I had a detention with Professor McGonagall in my sixth year. Minerva was called away to deal with some trouble in the Gryffindor common room and sent one of her prize pupils to keep me company."

"The said student sat down at the desk opposite me and began work on a Potions essay. I have always been rather adept at potions, and I knew her to be one of Slughorn's favorite students. She asked me something about the essay she was working on, and we struck up a conversation."

"She was a Gryffindor Muggle-born, who was very popular, and I was a Slytherin nobody. She was very kind to me, and we became friends. We would sometimes sit with one another in the library. We'd even gotten a butterbeer together at the Three Broomsticks."

"It wasn't long before term ended, and we went home for the summer holiday. We owed one another a couple of times, but my family life became worse by the day. Then Lucius Malfoy started coming 'round my house, and he and I struck up a friendship. He said he'd heard about my Potions making ability and my flare for the Dark Arts. He told me he knew a way for me to use my talents. I was... interested."

"My Gryffindor friend sent me another owl while Lucius was paying a visit. He intercepted it and told me that it was dangerous for me to be involved with the girl. He made it clear that it was even more dangerous for her. I understood his meaning and didn't respond to her."

"When we returned to school, I distanced myself from her and even called her a Mudblood enough times to make her hate me, which was my plan. I wanted to protect her from my new, *friends*. Soon I became so involved with the Dark Lord, her safety was even more at risk."

"Voldemort killed her a few years later. I had given him information which led to her death. I didn't know it was her at the time. When I realized it, it was already too late. I couldn't protect her. That's when I went to Dumbledore and turned spy for the Order. As I confessed my sins to Dumbledore, I told him that I wished to make an Unbreakable Vow to her. I knew it wasn't possible to make a true Vow, due to the fact she was deceased, but with his help, I was able to make it with a few adjustments. I vowed to her that I would avenge her death. I vowed that I would fight for the side of the light. I vowed that I would always protect her memory. And I vowed that I would never let any harm come to her son."

"Miss Granger, you reminded me so much of her. She was quite the know-it-all herself. She was wickedly intelligent, and she was braver than most men. She, too, was the brightest witch of her age. In my eyes, you were sent by her. She gave me a chance to fulfill my promise by promising to protect her memory by protecting you. By protecting you, I was protecting her. I felt it was her way of forgiving me."

When Snape didn't say another word, Hermione realized he had finished his story. She cleared her throat and wiped away her tears. "What became of the boy her son?"

Before Snape could answer her, Harry said, "He's lying in the cot right next to you."

Hermione's eyes widened. "Is it true? Was your friend Lily Potter?"

Snape shook his head. "Not when I knew her. Her name was Lily Evans back then."

A moment later, Draco walked in. He looked suspiciously at the others, knowing he'd walked in on something private. Snape stood to leave. When he reached the door,

Hermione asked, "Did you love her?"

Snape turned around to look at her. "Yes. I loved her in same way that you love Harry. However, my heart has always and will always belong to only one woman." With a penetrating glance toward Draco, Snape excused himself.

Hermione noted Harry's surprised expression. "What's the matter, Harry?"

"Do you know that is the first time the Professor has ever said my first name without looking as if he'd just found dung in his kippers."

The silence was broken by the laughter of Draco and Hermione, who were soon joined by Harry.

A/N: There is a poem called, "All I ever Needed to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten by Robert Fulghum." This is where I came up with the name of the book Hermione gave to Harry.

The Joy of the Father

Chapter 13 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: As always, I want to thank RobisonRocket for being the best beta EVER. I also want to thank my very loyal reviewers. I can't seem to write fast enough for you guys. But I love it. I hope you enjoy this chapter.

The Joy of the Father

Chapter 13

Harry had been released by Madam Pomfrey and given a clean bill of health. He was in the process of tying his shoelaces when his wife, carrying their daughter, made her way into the room. "I hear you're a free man," Ginny said, handing the baby to Harry. Harry pressed his fingers to his mouth and gestured to a sleeping Hermione.

Harry held the baby close to him, taking in her scent. "She's so beautiful, Gin. You know, you were right about the final battle. All I could think about was her and you. You guys pulled me through."

"We are so happy to have you home, Harry. But we have a very pressing issue to deal with now that you are up and about. Our daughter still doesn't have a name."

"Ah, you're right. We need to think of something that's just perfect for her. If it were up to me, I'd call her 'Daddy's Girl,' but I guess that's not really a name."

"No, you can't really get away with calling her that. We've already agreed on Lily for her middle name. So let's think for a moment."

Silence.

This seemed to be much harder than they thought it would be. Finally, the silence was broken by Hermione. "Will you two just name the poor child already?"

Ginny and Harry grinned. "Sorry, Hermione," said Harry. "We didn't mean to wake you up."

"You didn't wake me, Harry. I've been awake for a while. But, really, my poor goddaughter has gone over a month without a name. Quit putting her off and name her."

Ginny looked quizzically at Hermione. "Do you have any suggestions? You're her godmother after all; you can have some input."

Hermione thought for moment, and then a light hit her face, which Harry recognized as *I got it!* Harry smiled. "Alright, Hermione, I've seen that look before. What have you come up with?"

"Abigail."

Ginny grinned. "Abigail. I like it. Do you know someone with that name?"

"I know," Harry interjected. "What heroine from *Hogwarts: A History* was named Abigail?"

"Ha, ha, ha, you are so funny. Actually, the name has a specific meaning. I only know this because..." Hermione blushed, "I've been looking at baby naming books."

Ginny beamed. "Hermione, are you saying that you are having a girl?"

"I don't know yet, but I've got to keep myself occupied. Anyway, the name means something like 'joy of the father.' And she, apart from Ginny, is your greatest joy, Harry. So why not call her Abigail?" A flash of sadness crossed Hermione's face. "It's not like I'll be able to use it."

Harry felt his heart in his throat. "Hermione, you are a genius." Hermione flushed, but smiled shyly at the compliment.

Harry was suddenly struck with an idea. He whispered something in Ginny's ear that made her nod in acceptance. Smiling at Hermione, he said, "Hermione, I'd like for you to meet Abigail Lily-Jane Potter."

Harry's happiness wilted quite a bit when Hermione burst into tears. Ginny promptly started to shed a few tears and ran around the bed to share an embrace with her friend. Harry was bewildered. "Er... Hermione, we can call her something else if you'd like? I didn't mean to upset you."

Hermione waved off Harry's apology. "No, Harry. I think it's beautiful. It just caught me off guard. I'm very proud to have my middle name attached to... to... your mum's. It's a great honor. And to give it to such a beautiful baby is the icing on the cake. I don't know what to say, Harry. Thank you so much for thinking that I deserve such praise."

Harry blushed. "It's nothing... really. You're one of my best mates, Hermione. You've always been there for me and Ron. You deserve much more than that. Besides, you

heard what Snape said. You remind him of my mother, so why not extend her name just a bit and give it to her granddaughter."

Suddenly there was a knock on the door, and Madam Pomfrey entered the room. "Well, Potter, you are free to leave. Off you go. Severus is in his office, needing to speak with you for a moment."

Harry was surprised by this, but stood and handed the baby back to Ginny. "Do you want to wait here for me, or are you going home?"

"I'll stay here with Hermione. Come get me later, and we'll go home together. When I get you there, however, I'm going to snog you properly."

Harry wagged his eyebrows. "Can't wait."

Harry knocked on the door leading to Snape's office. He waited until he heard, "Enter," then walked cautiously into the room. "You wanted to see me, sir?"

"Yes, sit down. I want to show you something."

Harry sat in the chair indicated and waited. Snape opened his drawer and withdrew a roll of parchment. Handing it to Harry, he said, "I think you will find this worthy of your attention."

Harry unrolled the parchment. It was a letter addressed to both him and Snape. Harry met Snape's gaze for a moment, then read.

To Severus Snape and Harry Potter,

I have the body of the traitor. You will be able to find me at the Manor. I don't intend to run.

Sincerely,

Lucius Malfoy

Harry looked up at Snape. "Who on earth could he be talking about? We got all the Death Eaters."

Snape rubbed his eyes. Harry could not recall ever seeing Snape look so exhausted. In that moment, Harry was hit with the realization of all this man had done. He gave up a life of happiness and love so he could spy for the Order. Harry realized that this man not Snape, but Severus was not the enemy that Harry always thought him to be. No matter what kind of interaction they had, Severus' number one priority had always been the Order.

Severus, Harry now thought of him, was his mum's friend. He was cruel to her in order to save her life. Even though she eventually was killed, it was Severus who preserved her life so that she could marry Harry's father and give birth to him. Harry swallowed his pride and spoke with the most courage he could summon. "Severus?"

Severus was jerked out of his thoughts by the sound of his name on Harry Potter's lips. He stared at Harry, who was noticeably flustered, and waited a beat. He enjoyed watching the emotions play out on Harry's features and, feeling satisfied with the bit of fear he could still invoke on the boy, he grinned.

Feeling much more confident, Harry grinned back. "Well, I guess it's time I let you call me by my given name, Harry. You are an adult now, and no longer my student. I'll have to get used to it, however difficult it is to have James Potter's look-alike on my side for a change."

Harry gave Severus a solemn look, which Severus didn't misunderstand. "Harry, I'm fully aware that you are not him. I've been aware of it for a long time. I would see him in you until I saw your eyes. That's when I saw her. It's been... hard all these years. I reckon that's one of the reasons I've had so much animosity toward you for so many years. I look at you, and I see her accusations, and I see the mess I've made of my life."

Remembering what Ginny had said about Aunt Petunia, Harry said, "My eyes seem to have that effect on people. But, it's not your fault. The things you did when you were a child are in the past. The things my father did, and the things Sirius did, are all in the past. The things I thought you did, and the reasons I hated you, are all in the past. I want to start anew."

Severus stood and motioned for Harry to follow him. They adjourned to a room behind a bookshelf, which Harry could see right away was Severus' private office. Once inside, Severus sat down in a large leather chair. Harry took the one opposite him. Harry waited for Snape to make the first move, still a little intimidated by his newfound admiration for the greasy-haired bat of the dungeons.

Snape summoned two glasses and a bottle of Firewhiskey. Pouring a generous amount in both glasses, he handed one to Harry and sat back in his chair. He took a sip of the amber liquid and gave a contented sigh. "I want to say something to you, Harry. I wish to apologize for the hell I've put you through all the time I've known you. Lily was a wonderful woman. Though I didn't have romantic feelings for her, I was most displeased when she took up with James. I felt like she was making the biggest mistake of her life. Unfortunately, by that time, I was no longer in her good graces, so I couldn't convey my feelings on the subject."

"What I'm trying to say is that I let a playground hatred take over when I shouldn't have. It is not your fault that you had to bear a grown man's cross. You were only a child, and your entire world was ripped from you. When I saw you, I blamed you for James marrying Lily, which eventually led to her demise. I was a fool."

Harry didn't know what to say, so he decided to deal with the matter at hand. "So, what do you think we should do about Lucius? Should we go to the Manor?"

Severus took another sip of his Firewhiskey and nodded. "Yes, I think we should. However, I don't think we will need reinforcement." Snape waited for Harry's response and raised an eyebrow when Harry nodded in agreement.

"I think you're right. For some reason I don't think he's a threat. When would you like to go?"

"I believe we should go straight away. Is there anything you need to square away? Have you named your child yet?"

Harry couldn't hide his grin. "Yes, sir, we've decided to call her Abigail Lily-Jane Potter."

"Well, that's a fitting name. However, I'm surprised you didn't give her the first name Lily. Surely she's deserving of the moniker."

"Yes, of course she's deserving of my mother's name. However, we thought it best to give her something of her own. My daughter will go down in history as it is. The daughter of The Boy-Who-Lived, and the granddaughter of the woman who sacrificed herself; she needed to be her own person."

Snape nodded slowly in understanding. "And Jane, where did that come from?"

"Hermione's middle name. She is the one who came up with Abigail, so Ginny and I decided it was the right thing to do."

"Well, then, shall we go?"

"I need to go to the hospital wing, first. Ginny's waiting for me."

"I'll meet you outside the gates. We can Apparate."

"Won't Mr. Malfoy have wards up to block us?"

"He's expecting us. He will have taken them down."

Harry left Severus' office and rushed down up to the hospital wing. He found Ginny, Hermione, and now Draco cooing over Abigail.

"Hey, love. Are you ready to go?" Ginny made to stand.

Harry smiled wistfully at her. "Actually, Gin, something's come up. I'll meet you back at the house." He rubbed Ginny's cheek and planted a kiss on her lips.

Ginny frowned. "Is everything alright, Harry?"

"I think everything will be fine. Don't worry." He looked at Draco and Hermione hesitantly and added, "We're going after Lucius."

Draco and Hermione exchanged worried glances. Harry started to leave when Hermione stopped him. "Harry, I need you to do something for me."

Harry waited for her to continue. "Harry, I want my memories back."

Horried, Harry shook his head. "Why would you want to remember the things he did to you? I think it would be best for you not to remember."

Hermione huffed in anger. "I'm not a child, Harry. I want those memories back. Please, if you can get them back I need those memories."

"Why, Hermione? Why do you *need* them?"

Hermione looked at her hands and answered, "Because they're mine. Harry, you know what he did. He RAPED my body, Harry! I'm not going to let him rape my mind. I want my memories."

Hermione was mere inches from Harry with her fists clenched in fury. Harry hung his head. "Alright, Hermione, I'll try to get your memories back." Harry turned on his heel and left the room. Hermione turned, where she found Draco right behind her. She grabbed onto him, seeking comfort, which he gladly gave.

When Harry finally made it to the gate, he stood in front of Severus and pulled out his wand.

Severus looked pointedly at Harry. "Are you ready for this?"

"Yes, sir, I am ready."

With a pop, they Disapparated.

They landed on the doorstep of Malfoy Manor. Severus took a deep breath and rang the doorbell. When there was no answer, Severus frowned. "I was at least expecting a house-elf."

Harry grabbed the knocker and banged on the door, which opened upon impact. They both drew their wands in front of them and walked in. The house looked empty, but they proceeded with caution anyway.

"Let's go to the library. Lucius would usually take care of his business dealings in the library."

When they entered the seemingly empty library, they looked around for any sign of Lucius. Finally, they heard a voice. "I knew you would find me here."

Lucius spun around in the large armchair behind his desk. Harry and Severus raised their wands.

"Are you going to hex me, gentlemen?" Lucius asked as he opened his arms, indicating that he was unarmed. "I have no intention of trying to harm either of you." At Severus' nod, Harry lowered his wand, but did not pocket it.

"Lucius, we know what you did during the battle. However, you have yet to answer for what you did to your son and Miss Granger."

Lucius seemed not to hear him. "I have something for you to give to my son, Severus." Lucius indicated a Pensieve. "I would like for Draco to have it." Lucius withdrew two phials from the inside pocket of his robes. "These phials are marked with Draco's and Miss Granger's names. They each contain memories that I took."

Realizing that Lucius didn't want to talk about the assault, Severus tried a different approach. "Who is this traitor that you say you have?"

Those words brought a smile to Lucius' face. "He is dead, Severus. He has been dead for a while now."

Lucius reached into his drawer and withdrew his wand. Severus and Harry raised theirs. "I told you, I would not harm you, and I meant it. This wand is to bring forth the traitor."

Severus and Harry looked feverishly around them, looking for a dead body to float in at any moment. Severus narrowed his eyes at Lucius. "Did this man betray the Dark Lord, Lucius?"

"No, Severus. This man never betrayed his Lord. He committed a much worse sin than that. This man betrayed his son, his greatest joy."

Harry felt a pang at those words, bringing Abigail to the forefront of his mind.

Lucius raised his wand to his heart and whispered, "*Avada...*"

Harry and Severus both yelled, "NO!"

Lucius closed his eyes and ended the incantation, thus ending his own life.

"*Kedavra.*" Lucius slumped over his desk. He was gone.

A/N: Don't worry, you haven't seen the last of Lucius. The events of this chapter will really affect chapters to come.

Memories on Hold

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: I'm terribly sorry that I haven't updated in a few days. I will try so hard to have chapter 15 up very soon. I cannot find the correct words to thank RobisonRocket for her betaing skills. I will try to become more creative.

Memories on Hold

Chapter 14

The sun broke through the window of the library of the Malfoy Manor. Harry had mixed emotions where Lucius Malfoy was concerned. On one hand, Lucius had been a murderous Death Eater. There was no telling what kind of crimes this man had committed that Harry *didn't* know about. He had been in Voldemort's circle since his own childhood. He was the man who threatened the life of Harry's mother, albeit through Severus. In many ways, Lucius Malfoy helped change the course of Harry's life.

Lucius was the man who had given the diary to Ginny when she was just a small girl. Ginny had almost died in the Chamber of Secrets. She could have caused the deaths of others because of that diary.

Lucius had raped his best friend and left her for dead. She now carried his child. Would that child become as vile as Lucius Malfoy? Draco wasn't. At least Lucius wouldn't be around to shape Hermione's baby into what he was. *Not that I would let him*, thought Harry.

On the other hand, if it weren't for Lucius, Harry would surely have perished in the final battle with Lord Voldemort. What had happened? Harry stood staring at the body of Lucius as if he'd find certain answers. There seemed to be so much more to the dead man, but one thing Harry could be sure of was that in the end, Lucius did save him.

Harry's silent reverie was broken by the sound of his newfound comrade clearing his throat. Harry realized that Severus must have just come out of his own memories as well.

"I guess we need to call someone from the Ministry. Someone will need to contact Mrs. Malfoy so that she can make funeral arrangements and such," Harry said mechanically.

Severus gave him a stern look. "What are you talking about?"

Harry shrugged. "I remember when Uncle Vernon died, my aunt had to contact all his family." Receiving a strange look from his former professor, he added, "Mrs. Figg told me. I didn't even know he'd died until Mrs. Figg told me." Harry remembered how sad he had felt upon hearing the news of his hated uncle. He wasn't sad for the man who'd made his life miserable. His heart had broken for his aunt. She had been no better, but she was his family his blood. Regardless of the way he was treated, he had been kept safe. It was a sacrifice on her part as much as it was his mother's. Harry knew that now.

"Well, I think we definitely need to contact the Ministry. I will ask Draco to contact Narcissa." Severus gave a slight smirk. "They are free now. With Lucius gone, Draco and Hermione are free."

Harry looked hard at Severus. "Yes, they are. Just like you."

Severus regarded him and repeated, "Just like me."

A moment later, Harry was on the terrace sending his Patronus up for the Ministry while Severus was conjuring a blanket to put over Lucius' body. After stepping back into the library, he noticed Severus' hesitation to cover Lucius up. Finally, with a deep sigh, Severus whispered, "Goodbye, old friend. I hope you find peace." Severus used his fingers to close Lucius' eyes and then covered him with the blanket.

Harry couldn't help but feel bad for the man. It was a side he'd never seen of Severus and hoped he would never have to see again. Harry rather preferred the grouchy Snape over the sensitive Severus, for the sensitive one was rather scary and unpredictable.

Severus stood and grabbed the Pensieve and the two phials. He handed the phials to Harry, which Harry stowed in the pocket of his robes. Severus said, pointedly, "You need to take this with you to Hogwarts. I will wait here for Ministry officials. I don't want them to see what is in this Pensieve. I'm afraid there wouldn't be anything left for Draco if they plundered through it. No matter what Lucius Malfoy was, he was Draco's father. Take this to him, Harry. He deserves to know. You will also have to tell him that his father is gone."

Harry nodded and took the Pensieve. "And, Harry, tell them you have the phials that hold their memories. However, suggest that they shouldn't see them until the baby is born. I'm afraid that whatever secret is in those memories could destroy them. The baby is already at risk with Hermione's recent health issues."

Harry nodded and started toward the door. When he reached the handle, he turned back to Severus. Harry noticed that Severus was staring at the body of Lucius as if to make sure it didn't disappear. Harry felt the urge to say something. "Sir, I-I'm sorry for your loss. I know that he was your friend." Severus didn't turn, but said, "The man that was my friend died a long time ago. I have already mourned his passing, but I appreciate your words nonetheless."

"Yes, sir," Harry said, and then he left.

When Harry reached the castle, he was in a quandary. He had no idea how to break the news to Draco that his father had killed himself. He also had no idea how he was going to tell them he had their memories, but couldn't give it to them until the baby was born. Hermione was quite the force to be reckoned with.

Harry took a deep breath and opened the door to the infirmary. Hermione was sitting up in her bed with Draco sitting on the edge. She was telling him a story that was obviously very funny to Draco. When Harry got closer, he heard Draco say, "You turned into a cat? Oh... that's funny." They were both laughing so hard, they didn't even notice Harry come into the room. Harry swallowed hard. He really hated to break up such happiness with the news he had to give. Harry plastered a grin on his face and moved on. "I don't think I've ever heard Hermione laugh at herself before, good show."

"Hi, Harry," Hermione said through giggles. "I was telling Draco about our experience with the Polyjuice Potion." Harry bent down and kissed Hermione on the forehead. "You must be running fever or something, Hermione. You shouldn't be telling him those stories." Then in a mock whisper, Harry added, "He's the enemy."

Hermione grinned. Harry felt another pang. "Well, you look like you're feeling much better, anyway."

"Yeah," Draco said. "Madam Pomfrey said she could leave after lunch. I promised her I'd teach her how to play chess so she can beat Ron."

"Good on you, mate. Ron needs some decent competition."

Hermione laughed along with Harry and Draco at that remark, and then her giddiness subsided. "Harry, what's wrong?"

Harry looked at her, smiling weakly. "What do you mean, Hermione?"

"Harry Potter, you've been one of my best friends since we were in Hogwarts' nappies. You can not tell me that there's nothing wrong. I know your eyes, Harry, like I know my own. When you're really happy, you get a little crinkle in the corner, and right now you don't have a crinkle. Come on, spill."

Harry took a deep breath. "Gods, Hermione, you don't even need Legilimency."

"It has something to do with Lucius, doesn't it? You were going after him. Did you find him?"

"Yes, I did. I don't know how to say this, but Lucius is gone."

Draco frowned. "What do you mean? Where did he go?"

"No, I mean gone as in... Draco, I'm sorry, mate, but your father is dead. He took his own life right in front of us. We couldn't stop him. However, before he died, he wanted me to give you something. It's his Pensieve. It's currently in Professor Dumbledore's office for you to view whenever you're ready, mate."

Draco just stared at Harry as if he didn't even hear him. "I don't want that Pensieve. Whatever he had to say to me, he could have said it while he was still alive."

Harry sighed. "Listen, Draco, I know you don't want to hear it now, but someday you might regret it if you don't. I would give anything to have a Pensieve with my dad's last words."

"But your dad wasn't cruel like mine, Harry. From what everyone says, he was a good man that sacrificed himself so you and your mum could make it to safety. My father never would have done that. He only sacrificed himself so he wouldn't have to go to prison. He was a coward. And look at what he's done to me and Hermione."

Harry thought for a moment and then shrugged. "My dad wasn't good to everyone. Just ask your godfather. My dad and his friends did some pretty nasty things to him."

"Yeah," said Draco. "But your dad just did the same things to Severus that I did to you and your friends while we were in school. That was just rivalry. I know all about it. Just leave it, Harry. I don't want to look at it."

"Okay, I'll leave it. But, you know, if you're looking for answers, you might find them in that Pensieve. They may not be the answers you want to hear, but it would be something."

Draco looked at Harry angrily. "Why are you pushing this, Potter?"

"Because, *Malfoy*, I think the man deserves to be heard. We haven't told anyone this, but it was your dad that helped us kill Voldemort. He said something to the respect of Voldemort turning him into a monster, and then he turned on him. Just think about it, okay. He's dead now, Draco. He can't hurt either of you ever again."

Slowly, Draco nodded his head at this revelation. Hermione grabbed his hand. "Harry's right, Draco; you should at least think about it. Regardless of what he did, he was still your father." He looked down, sadly, at their grasped hands.

"I'm sorry about your father, Draco," Hermione said, noticing his sadness.

Draco realized that Hermione had mistaken his emotions regarding the news of his father's death. "Hermione, he stopped being my father the day he raped you. What I'm more concerned about is the fact that he can't undo the bond. I'm sorry, love, but you're stuck with me."

Hermione felt a swell of emotion at Draco's endearment. Without taking her eyes off of Draco, she said, "Harry, can you give us a few moments?"

Harry smiled. "I have to go anyway. I have some catching up to do with a couple of gorgeous witches. By the way, do either of you know where my aunt went? I wanted to tell her goodbye before she goes home."

"I believe she went to your house with your mother. She wanted to get in some Abigail time before she left," Hermione said.

"Oh, I almost forgot; wait until you see who the new Ancient Runes teacher is. I'll have Ron bring her down here; you're going to love it."

Seeing Hermione's confusion, Harry answered the unasked question. "Professor Vector retired."

"Oh, that's right; I forgot," Hermione said.

"Well, I'll see you later, yeah?"

"Sure, Harry. Wait, Harry, did you have any luck with getting our memories from Lucius?"

Harry looked sadly into Hermione's eyes. "I've got them, Hermione. However, Professor Snape asked me not to give them to you until after your baby is born. He's afraid that you'll cause more damage to yourself, which in turn could cause damage to the baby. I'm sorry, Hermione, but I agree with him. We're just afraid of what you will see."

Hermione sighed. "I understand, Harry. I can wait. Go and enjoy your family; you deserve it."

After Harry left, silence once again filled the room. Hermione was chewing on her bottom lip and finally said, "Draco, do you still want to make it official? Do you still want to marry me?"

Draco looked at her in surprise. "Yeah, I mean, only if you want to."

Hermione sighed and stood. She walked over to the window and looked out onto the grounds. "When I was a little girl, I used to dream of what my wedding would be like. It would either be in a church filled with my family, or it would be in the garden of my parents' back yard. I would do it in the spring when the flowers are in full bloom. I dreamed I would fall in love, and my prince would carry me off into the sunset where we would live happily ever after." Hermione finished with a bitter laugh.

"Of course, that was all before I knew I was a witch. Never in all my fantasies was I forced into a bond by a Death Eater father of my bond mate, and then he impregnate me."

Draco looked at his hands sadly. "I'm sorry, Hermione. I know this isn't easy for you. I'm sure we can work something out. Maybe you can marry someone you love in a Muggle ceremony."

Hermione walked toward Draco and laid a hand on his shoulder. "You haven't let me finish." She knelt down so that she was eye level with him. He looked into her russet eyes and waited for her to continue.

"Draco, all of my childhood fantasies were just that, only fantasies. This is reality. I honestly believe I could be happy with you, regardless of the circumstances. If I let this curse take over my life, then Lucius will continue to torture me from the grave. I will not let that happen. We don't have a choice with our bond. But we do have a choice in what we do with it." She cupped his cheek and said, "Draco, I think you are a wonderful man. The changes you've made in your life were not easy. I would be proud to be your wife."

Draco smiled and pulled Hermione into a hug. "Hermione, I will do everything I can to make you happy. I will raise this baby as if it were my own. After all, he or she is my family. You don't have to change your name if you don't want. I will understand if you don't want to be a Malfoy." Draco pulled back from her and looked into her teary eyes. "But, Hermione, if you do take my name, I promise I will make you proud to have it. It was strong and good at one time. I will do everything I can to put the Malfoy name back to where it used to be."

When Draco ceased his babbling, Hermione chuckled and said, "Draco, I will take your name. Not because it belonged to Lucius, but because it belongs to you."

Before Draco could respond, the door to the hospital wing opened, and a familiar voice said, "There you are, Dra..."

Draco looked up from Hermione to see Pansy Parkinson standing with her hand on her mouth and eyes wide in surprise.

Draco smirked at Hermione. "Hello, Pansy, have you met my fiancée?"

Pansy fell backwards in a dead faint. Luckily Ron was behind her and caught her before she hit the ground.

He looked at the other two and said, "That went well."

Slytherins!

Chapter 15 of 27

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Slytherins!!

Chapter 15

Once Pansy came around, she was sitting up in the hospital bed, still stunned speechless. Draco sat next to her, rubbing her back, calming her. He looked at Hermione, who was wearing a look of disdain. Draco gave her a guilty smile.

He walked over to Hermione's bed and sat down on the edge. Taking her hand, he whispered, "I know you won't understand this, but I really need to talk to Pansy. She deserves an explanation."

Hermione wrinkled her forehead. "Why does she need an explanation? We don't owe her anything."

"We don't owe her one, but *I* do. Hermione, Pansy and I have a past with one another. If you consider your friendships with Harry and Ron, you might understand better."

"But my relationship with Ron and Harry has always been strictly *afriendship*." At those words, they both looked at Ron. Hermione blushed. "Okay, so Ron and I have danced around something more, but it's still different."

"Hermione, do you feel strong enough to walk?" Ron asked. "Maybe we could go down to the kitchens and give them a chance to talk. Draco's right; Pansy deserves an explanation. On the way there, perhaps you can explain why he called you his 'fiancé.'"

Hermione looked hesitantly at Pansy, who still seemed to be in shock. Reluctantly, she swung her legs off of the bed and stood. Draco grabbed her dressing gown and helped her put it on over her head. He rubbed her cheek for reassurance and then moved aside for Ron to take her hand.

Hermione leaned against Ron for support as they walked toward the door to the hospital wing. Before they reached the door, Hermione paused and turned back to see Draco talking softly to Pansy. When she saw Draco rub Pansy's cheek in the same manner that he rubbed her cheek, Hermione pursed her lips and kept walking.

Ron put his arm around Hermione as they walked slowly toward the kitchens. "Hermione, what's going on? Why did Draco call you his fiancé?"

"Because, Ronald, we are going to make it official." Hermione sighed. "We decided that we might as well since there's really no way around the bond. Lucius is dead now, so we can't even force him to remove the blasted curse."

Once they reached the kitchens, Ron sat Hermione down. Taking both of her hands in his, Ron spoke quietly. "Hermione, you talk about the bond as if it's the worst thing that could have ever happened to you. However, I practically had to drag you away because you didn't seem to want to leave him alone with Pansy. That seems like the action of a very jealous girlfriend. What gives, Hermione?"

"I don't know, Ron. To be honest with you, I have never given much thought to the whole situation. He's just different somehow. Yes, the bond is horrible. I don't like being forced to do anything against my will." Hermione rubbed her stomach and continued. "I will never know what would have happened, if anything, if Draco and I were left to our own devices. We might have ended up dating one another, or we might have gone our separate ways after the war."

Ron dropped his eyes. "You and I might have ended up together."

Hermione took Ron's hand. "You know it never would have worked. We could have ended up hating one another, and, Ron, look at me. I could never risk losing what we have. You and Harry mean everything to me. We're the 'Golden Trio,' remember? No matter what has happened, or what will happen, I couldn't survive without you two. Ron, you and Harry are the air I breathe. Nothing will ever change that."

Ron couldn't speak. He grabbed Hermione in a tight embrace and held her for several heartbeats. When he pulled away, Hermione could tell that his eyes were watery. He just smiled at her and then started loading two plates with treacle tart.

He regarded his friend for a moment and asked, "Hermione, do you love him?"

Hermione seemed to stew on her answer for a moment. She finally replied, "I'm not sure. Like I said, he's changed a lot since this whole mess started. I don't know if I know him well enough to say that I love him, but I find myself thinking about him quite often." Hermione flushed crimson, which was not lost on Ron.

He grinned at her and asked, "What are you thinking about that has you blushing?"

"Gods, Ron, when did you become so observant? Okay, when Draco and I were staying with Ginny, we... er... slept together. Well, we actually slept. We didn't do anything else, but it was nice. I got accustomed to having him there. Ron, I really think I could be happy with Draco. Yes, I realize that our relationship is rather unorthodox, but I'm determined to make it work."

"Okay, Hermione. Well, Draco should have had plenty of time to explain things to Parkinson, so I say we head back down. You're looking a little tired, anyway. Come on, I'll walk you back to the hospital wing, but then I have to go. I promised Harry that I'd take his aunt back to her house. I think Harry and my sister are... er... busy catching up

on lost time." Ron wrinkled his face in disgust.

Hermione laughed. "It's alright, Ron. I can make it back without assistance. You can go on."

Ron looked hesitant, but kissed her forehead and hugged her tightly again. With his face buried in her curly hair, Ron whispered so low, Hermione almost didn't hear him. "For what it's worth, Hermione, you're the air I breathe as well."

Hermione let a tear slide down her cheek and pulled away from him. "I love you, Ron."

"And I love you, Hermione. I don't care if Draco and I have formed a new friendship, if he ever hurts you, I'll kill him." The seriousness in Ron's expression was frightening, but Hermione understood. She squeezed his hand and walked toward the hospital wing.

Draco told Pansy everything, leaving out the part of Hermione getting raped. He knew Pansy would find out about the pregnancy once Hermione started to show, but there was no reason for Pansy to know that the baby was his sibling rather than his own child.

"Draco, there has to be a way to get rid of this bond. I don't know much about it, but I've heard of it. It can't just end with the death of the caster."

Draco stood from the bed, exasperated and tired. He had been going round and round with Pansy, and he just wanted her to leave so he could get some sleep. Once Hermione returned, and Pansy left, he could curl up on the cot with her and take a nap. He smiled at the thought.

He had to find a way to placate Pansy so she would leave. He really wanted to get rid of her before Hermione got back. The jealous look on the latter's face made him feel smug. Pansy was still ranting about the bond, and Draco had to shut her up. "Look, Pansy, there's nothing to be done. I've already told you."

"But, Draco, you were supposed to marry me."

Draco frowned, and then it hit him. "The arrangement Oh, Merlin, Pansy, I forgot. Surely you don't think that still stands. There's nothing to be done now."

Hermione had finally reached the door to the hospital wing, which was left cracked open. She couldn't see inside, but she could hear their voices. Hermione knew she shouldn't be eavesdropping, but she just couldn't help herself.

"So, you can't marry me because you're stuck with... with...her?"

Draco could feel the anger rising, but he was too tired to argue with her, so he just nodded. "Pansy, I'm sorry. You and I cannot be married. I can't marry anyone *but* her, so I am going to marry her. Look, you mean a lot to me, Pansy, but there's nothing that can be done about it. Could you just *try* to be happy for me?"

After a long pause, Pansy sighed. "Alright, Draco, but I'm not giving up. When's the big day?"

"We haven't even gotten around to discussing the date."

"Good, I'm going to find away to get you out of this, Draco Malfoy. When I do, you'll be mine again."

Draco hung his head in defeat. He made a mental note to marry Hermione as soon as possible, but to Pansy he said, "Whatever you say, Pansy."

Feeling satisfied, Pansy stood from the bed and kissed Draco on the cheek. "I have to go now, love, but I'll see you later."

Draco just nodded his goodbye and collapsed on the bed.

Hermione was pale. *He's just marrying me because he can't marry anyone else. Of course he is, Hermione, you silly girl.* Hermione hid behind a pillar and watched Pansy leave. Hermione couldn't help but noticed an extra bounce in Pansy's step.

Hermione stayed in her hiding place long enough to make sure Pansy was gone. She pulled herself up and realized she was panting as if she'd just been chased by a Hippogriff. *Oh, Merlin, what am I going to do? Draco doesn't really want to marry me. He's probably just doing it out of pity. Well, I'm not going to give him the chance. I don't care if I live the rest of my life alone. Alone is better than being in a loveless marriage of convenience. I won't be anybody's fool, not even yours, Draco Malfoy. I thought you'd changed. I'm such an idiot. I've got to get out of here.*

Hermione's mind was screaming at her to do something. Hermione put on her best smile and walked into the room. She saw Draco curled up on the mattress. He looked so inviting, and sure enough, when he saw her, he spread his arms for her to join him.

Hermione gritted her teeth and walked over to the bed. She lay down next to him, facing the opposite way so that he couldn't see her face. She prayed that her voice wouldn't betray her heartache. "Draco, I'm really tired, but I have a massive headache. Do you think you could find Madam Pomfrey? I think I might have overdone it." Hermione's voice cracked, but Draco understood it to be due to her headache.

He was nice and warm, enjoying this little bit of snuggling that, in his opinion, was long overdue. However, he knew Hermione had been through a lot, so he rolled out of bed. "I'll be right back. Don't go anywhere. We need to discuss the date of our wedding, and I have some other stuff I want to tell you about my conversation with Pansy."

Hermione smiled shyly and nodded.

Draco left the room in pursuit of Madam Pomfrey. As soon as he was gone, Hermione jumped out of bed. She was still pretty weak, but her adrenaline gave her the strength she needed to move.

Hermione quietly made her way through the corridors until she reached the library. Once inside, she made her way to the fireplace. With one last look at her beloved sanctuary, Hermione stumbled into the grate and Flooed to her flat.

Ignoring her weakness, Hermione rushed to change her clothes, then threw some clothes into a suitcase. She grabbed a few toiletries, then Flooed to the Leaky Cauldron. Once she got her bearings, she ran out the door without a backwards glance. She headed straight for Ollivander's, where she would purchase a new wand.

As soon as Hermione stepped out of Ollivander's, she looked left to right. New wand in hand, she prepared to Disapparate. Suddenly a hand was put on her shoulder to stop her. Hermione gasped and turned to find Severus Snape looking down his nose at her. All the emotions that she had been holding finally spilled. Along with those emotions, her adrenaline finally ceased to exist. Hermione collapsed into Severus' arms and sobbed.

Severus awkwardly patted her on the back, looking around to make sure nobody was paying attention. "What are you doing? Why are you not at Hogwarts?"

"Oh, Severus, I "

Hermione never finished her sentence. Severus gathered Hermione's unconscious body up before she hit the sidewalk. Holding her tightly, he Apparated to the doors of St. Mungo's.

Draco was pacing back and forth, waiting for Dumbledore to come down. The stone gargoyles refused him entrance to Dumbledore's office.

"Can't you just let him know I'm here?" Draco was on the verge of begging when Dumbledore appeared behind him.

"Are you waiting for me, dear boy?"

"Yes, Professor, Hermione's gone. She asked me to get her something for her headache. When I came back, she was gone. Sir, you don't think someone's taken her, do you?"

"I don't know how that could be possible." Dumbledore gave Draco a piercing look. "Did you talk to Miss Granger before her disappearance?"

"We were talking with each other before Pansy came for a visit. I assume she's the new Ancient Runes teacher?"

"Yes, yes, she is. How was Miss Granger behaving?"

Draco thought for a moment. "I don't know. Before she went to the kitchens with Ron Weasley, she was fine. Well, I mean, she acted a little put out that Pansy was there, but other than that, she seemed fine. When she returned, she said she wasn't feeling well."

"I see. Go back to the hospital wing in case she comes back. In the meantime, I shall make some inquiries."

Draco hesitated and then gave a defeated nod in Dumbledore's direction.

After what seemed like an eternity, the door to the hospital wing finally opened. Draco sat up from the comfort of the bed that Hermione vacated. He did not like the grave expression on the old man's face. And where was that damned *twinkle* when you actually wanted to see it? Draco sat on the edge of the bed, heart pounding, and prepared for the worst.

"Well, Mr. Malfoy, you are correct. Miss Granger is no longer in the castle. However, she was not kidnapped as you suspect. I spoke with some of the portraits in the Entrance Hall, and I was informed that Miss Granger left alone."

"What?" Draco was stricken. "Why would she do that? We were making plans. And she was sick, Headmaster. She was really sick. As you know, she almost died."

"I am aware of that, Mr. Malfoy. Do not worry. Whatever is bothering Miss Granger, she will contact someone soon. Trust her heart, dear boy, and she will find her way back."

After Dumbledore stalked out of the room, a shadow of the boy he once was passed through his eyes. "Trust her heart, my arse! If she wants to run from me, let her. I will not chase her, if that's what she wants. No, I will not be made a fool of, especially by a Mud --" Draco stopped himself, and then he lay back on the bed and sighed. He needed to find her, that he was sure. Soon, sleep overtook him.

A lone figure stood in the doorway of the hospital wing. He watched Draco sleep for several minutes, then departed.

A/N: I just want to apologize, profusely, to Sinbad. I know you were happy for Draco and Hermione, but seriously, I couldn't have them always be sunshine and roses. Where's the fun in that!

Hermione's Heartache

Chapter 16 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: Thanks to the allmighty RobisonRocket. I only own the plot. I've left a message for JKR, asking her to hand Snape over, but she must not have gotten it yet. I'm expecting the call any day now. Then he will be all MINE!

Hermione's Heartache

Chapter 16

Severus paced the corridor of the lobby of St. Mungo's. He was told that Hermione should be alright, but she was very ill. She had overdone it, the Healer had told him. The fact that Hermione was still reeling from her bout of malnourishment, and the fact that she was pregnant, forced her body into shock. The baby seemed to be taking all the nourishment it could get, leaving Hermione with nothing.

Severus had left the hospital long enough to see the Headmaster. He told Dumbledore what had taken place. Dumbledore proceeded to tell Severus about Draco's ardent search for the girl. Severus had been a Death Eater and spy for most of his life. He learned to read the actions of people. In his mind's eye, he saw Hermione Granger, risking the lives of herself and her child, fleeing the castle, and Draco. When he found her, she had been crying and desperate. And Draco searching everywhere for her after she made up a story to get rid of him. It didn't take a genius to gather that Hermione didn't want Draco to find her.

Severus was at a loss. He felt compelled to tell Draco where Hermione was, simply because Draco was his godson, and his loyalties were with the young Slytherin. However, he didn't want to say anything until Hermione awoke. If something terrible had happened between the two, he didn't want to be the one responsible for bringing them back together. Feeling confident that Dumbledore wouldn't give in and tell Draco where he could find Hermione, Severus continued to pace.

Moments later, the Healer emerged from Hermione's room. "Sir, the young lady is awake, and she'd like to speak with you."

Severus nodded and moved swiftly to the inside of Hermione's room. "Well, I hope you're happy, you silly girl. You have outdone yourself this time. What seems to be the problem? Why did you flee the castle?"

"Well, you don't waste any time, do you? I don't want to talk about it." Hermione turned her head as tears threatened to spill.

"You have had a terrible time of things lately, Hermione. I wish you to tell me what it is that is troubling you so. I assumed things with Draco were alright. Lucius is dead, so

you aren't under house arrest any longer."

Hermione hesitated. She gave a resigned sigh and spilled her guts. When she had finished recounting her tale of what she heard, she was in tears once more.

"I see, Hermione. Did you happen to ask Draco about what you heard?"

"Of course I didn't. He would just lie to me and tell me that I misunderstood."

"I can say a lot about my godson, Hermione, but he is not a liar. Quite the contrary, he is sometimes a little too open with the truth."

"That's not the Malfoy I remember. The one I remember used to lie just to get us into trouble."

"I believe you can agree with me that he has grown up considerably since he was a student. He is no longer an adolescent boy, and you are no longer an adolescent girl. He deserves to know your whereabouts. And he deserves to give his side of the story."

Severus watched as Hermione drank in his words while absentmindedly stroking her belly. He felt a pang of guilt, but did not back down.

"Severus, are you going to tell him where I am?"

"No, I won't. But I will inform him that you are currently safe." Severus was not asking her permission, which Hermione was well aware. She was very thankful that he wouldn't tell where she was.

He watched her for a few moments and then asked her, "Will you allow me to ask him about the conversation that he had with Miss Parkinson? It would be tragic for the two of you to have come so far in your *friendship* to have it come to a conclusion due to an eavesdropped conversation.

Hermione had the grace to blush slightly. "I don't care. You can do whatever you want. But what makes you think he would tell you the truth?"

Severus' only answer was a penetrating stare, which she acknowledged with an, "Oh."

"Fine, ask him. See what he tells you. I, for one, am not buying into it."

Severus gave a disgruntled sigh, but didn't comment. "I believe I shall leave you now. I have some business that needs my attention. You really need to get some sleep. You really did a job on yourself this time."

"I know," was Hermione's only response.

Draco was still lying on the cot, staring at the ceiling, when the door to the hospital wing opened.

Draco jumped. "Hermione!"

"No, sorry, Draco, it's just me." Severus stalked over to the bed.

Draco paled. "So, have you heard that she's gone missing?"

"I've heard she's run away, if that's what you're asking. That's why I'm here. I know where she is, and she's safe, but we need to discuss what's happened."

"Where is she?" Draco asked, irritated.

"I'll not divulge that information until I've asked you a few questions. She is convinced that you will lie to her, if she were to ask you; however, I've convinced her that you will not be able to lie to me."

Draco nodded.

"I need you to tell me of your conversation with Miss Parkinson."

"What do you mean? Pansy came in here to see me; I told her I was getting married, end of story."

"Really, that's all? I'm surprised Hermione would be upset by hearing that," Severus said sarcastically. "Now, why don't you tell me exactly what was said?" Severus asked patiently, albeit cursing whatever gods put him in the position of a mediator. He wished more than anything that he could go back to not giving a damn.

"Why don't you just come into my head and find out? I'm too tired to play games with you, Severus. And I don't want to play games with Hermione either. So come on in. Maybe you'll find something."

Severus nodded and did just that.

After a few moments, he pulled out of Draco's memories and sat back with his fingertips in a steeple. He looked over at Draco, who had his head in his hands.

"Severus, do you have any idea which part Hermione came in on? Seeing what you've just seen, I can guess what she heard."

"Draco, it sounded to me like you were trying to give Miss Parkinson hope of a future with you. However, by your body language, I'd say that probably isn't the case."

"I was trying to get rid of her, Severus. I just wanted to mollify her so she'd leave. But if one were to only hear that from, say, the other side of the door, it would be taken completely out of context."

"Which is why Hermione fled," Severus said.

"Yes, that has to be why. We have to go and find her and tell her the truth." Draco stood and grabbed his trainers. He tied his laces and walked toward the door. He turned when he realized Snape wasn't following him.

"Aren't you going to take me to her?"

"No, I'm not. I think it would be better if I talked to her first. She needs to have the chance to make her own decision on what she believes. Draco, she's very fragile right now. Her health, as well as the baby's, is in jeopardy. The last thing she needs is more stress."

Draco sighed in frustration. "Very well, I will wait. Can you at least tell me where she is?"

Severus rubbed his eyes. "If I tell you where she is, can I have your word that you will not look for her until you've heard from me?"

"I give you my word. I just want to know that she's alright."

"She is at St. Mungo's, Draco. She overexerted herself, and she's fallen ill."

Draco gasped. "This is my fault. I should never have left her alone. I should have insisted that she stay with me when I spoke with Pansy."

"Second guessing yourself isn't going to help you now, Draco. Let me speak with her. I'm sure I can smooth things over while you wait."

"I'll stay right here. Please contact me as soon as you speak to her."

Severus gave a curt nod and left the hospital wing, leaving Draco to stew in his own frustration.

Severus opened the door to Hermione's hospital room and was surprised to see that she wasn't in her bed. He knocked on the door to the bathroom, and there was no answer. He was about to find a Healer and ask for her when the door opened and an orderly entered the room.

"Excuse me, sir, I didn't realize there was someone in here. I just need to change the linens."

"Where," Severus growled, "is the girl who occupied this room only a few hours ago?"

"I'm not sure where she was off to, but she checked herself out of here. I don't know anything else, but I'm sure you can ask one of the Healers."

Severus stalked out of the room and headed straight for the Healer's station. The sight of the renowned, and angry, Potions master standing at the desk was enough to stop all activity at once.

A shy Healer in training asked quietly, "May I help you, sir?"

"Yes, I would like to know why the girl in Room 216 was released."

A Healer sitting at the desk in the back replied, "I released her. I had my orders to do so."

"Who gave you the orders?" Snape hissed.

"The Healer in charge of this wing did," the Healer said with a bit of annoyance. Severus looked closely at her tag and noticed that she was Healer Pickett.

At that moment said Healer walked out of her office. "Professor, is there something I can do for you? Is Miss Granger alright?"

"I wouldn't know, Healer Davis, she's not in her room. I have been informed that you released her," Severus said, barely able to restrain himself from hexing everyone.

"I did nothing of the sort," Healer Davis retorted. "I wouldn't have released the young lady; she was too ill."

Healer Pickett glared at her in a panic. "Healer Davis, you told me to grab her chart because she was going home. I took it to her, and she was eager to sign it. She seemed fine."

"I told you to release the patient in Room 260," Healer Davis spat. "Mrs. Tinklebaum is the one who is to be release; Mrs. Tinklebaum in Room 260. NOT Hermione Granger in Room 216. Did you even look at the name on the chart?"

Healer Pickett lowered her eyes to the floor. "I didn't hear the name, I just heard the room number, and the number I thought you said was 216."

Severus took a deep breath and whispered in a voice full of venom, "You do realized that you have released a very ill, not to mention pregnant, woman. Because of your mistake, she could die." And just in case the poor Healer didn't feel bad enough, Severus added, "She also happens to be one-third of Harry Potter's famed 'Golden Trio,' that I'm certain you read about in all the news papers. She is a member of the Order of the Phoenix and was a key factor in bringing down the Dark Lord. And she hasn't even gotten her Order of Merlin, yet. For your own good, you stupid girl, you had better pray to what ever deity you deem necessary that we find her ALIVE!"

After Severus had reduced the girl to tears, he turned on his heel and left in a flurry of billowing robes.

Hermione had just Apparated into a Muggle neighborhood. She walked down the familiar street, slightly dizzy, with only one thought. She would go to the only one who never judged her, the only one who didn't ask questions, the only one who, in Hermione's eyes, would take care of her the way she needed to be cared for her mother.

Hermione's feet seemed to take her right to the two-story, brick home without Hermione's notice. She was exhausted from the day and still dizzy from the Apparition. She made her way up the cobblestone walk and rang the doorbell. The house was dark, but Hermione assumed her mother must be in the bedroom.

After a few minutes, Hermione stepped back onto the walk. She looked up to see if any lights were on. As she tilted her head back, the dizziness took over, and Hermione fell to the ground. She tried to sit up but couldn't get her bearings.

Hermione's last thought, before consciousness left her, was of her mother finding her dead on the cobblestone walk.

A/N: I know, I know... I should lay off of Hermione, but I can't help myself. I've read too many SS/HG fics, and I feel the need to torture her as much as she's tortured me. Please Read and Review! They inspire me!

A Stroll in the Moonlight

Chapter 17 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: You have my beta, RobisonRocket, to thank for getting this next chapter so quickly. She's the best. I been beaten up a bit for torturing Hermione. I promise I will lay off her -- Later, though. Right now, please sit back, relax, and enjoy a little Stroll...

Remus Lupin was trying to get through the hustle and bustle of Diagon Alley. It was exceptionally crowded on this particular day, and Lupin only assumed it had something to do with September 1st being right around the corner. Although Lupin was recognized as a defender of the Wizarding world, he was still uncomfortable with any kind of attention, even if it was positive attention.

After acquiring all he would need for his new job at the Ministry, he remembered he had promised Harry he'd pick up some owl treats for Hedwig. A smile played on the corner of Lupin's mouth. He knew Harry wouldn't leave Ginny and Abby for even a second, certainly not long enough to get owl treats for Hedwig. And since Harry wasn't leaving the comfort of his wife's arms, he was using Hedwig more often these days.

He felt another twinge of amusement at the thought of Hedwig. She was a mother herself now. She had four babies, which were all given to friends except for one. Harry kept the only snowy owl, and only female out of the bunch, for Ginny. Hedwig was a proud mother and seemed to mollycoddle her only daughter, much like Molly Weasley did with her children. When Ginny sent Cleo with a letter, Hedwig would stand at the window and watch until Cleo would disappear into the clouds.

However, if Harry tried to use Cleo, to give Hedwig a break, Hedwig would still regard him with indignation. After a few sharp nips on the finger, Harry had finally caught on, and Hedwig was back in business.

With thoughts of owl flying through his mind, Lupin shuffled into Eeylops with a grin. He walked down the aisle that held the best quality treats for the more regal class and the only treats Hedwig would indulge in. She was, after all, royalty.

He made his way to the counter and waited patiently for Mr. Cockburn. When it was his turn, he put his goods on the counter and smiled at the old shopkeeper. "Hello, Joe. How's business."

"Blooming, Remus, blooming. How about yourself? I heard tell that you are the new head of the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. I think it's brilliant, Remus. You are definitely qualified."

"Thank you, Joe. I appreciate the vote of confidence."

"Well, I see you're shopping for Hedwig again. I can always tell." Mr. Cockburn tapped his temple. "How is Mr. Potter these days? I imagine he's cooped up with that beautiful wife of his. It's like James and Lily all over again."

They became silent for a moment, both giving a moment to the memory of the young couple who died way too soon. Lupin gave a tiny smile, and Mr. Cockburn silently began to take care of the purchases. Just as Lupin was reaching into his pocket, Mr. Cockburn spoke to someone coming up the aisle.

"Did you find everything you were looking for, Madam?"

Lupin turned to see who the shopkeeper was addressing and was met with familiar, deep, brown eyes and a smile that would light the darkest cave. His heart leapt. "Hello, Susan. What brings you to Diagon Alley?"

Susan Granger was making her way to the counter with a hand basket full of owl treats. She smiled widely at Lupin and extended her hand. Lupin took her hand and placed a light kiss upon it in a very regal gesture.

"What brings you to Diagon Alley, Susan?" Lupin asked.

"Oh, I needed to get some treats for Jupiter. He is so spoiled much like his mother." Susan laughed. "I'm just glad that Hermione was able to get me connected to the Floo network so that I could come here without traveling all over the world. What brings you here, Remus?"

"Hedwig and Cleo were running a bit low," Lupin replied. "How is Jupiter? Is he adjusting well to life as a Muggle?" Lupin teased.

Susan laughed again. "As well as I have adjusted to being the mother of 'the brightest witch of her time.'"

Lupin grinned. "Hermione told you about that, did she? Well, I meant it. She's an extraordinary witch."

"She's an extraordinary daughter as well. But, no, she would never tell of a compliment like that. Harry told me back in there third year when you were their teacher."

"That's our Harry. He'd much rather rave about the accomplishments of those he loves than talk about his own." Remus paid for his belongings and waited for Mr. Cockburn to add up Susan's.

"Harry is such a sweet boy. After John died, he and Ron accompanied Hermione to the house quite often. I knew he had more important things to worry about than helping us pack away my late husband's belongings, but he worked diligently and never complained. I wasn't very excited about my daughter's best friends being boys, but now I admit that I was very wrong. I finally realized that they would take care of her when I couldn't. She's very lucky to have them. And I'm very thankful that she has them."

Lupin felt a tinge of guilt. He didn't realize that Susan didn't know about Hermione's recent attack. He couldn't tell her; it wasn't his place.

Deciding to change the subject, he thought for a moment. Hoping he wasn't overstepping his boundary, he asked, "Where are you going from here?"

"Oh, I don't know," Susan replied. "I'll probably go into the city for lunch and then do some cleaning at the house. I'm off today, and I'm not on call or anything, so I'm free for the day."

"Would you care to have lunch with me? There is a new café that opened down the street. I haven't tried it yet, but I've been meaning to." Lupin held his breath.

"I'd love to, Remus. I can put my cleaning off for a while." Susan chuckled and added, "Perhaps I'll have Hermione come over with her wand and do it."

Lupin held the door for her, and they walked out into the bright sunlight. It was a warm August day, but there was a nice breeze, so the walk was refreshing. They talked about the freedom that the Wizarding world had now that the war was over. They talked about Lupin's new job at the Ministry. And they talked about Susan's life as a widow.

"It's gotten easier," Susan stated. "I guess one never actually gets used to being alone when they lose a spouse. It's been two years now since I lost him. Hermione said that I need to get back out there and find a man. She said that I am too young to mourn her father for the rest of my life."

They had reached the café by now. They were seated by a pleasant young witch who recognized Lupin immediately. "Hello, Mr. Lupin. It's an honor to have you here in my café. Dessert is on the house for your and your friend today."

"Thank you so much, Miss, but that's not necessary." Lupin couldn't keep himself from flushing slightly.

"Nonsense! You are a member of the Order. I probably wouldn't have this little café if it weren't for you and your friends. We owe you all so much." Not waiting for another protest, the young woman walked away. Lupin caught Susan's eye and felt another flush when he caught her smirking at him.

After they placed their order, Susan finally said, "Hermione's not the only one who has issues about taking a compliment."

"Hermione deserves the compliments she gets," Lupin said quietly.

Susan knitted her eyebrows together. "And you don't? From the way I understand it, you played a pretty big part in the war. Hermione told me what you had to do, Remus. It can't have been easy for you to spend so much time amidst vicious werewolves."

Remus looked stonily at her. "You know what I am, Susan."

"Let's see," Susan started counting off with her fingers. "You were the best Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher that Hogwarts has ever had. You have been a father figure to my daughter in this world. From what I heard, you melt into nothingness every time you see Abigail. And you are an honest and caring friend. These are just the things people say about you, Remus. However, from my own experience since I've known you, I can say that you are curiously brilliant. You have never had anything but kind things to say to me, even though I'm a Muggle. And when John died, you touched me by your sincerity."

Lupin was on the verge of retort when their food was brought out to them. Susan took the opportunity of his silence to continue. She placed her hand on top of his, a gesture that startled Lupin, and she looked intently at him. "Remus, lycanthropy is something that happened to you. It does not define the man that I see in front of me. You should be proud of your accomplishments, Remus. Do not dwell on something that can't be changed. You are not a vicious monster."

Lupin was quiet for a stretch. Susan had started on her meal and didn't notice him watching her. Nobody had ever said those things to him before, and he realized how nice it was coming from her. He returned to his own meal and before long, they were finished.

After finishing their dessert of cinnamon ice cream, they left the café. They walked in companionable silence toward the Leaky Cauldron. When they entered, Lupin realized he didn't want his time with Susan to come to an end. As they reached the Floo, Lupin hesitated slightly. Before he had a chance to say what was on his mind, Susan beat him to it.

"Remus, would you like to go into the city with me? I need to stop by my office for a moment, and then I need to do some shopping for Hermione's birthday."

"I'd love to, Susan. I've never been to a dentist office before, and it's been a long time since I've been to Muggle London."

A few hours later, it was starting to get dark out. They had a good day together, talking about everything from dentistry to the Ministry. They decided to have dinner together and then take a taxi to Susan's neighborhood. Instead of having the driver drop them off at the house, she had them drop them off at a nearby park.

"This is where John and I used to bring Hermione when she was little. We always thought we'd have more children, but Hermione was it."

"Why didn't you have more?" Lupin asked.

"As you know, John was quite a bit older than me. As he got older, it became obvious that our chances were getting slim. I could probably still have them even now, but he couldn't, so we gave up trying."

Lupin was thoughtful for a moment. "So, do you think you'll start dating again?"

She gave him a smile, took a step toward him and answered, "That depends on whether or not the right man came along."

Lupin licked his dry lips and took a step toward her. "And do you know any right men, Susan?"

Taking another step toward Lupin, she said, "I believe I know one. I just don't know if he is interested. Do you know of any nice men, Remus?"

They were centimeters apart now. Lupin grinned and replied, "I know a nice werewolf."

"I like werewolves. Do you think he would want to take me dancing?" Susan whispered.

Lupin bent his head and whispered, "Absolutely." When their lips met, Lupin felt a shiver run down his spine. It was a tentative kiss at first, but when Susan put her arms around Lupin's neck, he deepened the kiss. After a few more moments, they pulled apart but didn't let go of one another.

Staring into her eyes, Lupin noticed they were shining. "Are you sorry that happened?"

"No, I'm not. I have had a wonderful day with you. It's just that since I was seventeen, I've only kissed one other man. I hope he's not angry with me."

Lupin sighed. "I didn't get to know him very well, but I believe John would want you to be happy, Susan. From what I could tell, he loved you very much. Hermione's right, you are still very young. You should enjoy life."

"Yes, Remus, I'm sure that's what he would have wanted. He was a good man, and I'll always miss him. But, I think it's time for me to live again." Susan paused. "Listen, it's getting late, and I have to be at the practice early. Would you mind walking me home? You can Floo from there."

"I'd love to. And on the way, I can tell you all about Abigail. I think she's next generation's brightest witch. I could be slightly biased, but what can I say? She is a remarkable baby. She has the most beautiful eyes, just like her father and her grandmother. And she has the cutest little dimple when she grins. Of course, I believe she saves her best grins for me because I'm obviously her favorite. You really need to see her before she's off to Hogwarts."

Susan laughed at that. "Remus! She's an infant. I'm sure I'll see her before she's off to Hogwarts. But, I do enjoy hearing you talk about her. You sound like a proud grandfather."

Lupin paused in his step. Susan giggled as she watched him swell with pride. She laughed out loud when he said, "I feel like a proud grandfather. I believe I'll start calling myself that, and when Abby's old enough, she'll have caught on. I'll be Grandfather Lupin."

"Oh, Remus, you are smitten, aren't you?" Susan started walking again.

Remus grabbed her around the waist and turned her to him. "Yes, I am smitten." She gave him a shy smile and placed a quick kiss on his lips. "So am I, Remus, so am I."

As they approached her street, they walked arm in arm. The moonlight glinted through the clouds, and Remus couldn't help but look toward it. He felt a bit guilty and cleared his throat. "Um, Susan, are you sure you want to pursue... oomph."

She cut him off by grabbing his head and kissing him hard on the mouth. "Yes, I'm sure. I'll just have to get use to not seeing you once a month. But, Remus, it's only a half moon tonight, so I don't think I have to worry about you attacking me."

Susan started walking again and didn't hear Remus say, "Don't be so sure."

He caught up with her, and she linked arms with him again. They walked in companionable silence, enjoying the cool night and each other's company.

As they approached the house, Susan said with a bit of reluctance, "This is me. Would you like some tea before you Floo away?"

"I believe so. Susan, would you like to have dinner with me Saturday evening?"

"I would love to, Remus."

"Wonderful, I'll make reservations at " Remus stopped. "What on earth is that?"

Susan turned toward her house. "What, Remus?" Then she saw it. She started to rush over until he grabbed her arm. He pulled out his wand and held her back. He walked slowly over to the lifeless body that was lying upon the damp grass.

Feeling like ice was grabbing his heart, he gently rolled the body over. He felt the blood drain from his face as he looked down at Hermione Granger.

Susan fell to her knees next to her daughter. "Oh, dear God! Hermione! Remus, please, is she alive?"

He reached down to feel a pulse. Looking back at Susan with sadness, he said, "Barely."

A/N: Since we don't have actual names for Hermione's parents, I made them up. I can't have Lupin calling his new gal, "Mrs. Granger." And some of you might think this moved a little fast, but we need to assume that Lupin has known Hermione's parents for a while. And I know HBP has Lupin all up in Tonks' koolaide, but this story is AU, so there you have it.

Learning to Live Again

Chapter 18 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: For all of you who wants me to leave Hermione alone, here you go! None of this would even be possible without the help of RobisonRocket. I would have pulled my hair out and given up a long time ago if I didn't have her.

Learning to Live Again

Chapter 18

Two weeks later...

The waiting area at St. Mungo's was overloaded with Hermione's loved ones. News of her collapse traveled quickly, and now all they could do was wait. Severus and Draco took turns pacing about the long corridor while Ginny and Harry held tightly to one another in the corner. Remus was in the process of explaining the last few months to Susan. Dumbledore was huddled with Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Fred, Ron, and Bill. George, however, chatted up the young resident Healer, Gwen Adams.

They were all gathered there for the same reason... Hermione was finally awake.

The door opened, and Healer Davis came out of Hermione's room. Severus scowled at her, which she ignored. "Hermione is awake. She is very fragile, so she is only allowed two visitors at a time. She would like to see her mother first."

After Susan Granger retreated into Hermione's room, silence fell again. They didn't have long to wait, however, for Susan reemerged moments later beckoning for Remus to join her. He flushed a bit and then followed her in.

Remus didn't dare show any signs of affection toward Susan until Hermione brought it to his attention. "Remus," she said faintly. "You can stop pretending that you and my mother are just friendly acquaintances. I couldn't be happier that the two of you have found each other. I've been telling my mother that she needs to find someone. It's been two years since my father died. I can't think of two people more deserving."

Remus blushed again, but said, "Thank you."

Susan smiled at her daughter. "Hermione, why didn't you tell me what happened to you? Remus filled me in on most of it, but that nice young man, Draco, filled me in on the rest."

Hermione pursed her lips. "I'll bet he did. Did he happen to tell you that we are bound, and now he wants us to get married and live happily ever after?" Hermione asked dryly.

Susan assessed her daughter and replied, "Yes, something like that. He also said you were expecting his child. Hermione, I can't say I'm thrilled with the circumstances, but I can't deny that the idea of a grandchild is very exciting."

Hermione was perplexed. "H-he told you about the baby? What did he say? When did you talk to him?"

Susan smiled sweetly at her daughter. "Well, I guess being unconscious for two weeks would cause my curious little girl to have a lot of questions. Draco told me that the two of you were expecting a child in the spring. He said that even though you are bound by magic, you still plan to make it official. And he told me all of this in a period of two weeks. We talked almost every day while we both sat here, waiting for you to wake up."

"He was here every day?" Hermione asked, surprised.

"Oh, yes," Susan replied. "He was worried sick about you, Hermione. I don't think he ate much while he was here, and I'm sure he didn't sleep. Bless him, when the Healers kicked him out of your room, he threw a fit. He finally begged them to let him stay. He spent the first two days in a chair, and the Healers finally relented and brought him a cot. He would only leave your side when the Healers needed to examine you and the baby."

Hermione looked at the chair that her mother indicated and felt her heart in her throat. The chair was small, without much cushion. Her eyes watered a bit when she thought of the arrogant, insufferable Slytherin Prince, sleeping in the extremely uncomfortable looking chair. She sighed.

"I'm sure... um... I'm sure he was just concerned about the baby." Hermione flushed at what she believed to be true.

Susan frowned in thought. "Well, that's possible, I suppose. However, the Healers reassured him that the baby was fine just a few hours after we brought you here. Hermione, he has been here day and night for two weeks, waiting for *you*. Perhaps you shouldn't keep the poor boy waiting any longer. Remus and I can go, now that I know you're going to be alright. I'll check back with you in the morning." Susan and Remus took turns kissing Hermione on the forehead.

Susan stopped before she reached the door. "So, do you want me to send Draco in?"

Hermione hesitated for a moment and then shook her head. "I would like to see Ron and Harry, if it's alright and Ginny, if they'll let her in with Harry. But, Mum, tell Draco not to leave. I do want to see him I just want to see everyone else first."

After Susan sent Harry, Ginny, and Ron into Hermione's room, Draco looked hopefully at her. "I'm sorry, Draco, she's not ready to see you yet," Susan said solemnly.

Draco sighed heavily and headed toward the corridor. Susan told him to wait, and he turned around. "Darling, Hermione wants to see you, she just wants you to be last. I expect she will want to keep you in there longer." Susan gave Draco a knowing smile when his face lit up. Draco returned to his pacing; however, his step was more anxious than worried.

After the last of the Weasley family left, Severus took his turn. She smiled guiltily at him when he entered. Taking his seat next to the bed, he crossed his arms and scowled at her.

"I believe that you have punished yourself quite enough, therefore I will not reprimand you for your escape. However, I want you to remember your time here for the rest of your life, Hermione. The seriousness of this event is insurmountable. I hope, in the future, you will recall the time you almost killed yourself and your child for your foolish insecurities."

Hermione paled. "I thought you weren't going to reprimand me, sir."

Severus leaned forward and sneered, "I didn't."

Sheepishly, Hermione looked down at her hands. "I'm sorry, Severus. I know you're right. I don't know what's wrong with me. I just felt like dying, and I didn't care what the consequences were because I knew that Draco didn't care. Mum told me that he's been here every day. Did you talk to him? Did you ask him about Pansy?"

Severus nodded. "It was a misunderstanding, Hermione. You heard Draco trying to appease Miss Parkinson so she would leave him alone. I saw everything in his head. I would be willing to show you what I saw, if you don't believe me."

"No, that's not necessary. I believe you. I just feel awful that I didn't believe Draco. I'm going to talk to him about it. I'm going to ask him to forgive me."

Severus stood. "I believe now would be as good a time as any. I will send him in. I will be away for a few days; however, I will check on you again when I return."

"If you don't mind me asking, where are you going?"

Severus regarded her with shining black eyes. Hermione caught a shadow of something like *hope* flash across his face before he quickly schooled his features.

"I'm going to Paris, Hermione, to retrieve something I lost many years ago. How long I'll be gone will depend on how well things go." Severus looked forlornly out the window. "Of course, if things go better than I expect, my length of departure could be extended indefinitely." He bowed slightly to Hermione and exited the room.

Before Hermione had time to contemplate the uncommon actions of her former Potions master, the door opened slowly. Shock was not a good enough word to describe Hermione's reaction to Draco's appearance. The debonair grace of his stride had been replaced by anxious baby steps of a frightened child. The arrogant petulance of his demeanor had been replaced by weariness and exhaustion. The perfectly coiffed, platinum hair had been replaced by tresses that looked as if he had run his hands through them too often to count. Hermione closed her eyes in unbridled guilt.

Sighing heavily, and seeing that Draco still hadn't moved beyond the threshold, she sat up straight in her bed. "Please sit down. Draco. I have something I need to say to you."

Tentatively, Draco entered and took the chair that he'd spent two terrified days on. He found that he couldn't quite meet her eye.

"I need you to look at me, Draco. I need to know that you see me while I apologize." Draco jerked his head up and met her eyes. She was taken aback by the dark circles that marred his porcelain skin. He looked so tired and a bit lost.

"I overreacted, Draco, to the things I heard you say to Pansy. I don't know why I didn't just come to you first. I'm not even sure it was you I was running away from. I think part of me just wanted to be free from everything from the Wizarding world, Lucius, this baby, and yes, Draco, even you, and my feelings for you. Unfortunately, I couldn't run from myself." Hermione sighed heavily. "Draco, please understand. I wasn't mad at you not really. Somewhere deep inside, I knew there was something more to what I heard you say to Pansy. I don't know, I guess, I was just looking for a reason to run, and the opportunity presented itself. The pumpkin that broke the Hippogriff's back, if you will."

"I'm not proud of the consequences, Draco, but I can't say that I didn't expect them. I just felt ashamed of myself that day. When I heard you talking to her, I just felt like I was trapping you, and I don't ever want to feel that way again." Hermione remained stoic through all of this, willing herself not to cry.

Draco reached for her hand. "The last thing I want is for *you* to feel trapped. I have been doing a lot of thinking while I've been here. I've talked to your mother, Harry, Ginny, and even Ron. You've brought us all together, I suppose. So many people love you, Hermione; you could have talked to anyone about the way you've been feeling."

Hermione smiled sadly. "My mum told me you said the baby was yours. Why didn't you tell her the truth?"

Draco shrugged. "It's just the way I feel, I guess. I want so much for this baby to be mine; I think I'm trying to convince myself as much as anyone else. The funny thing is, though, nobody questioned me on it. Nobody made a move to correct me."

Hermione chuckled. "They probably want to believe it as much as you do as much as I do."

Draco smiled widely at her.

"Anyway, you said you talked to my mother. What did you two talk about? She seemed to be awfully taken with you."

Draco blushed a little at that. "Well, I'm awfully taken by her as well. Your mum is brilliant, Hermione. She told me all about your father and your childhood. She told me about her dentistry and explained how it works without magic. I was really impressed. I can see where you get your cleverness. If she were a witch, I swear she would have been sorted into Slytherin." Draco laughed. "She had Lupin panting after her. That poor man is besotted. Anyway, she and I had a nice long talk. She made me realize some things that I didn't think were even in my repertoire. My talks with her were enlightening."

"Really? You think she would have made a good Slytherin, huh? I guess, coming from you, that is quite a compliment. What on earth did my mother manipulate you into realizing?" Hermione beamed, but the laughter in her eyes died when she watched Draco's face grow contemplative.

"She made me realize that I've been a complete fool for a very long time. I lived an entire lifetime without realizing that there is an entire life that I've missed out on. She asked me why, if we were forced into a bond, I would spend every waking moment waiting for you to open your eyes. When I told her I was worried about you, she laughed at me. Can you believe I let a Muggle laugh at me, and I didn't even flinch?"

"Anyway, when I asked her what was so funny, she told me a little story. She said when she was in the hospital when you were born, your father never left her side. She said she was out cold for a while, and he was so worried. She said that when she looked at my disheveled appearance, I reminded her of your father. She told me to think about why I was *really* there."

"I told her that I wanted to be there when you woke up. I said that I was afraid you'd wake up, and I'd miss it. I told her that I was afraid that I'd lost you. And do you know what she asked me?"

Hermione smiled through her tears. "No, what did she ask you?"

"She asked me what I was afraid to lose. Silly question, if you ask me. But I started thinking about it. She wasn't asking me if I was afraid to lose a person. She was asking me if I was afraid to lose a moment."

"She is quite the Slytherin, isn't she?" Hermione said aloud.

"I told you she was. Anyway, she decided to go for coffee and left me with you and my thoughts, and my thoughts about you. I felt something I've never felt before. I realized that she was right. I was afraid of losing a moment afraid I'd lost a chance that I'd never get back."

"And what chance did you lose, Draco?" Hermione placed her hand on his cheek. He kissed her palm and then grabbed her hands. Draco drew her up to sit on the edge of the bed.

"I'm not very good at this, Hermione, because I'm just a ridiculous male. I never recognized the symptoms because I've never felt them before, and I wasn't even sure I ever could."

Hermione started to speak, but Draco interrupted her before she could say anything. "It's weird, this feeling. My stomach gets all tied up in knots, and I start to feel like a first-year."

Draco was pacing the floor now, and his nervousness was making Hermione uneasy. "Draco, I've never seen you like this before. Are you okay?"

"No, Hermione, I'm not okay. I'm in love, alright. I'm desperately in love with you. At least that's what Harry says is my problem. He knew the symptoms right away. I think there's only one thing I can do about it."

He looked over at Hermione, who had both hands covering her mouth in shock. Getting herself back together, she spoke carefully. "Wh-what is it that you think you can do about it?"

Draco stopped in front of her and dropped to his knees. He grabbed the chain from around his neck and pulled. Hermione gasped in confusion when he broke his chain. However, when she saw what was on it, she started to tremble.

Draco held a simple platinum band with one respectably sized diamond in the middle. He took her trembling hand and, licking his lips, looked into her eyes. "I'm not really sure how I'm supposed to ask this, so I'm going to give it my best shot. There's a really pretty band that goes with this ring, Hermione. I'd love to give it to you, but the only way I can is if you marry me."

Hermione let the tears flow freely, but couldn't form any words. Draco started to wince at the pain in his knees. "Um, Hermione, do you want to marry me?"

Hermione threw her arms around him and kissed him all over his face. "Yes, Draco, I want to marry you. Oh, Draco, I love you, too."

Draco stilled. "You-you love me, too? Hermione, you don't have to say that just because I did."

"I know I don't, Draco. I've loved you for a long time. If I didn't, I wouldn't have cared what you said to Pansy. Oh, I'm so sorry it's taken me so long to figure it out."

They sat on the floor for a long time, talking quietly about their future, her mother and Lupin, Draco going back to work, and Hermione's dream of doing private research.

"What do you want to research?" Draco asked with his arms wrapped tightly around her.

Hermione was absentmindedly admiring her ring. "I don't know probably potions. Maybe Severus will let me work with him."

"He might," said Draco. "I think you'd be brilliant."

"Thank you for the vote of confidence. We'll see." Hermione noticed Draco's wistful expression. "What are you thinking about?"

"I'm thinking that just yesterday, I didn't know whether you'd live or die. I was afraid I'd never get the chance to tell you how I feel. And I most certainly never thought I'd see that ring on your finger."

Hermione kissed him on the cheek. "Draco, there's only one reason I have this ring on my finger."

He arched his eyebrows at her. "Oh, yeah -- and what reason is that?"

She rolled her eyes derisively. "Well, *obviously* so I can get the one that goes with it."

Violet

Chapter 19 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: Guess what! I'm not JKR. Thanks so much to RobisonRocket. I am an absolute horror when it comes to placing commas in the right place; She is an absolute genius.

Violet

Chapter 19

Six months later...

Harry was lying on his bed, nibbling on Abigail's feet while Ginny bustled around. "Hey, Gin, look, Abby loves this. She laughs every time I put her toes in my mouth. When I take them out, she sticks her foot in my face so I'll do it again watch."

Ginny turned toward her bed and watched as Abby crammed her foot into her daddy's mouth then giggled hysterically. Ginny fell onto the bed with them and said, "Your daddy's silly, isn't he, Abby?" At the sound of her mother's voice, Abby tried to cram her foot into Ginny's mouth.

"Looks like she's found a new hobby, huh, Gin? I bet she's the cleverest eight-month-old baby in the whole world. Aren't you, Abby? You're the cleverest baby in the world, aren't you? You'll be giving Hermione a run for her money. And if you're as talented with a wand as your mum, we'll all need to watch out."

Ginny got an evil glint in her eye. "Harry, you're pretty talented with your *wand* as well."

"Well, I dunno about that. I mean, yeah, I'm pretty good at defense spells and all." Harry answered, oblivious to Ginny's meaning.

"Harry, I wasn't talking about your defensive spells." Ginny giggled.

Harry reddened when he finally caught on and put his hands over Abby's ears. "Gin, you can't talk about stuff like that in front of the baby. I'm telling you, she's clever. She'll understand what you mean if you're not careful."

Ginny laughed again. "Oh, she will be a precocious witch, won't she? Speaking of Hermione, have you heard from anyone today? I meant to stop by her flat on the way to the hospital to get my new shift schedule, but I was afraid of leaving you alone with Abby for too long."

Harry looked affronted. "Draco popped in while you were out. He said that she just had some early labor pains, but she'll be alright. And why would you be afraid to leave me with Abby? I've got this whole father thing down. You've got nothing to worry about. I'm not going to drop her out the window or anything."

"Harry, I wasn't worried about her, I was worried about you. Like you said, she's very clever."

"Very funny, Gin, very funny. So, you've got your new schedule, do you? When do you go back?"

"I don't go back for another week. Now that the war's over, and I have Abby, I am only going to work part-time."

Harry cupped her cheek. "You know you don't have to work at all, right? You can hang out with us every day. We're awfully fun to be around. Besides, you make me feel like I'm not doing anything because I haven't got a job."

"Harry, you don't have to get a job. We have enough Galleons to keep our grandchildren from working. But, this isn't about money. It's about helping people. You have earned your right to stay home for a while. Not to mention that fact that you can't even leave this place without having pretty witches and pesky reporters following you everywhere you go."

"What pretty witches?" Harry asked and laughed when she punched him lightly on the arm. "Well, the only pretty witches I know of are you and Abby -- oh, and that girl that runs the café in Diagon Alley."

"You're really funny, Potter." Ginny laughed. "Is this girl someone I need to worry about?"

Harry laughed. "Nah, I'm not really her type. I think she likes redheads. When Abby and I had breakfast with George last week, she didn't give me a second glance. She only had eyes for Abby and George but I don't think Abby is the one that made her blush."

"Well, that's wonderful. George has been slightly woeful since Fred hooked up with Gwen. Perhaps George has confided some info with Gwen. I'll have to ask her about it when I go back to work."

There was a knock at the door. "Excuse me, Harry Potter, sir, it's Dobby. May I come in, sir?"

"Yeah, Dobby." Harry sat up, and Ginny took Abigail from his lap.

"It's Mr. Malfoy, sir. He says that Miss Hermione is needing you and Mrs. Ginny."

Harry and Ginny exchanged a look of trepidation. Harry stood and said, "Where is she, Dobby?"

"Miss is back at St. Mungo's, Harry Potter."

Ginny left Abby with Dobby and Apparated straight to St. Mungo's. When they arrived, they found Remus and Susan sitting in the waiting area and Severus standing by the wall with his arms crossed and his scowl firmly in place.

"What's going on?" Harry asked Severus.

"Hermione's gone into labor," Severus whispered.

Ginny frowned. "It's early, yes, but not *too* early. I'm going in there. Hermione might need me."

Harry gave her a quick kiss, and Ginny went in.

Harry looked around the room. "Where's Draco?"

"He's inside with Hermione," Severus replied.

"Has anyone contacted Ron?"

Severus sighed with the annoyance of so many questions. "You could give Little-Miss-Know-it-All a run for her money. Yes, Lupin Floo-called Weasley all of them, as a matter of fact. They are on the fifth floor in the visitors' tearoom. I believe they were going to go in the shop and get some flowers as well."

"So, now what?" Harry asked.

Severus raised an eyebrow. "Now we wait."

Harry searched for something say. He hated waiting and couldn't stand the quiet. "When did you get back from your holiday?"

"We came home early. Draco contacted us to let us know that Hermione had gone into labor."

Harry frowned. "*We*?" Unconsciously, he let his eyes wander around, looking for whomever Severus was referring to.

Severus smirked. "Yes, Harry, there is someone with me. She is also currently on the fifth floor."

The sound of the elevator door opening brought both men to the attention of a tall, beautiful, blond woman. Harry had only seen the woman once in his life. However, his only recollection of her was not of the beauty he saw before him. He remembered her wearing a look on her face that indicated something smelly under her nose. The

woman striding toward Severus was definitely not the Narcissa Malfoy that he had met before.

Harry's jaw dropped when Narcissa handed Severus a cup of coffee, for which he thanked her with a peck on the cheek.

Narcissa turned toward Harry. "Harry Potter, I presume?" she asked, extending a delicate hand toward Harry. Harry mentally shook himself while taking the outstretched hand. "Yes, I'm Harry Potter. You must be Draco's mother."

She smiled proudly. "Yes, I am. And I'm about to be a grandmother. I cannot tell you how pleased I am." Narcissa dropped her voice so only Severus and Harry could hear her. "Don't look so surprised, Mr. Potter. I know the circumstances of the child's existence; however, my son has informed me that the child will be raised as his. As such, that will make me a grandmother."

Harry nodded his thanks to her. "Please, Mrs. Malfoy, call me Harry."

She chuckled. "Then I must insist that you call me Narcissa."

The elevator opened again, and Dumbledore, followed by the rest of the Weasley family, entered the corridor.

They all spoke quietly with one another until Ginny emerged from Hermione's room. All eyes turned toward her. When Ginny let a grin spread across her face, a collective sigh of relief reverberated throughout the corridor.

"Draco will be out in a moment," Ginny said. "He would like to be the one to make the introduction. However, Hermione would like to see Harry and Ron right away."

Harry and Ron exchanged confused looks, but followed Ginny into Hermione's room. Once inside, they both stood hesitantly right inside the door.

"Oh, for Circe's sake, boys, come here." Hermione patted the spot on either side of her. She looked tired, but extremely happy. Draco was standing next to her bed, holding a small bundle.

The boys took a seat on either side of Hermione and covered each of her hands with their own.

"Now, I called you two in here for a specific reason. Draco and I have been discussing some things lately, and we've come to a decision. First of all, however, I have some things I want to say to you. I love you both so much. You boys are my family. You have been my knights in shining armor, and you've risked your lives for me too many times to count."

"Even after everything with Voldemort, Lucius, the bond, and my health crisis, you two have never left my side. I know that I can always count on you to be on my team, regardless of the circumstances. You have loved me unconditionally and supported me with everything I've ever done." Hermione giggled. "Even S.P.E.W."

Harry and Ron exchanged amused glances.

"What I'm trying to say is, I know that I can trust you with my life. I also know that I can trust you with the life of my baby. It's unorthodox, but it seems like everything I do lately is unorthodox. Anyway, Draco and I would like to ask you both to be godfathers to our baby."

Taken aback, both boys looked at Hermione and then at Draco. Back to Hermione, they spoke in unison. "You're on."

Outside Hermione's room, patience was running thin. When the door opened again, Draco came out, holding the small infant. He put his hand up to put a halt in the steps of the visitors who wanted to be the first to hold the baby.

Harry and Ron emerged right behind him, grinning. Ginny pulled up the rear, pushing Hermione in a wheelchair.

"I was going to introduce you all, but I think it would be best if her godfathers did it," Draco said.

Harry took the baby from Draco while Ron cleared his throat. "Family and friends, Harry and I would like for you to meet our goddaughter, Violet Ginevra Malfoy."

A collective cheer rang out as they all started speaking at once.

"Oh, how lovely."

"What a beautiful name."

"Another little girl, that's wonderful."

"May I hold her?"

Harry took a step forward and handed the baby to Susan. Susan moved the blanket off of Violet's head and admired the tuft of blond curls that were already formed.

"Hermione, she's beautiful. Wherever did you come up with the name?"

"Well," started Hermione. "Ginevra is Ginny's full name, and we just wanted to pay tribute to her."

Narcissa came to stand next to Susan and asked, "Is Violet a family name?"

"No." Hermione blushed. "There are a couple of reasons why we named her that. When I was growing up in the Muggle world, the lights of my school library were violet. It's said that violet lights are used to improve concentration. As Ron and Harry can attest, the library has always been a place of refuge for me."

"Leonardo da Vinci once said," Susan offered, "that he used to meditate under the violet light falling through the stained glass windows of a quiet church."

"This is all true, but there is one main reason," Draco countered. "Violet is the color of her eyes. They will probably change, but that is the color they are right now. Hopefully they'll still be that color when she opens them again."

"May I?" Narcissa asked Susan.

"Oh, yes, of course." Susan handed the baby over to Narcissa.

Severus came to stand next to Narcissa, and Hermione gave Draco a knowing look. He smiled and winked at her.

Narcissa held the baby close to her. "You are quite lovely, Violet. I would love to see your eyes."

As if on cue, one deep, bluish-purple eye opened. Narcissa gasped. "My goodness, there it is. She has purple eyes."

"Have you ever seen eyes like hers, Mother?" Draco asked.

Narcissa froze. "Yes, Draco, I have."

Hermione yawned, which didn't go unnoticed by Ginny. "Okay, everyone, I believe it's time to let the new mum get some rest. I'm sure she wouldn't mind seeing everyone again tomorrow, but I think we should give her and Draco some time alone with Violet."

As everyone started to depart, Dumbledore stopped to pat the baby on the cheek and then whisper something to Draco. Draco frowned at Dumbledore and then stared at his retreating back, lost in thought.

After Draco and Hermione settled back into her room, there was a soft knock on the door.

"Draco, it's Mother; may I please come in?"

"Yes," Draco answered. After Narcissa entered, Draco decided to tell both of the women about Dumbledore's very strange advice.

"I'm glad you're here, Mother. I was just about to tell Hermione what Dumbledore said to me."

"Really? What did he say, Son?"

"He told me that I really needed to look at Lucius' Pensieve," Draco replied.

"Well, I agree with him, Draco. And I'm going to tell you why. First, though, may I have Violet for a moment?"

Hermione exchanged a worried look with Draco, but handed the baby to Narcissa. After Narcissa took the baby, she gently removed the blanket, leaving Violet clad in only a diaper.

"Mother," Draco started. "What in Merlin's name are you doing?"

"I have a suspicion, Darling, and I need to check something." Narcissa turned the baby over in her arms and gasped.

"What is it?" Hermione panicked.

Narcissa carefully wrapped the baby back up in the soft blanket and handed her back to Hermione.

"Draco, did you know that Violet has a birthmark shaped like a crescent moon on the back of her neck?"

"Yes, we thought it was very peculiar, but it's just one more thing that makes her special. Why?"

Without answering, Narcissa closed her eyes. "Draco, you asked me if I'd ever seen eyes the color of Violet's, and I told you that I had."

"Yes, but you never told me who."

"My grandmother, Draco -- *my* grandmother. And there is one other person that I know of who has the crescent moon birthmark."

Draco's heart was beating faster. "Who, Mother?"

"Me," Narcissa replied. She then lifted her long, blond hair to reveal the same crescent moon birthmark on the back of her neck in the same place as Violet's.

A/N: Voila!! I hope you enjoyed this chapter. Now it's time to get down to the nitty-gritty. The information regarding the name of Hermione's baby was found on Trivia-Library.com

Pensieve Tales

Chapter 20 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: I know, I know... I have been extremely busy this past week. Please, forgive me.

Pensieve Tales

Chapter 20

Draco's face drained of color as he stared at the crescent moon adorning his mother's neck. He knew this could mean only one thing. He was pulled out of his musing by the sound of Hermione's voice.

"Draco, I think it's time we get our memories from Harry. We can use Lucius' Pensieve to view them after you hear what he has to say to you."

"Yes, I think you're right." Draco replied without meeting her eyes. "I'll go and fetch Harry and the Pensieve."

After Draco left, silence enveloped Hermione and Narcissa. The only sound was the steady breathing of Violet, who was fast asleep.

Never one to keep quiet, Hermione spoke first. "So, you and Severus are... together?"

Narcissa smiled shyly. "Yes, we have always been rather close. We have been dear friends for over twenty years. When we were young, Severus and I would study together and sometimes go to Hogsmeade together. I believe we would have ended up married if it hadn't been for my arrangement with Lucius."

"That's terribly sad," Hermione retorted. "I couldn't imagine being in love with one man while being forced to marry another."

"Oh, is that so? Tell me, Hermione, what do you think of your bond with my son?"

Hermione flushed. "I hated it at first. To be honest with you, I still don't care for it. It's not Draco I love Draco. It's just the way things have come about. I don't like being forced to do anything."

"True," Narcissa replied. "However, if it were not for the bond, would you have given yourself a chance to fall in love with him? Might you have gone your separate ways after the war?"

"You are probably right," Hermione acquiesced. "I guess we will never know, will we?"

"No, darling, we will never know," Narcissa said.

"Narcissa, how do *you* feel about the bond? You're a pureblood, and your son is marrying a Muggle-born."

"This might come as a surprise to you, Hermione, but I think it's wonderful."

"You do?" Hermione asked incredulously.

"Yes. I don't have the same kind of prejudices against Muggle-borns that my former husband did."

"You don't have the same *kind* of prejudices, but you still have prejudices. Is that what you're saying?" Hermione was starting to become defensive.

Narcissa chuckled. "Everyone has prejudices."

"I most certainly do not," Hermione challenged.

"No? Tell me, Hermione, what did you think of Slytherins when you were in school?"

Hermione blushed furiously.

"You see, everyone has prejudices," Narcissa said matter-of-factly.

"But you *hated* me," Hermione whispered.

Narcissa shook her head sadly. "No, I didn't *hate* you. I was afraid of you."

Hermione's eyes widened. "Why?"

"Well, you are the smartest witch of your age, Hermione. You are a Muggle-born witch, a Gryffindor, and best friend to Harry Potter. You were never afraid of anything, Hermione. You even had the nerve to *slap* my son. Of course I was afraid of you. There aren't many witches like you, Hermione, and that alone makes you dangerous."

"I'm not dangerous. I would never hurt anyone."

"No, but you *could*. Lucius was terrified of you. He would never have let you know that, but he was. We are all afraid of what we don't understand. Does that make sense?"

"Yes, I suppose it does," Hermione said. "So, did you dislike Gryffindors as much as Draco did?"

"No, I didn't. The hat wanted to put me in Ravenclaw, but I begged it to let me go to Slytherin. My father would have had a fit if I hadn't gone to Slytherin. And as far as Gryffindors go, I had a very good friend who was a Gryffindor -- a Muggle-born at that."

"And who was that, Mother?" Draco and Harry had just entered the room.

"Ah, there you are, sweetheart," Narcissa said brightly.

"Who was your friend?" Draco asked again.

Narcissa looked at Harry. "Lily Evans. Your mother was as beautiful on the inside as she was on the outside, Harry. She would have been very proud of you."

Harry let his jaw drop. "You were friends with my mother? I never knew."

"I don't think anyone knew. She and I would sometimes study together. I was shocked to learn that Severus had been such good friends with her until I got to know her myself. I can't imagine anyone knowing Lily Evans and not loving her. She touched the lives of everyone around her."

"She was absolutely brilliant with charms. Her potions making rivaled that of Severus. And your poor father," Narcissa laughed, "was on the business end of her wand more than once."

Narcissa's laughter faded into sadness. "When she died, I believe a piece of the entire Wizarding world died with her. She was a phenomenal woman. I wish I could have remained friends with her."

Harry swallowed the lump in his throat and asked, "Why didn't you?"

"I had to marry Lucius, and I wasn't willing to put your mother's life in danger. I did see her once when you were about two-months-old. Sirius was my cousin, you see, and he knew how much I cared for Lily. Sirius brought me James' Invisibility Cloak, and I went to Godric's Hollow. Draco wasn't much older than you, so I took him with me."

Narcissa seemed lost in thought for a moment. "You were a startlingly beautiful baby, Harry. Your eyes were magnificent, just like hers." Narcissa laughed again. "I remember putting you and Draco in the crib together while Lily and I had our tea. When it was time for my departure, Lily and I laughed out loud at what we found in the crib."

"What did you find?" Draco asked.

"You and Harry were sound asleep, and you were holding onto Harry's arm, and you had his, oh dear." Narcissa was beginning to laugh harder.

"I had his what, Mother?" Draco asked, annoyed.

"I'm... oh... I'm sorry. It was just so sweet. You had Harry's fist in your mouth, sucking on it, like it was a bottle."

Narcissa became hysterical with laughter, and Hermione had burst into giggles as well. Harry and Draco had both gone pink and unconsciously took a step away from each other.

"Well, that was a nice trip down memory lane," Draco said, trying to compose himself. "Shall we get started now?"

The air in the room suddenly became thick with anticipation. Harry pulled the shrunken Pensieve out of his pocket and enlarged it to its normal size. Then he took the two phials out and handed them to Narcissa until they were ready to be seen.

"Go on, Draco," Narcissa encouraged.

Draco looked at his feet. "I don't really want to go alone."

"I'll go with you, mate," said Harry. "After all, I let you suck on my hand."

Draco rolled his eyes. "Let's go then."

Draco and Harry fell into Lucius' office at Malfoy Manor. As soon as they fell, they saw Lucius sitting behind his desk, drinking brandy. He looked an absolute mess, and Harry recognized him as the Lucius from the day he killed himself.

Suddenly, he began to speak. "Draco, I have never been one to write letters and such, so I decided to use a Pensieve to record my thoughts. I want you to know that I am proud of you. You probably don't care to hear that, but there it is."

"You have turned into a remarkable man, Draco, and I hope that one day you can find it in your heart to forgive all of my trespasses. I realize that I was never a good father to you. I do hope that, were you to ever have children, you will take what you have learned from your mother."

"I also hope that you can forgive what I have done to you and Miss Granger. Although it was truly an accident, I pray that your life will turn out well. Perhaps the two of you can marry and have children of your own. She is a very powerful witch, Draco, and I believe that the two of you have what it takes to change this world. Yes, I know she is a Muggle-born, but times are changing. Unfortunately, I realized that when it was too late."

"I took my life, Draco, so that you could have one. I could not allow my existence ruin your life any more than it already has. Malfoy was once a name of honor, for which I believe you can restore."

"Please believe that regardless of what kind of father I was, I have always loved you. And, again, I realized that when it was too late. You will be a good husband, and one day, a good father. You are stronger than me, Draco. I could not turn from the Dark Lord when it mattered, but you had the courage to do so."

"I have left the Manor to your mother. I have put her through nothing but hell for her entire life, so that is the least I can do for her. The villa in Positano is yours, if you want it. There is also the cottage in Hogsmeade, which has been vacant for quite some time. Your mother and I bought the cottage before you started Hogwarts. She wanted to be close by while you were in school, but she never wanted you to know. I have never occupied the residence. My solicitor will have the deeds to the properties, along with the key to the vault, which holds your savings. I hope this will give you some semblance of peace."

"I must go now, Draco. I hope that one day you will be able to forgive me enough for both of us, for I will never be able to forgive myself."

As Lucius faded, Draco pulled himself out of the Pensieve with Harry in tow. Everyone sort of held their breath, waiting for Draco's reaction.

Hermione timidly asked, "Well, what did you see? Did you find out anything about Violet, or the day we were attacked?"

Still not meeting her eyes, Draco replied, "Not a bloody thing. You are welcome to take a look if you wish. It was just a whole bunch of rubbish about how sorry he is that he made my life and my mother's life hell for so long."

Hermione whispered, "I don't want to look, thank you. I guess we have to look at our own memories then."

Draco nodded. "I will go first, if you'd like."

"Actually, Draco, I was hoping we could go together. I don't think I could do it on my own. Maybe we could look at mine first and get it out of the way."

Draco looked at a spot somewhere over Hermione's head and nodded again. "I will go in with you, but I know what we are going to find."

Hermione frowned. "What are you talking about, Draco? What do you think we are going to find? I hope to find pieces to our puzzle."

They all turned to the sound of Violet waking up. Harry walked over and took the baby from Hermione. "I'll hold her, Hermione. You go on. We'll be here when you are finished."

Draco closed his eyes in thought. "I know what this is going to be, and I just want to say how sorry I am."

Hermione grabbed his hand and squeezed it tightly. "What are you sorry for?"

Draco didn't respond. He took the phial with the "H" marked on it from his mother. He uncorked it and poured its contents into the Pensieve.

"Draco, look at me. What are you sorry for?" Hermione repeated.

Finally Draco looked eyes with her, and she was shocked by the emotions that played out through his grey eyes. Draco unashamedly let a tear slide down his cheek as he whispered, "I'm sorry for doing those things to you, Hermione."

"Doing what things, Draco? You're scaring me."

"When we go into that Pensieve, you will see."

"See what?" Hermione was shaking now.

"You will see that I am the one who raped you."

Madness

Chapter 21 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: Here is where all the warnings come to pass. Please understand that I am NOT a fan of any form of rape. This scene is necessary in order to understand what happened to Draco and Hermione. I have kept it as clean as I possibly could. Thank you to RobisonRocket, who, thankfully, didn't have to brush her teeth after reading this.

Madness

Chapter 21

Once Draco and Hermione entered the Pensieve, Hermione turned to Draco. "You didn't do those things to me, Draco. I know you didn't. You are NOT your father."

"How do you explain all the signs then, Hermione? Violet is my daughter, not his."

Before Hermione had a chance to respond, their attention was drawn full force to the matter at hand. This was it... the missing memory.

Pensieve Hermione lay upon the bed, trying desperately not to cry. The present day Draco asked, "Didn't you say he Stupefied you?"

"I'm beginning to think there were some memories planted before. It made things easier to leave, if you ask me. Lucius didn't erase our memories, Draco; he bottled them up."

They both watched the scene play out in horror.

Into the Pensieve

Hermione was on the bed, unable to move. Lucius strode confidently to her and almost lovingly caressed her cheek where a bruise was already forming. A shiver ran up Hermione's spine while Lucius spoke softly.

"Yes, my darling little Mudblood, you are quite right for the picking. I must say, they do make your kind pretty on the outside." Suddenly his voice turned cold. "However, your insides are nothing but filth and dirty blood."

With the same hand he used to caress her, he backhanded her. Hermione flinched, but still refused to cry.

"Are you afraid of me, Mudblood? Are you afraid of what I will do to you?"

Hermione shook her head defiantly.

"You should be afraid. Do you have any idea how much I hate Harry Potter? He has been the bane of my existence for far too long. Because of his lucky triumphs over my Master, I have had to suffer... consequences. But today seems to be a very lucky day for the two of us, Miss Granger. Yes, lucky indeed. You see, you get to touch a Malfoy, and I get to have a piece of Harry Potter's whore!"

Lucius laid on top Hermione and stuck his fingers inside of her. "What do we have here?"

Hermione started to panic. "Please, Mr. Malfoy... I'm... I've never." Hermione begged him not to do what she knew he was going to do. Her efforts were futile, however.

"Oh, this IS your lucky day. Don't worry, darling, you'll not die a virgin. You will die with the juices of a Malfoy flowing through you." Lucius laughed maniacally and continued to assault her with his fingers.

Suddenly he stopped. He got off of her and pointed his wand to something in the corner of the room. "Ennervate."

"Draco, come here."

The sound of Draco's voice could be heard. "Father, please, just let us go. I am your son. Can't you please just let us go?"

"I'm sorry, Draco, but I can't do that. You may check on your Mudblood if you'd like."

Draco took the bait and hurried to where Hermione was lying on her side in a fetal position. "Granger, I'm sorry... I'm so sorry. Please, I'm going to try to get us out of here. Granger Hermione."

"Malfoy, I can't move. I don't know what he's done to me, but I can't get out of this bed. There's a shield or something that is keeping me in this bed."

Draco stood up again. "What have you done to her? She has done nothing to you. Your anger is toward me for not following your damned Master. Let her go."

Lucius smiled evilly at Draco. "You will get your punishment the same time she gets her reward. You see, I told her she would have the chance to lose her virginity to a Malfoy before she dies."

"Please, Father, don't..." Draco begged.

"Oh, I'm not going to rape her, Draco. No, you see because of you, I CAN'T," Lucius yelled.

And to Hermione's and Draco's horror, Lucius unzipped his trousers and lowered his pants. Hermione screamed, and Draco looked as if he was going to vomit.

"Yes, it's disgusting, isn't it? You see, Draco, this is my punishment for my son abandoning me. The Dark Lord thought I should no longer be able to bear children, so he took care of it for me. It would have been better if he would have simply removed it, but that's not really his style. So, instead, he made me into this monster. I'm not even a man. I'm an IT."

Sure enough, where there should have been a man's appendage there was a mangled, bloody monstrosity. Voldemort had removed the skin by magic and burned what was left. Just before Lucius had lost consciousness, Voldemort ended the spell, so that Lucius would wish for death.

"You see, Draco, the Dark Lord is none too forgiving. I begged for the mercy of death, but he is not merciful. So, here I stand before you, a monster." Lucius turned to Hermione. "Do not fear, my dear, you will still get a Malfoy."

Without warning, Lucius silently divested Draco's clothes with a wave of his wand. "Now, Draco, for your punishment, you will lose your own virginity to a Mudblood."

If the situation hadn't been so dire, Draco would have been angry for Lucius spilling that bit of information.

"I won't do it, Father," Draco said stubbornly, trying to cover his bits with his hands.

"You'll have no choice," Lucius drawled.

"D-Draco?"

Draco turned to the sound of Hermione's whisper. He bent low to hear her.

"Draco, if you don't do it, he'll put you under the Imperius Curse. You know he will, and he can make you do horrible things to me. Please, Draco, just do it and get it over with."

"But, Hermione, I can fight the Imperius Curse. I've been training with Severus. I know I can do it."

"Draco, please, is that a chance you want to take? You've been training, but you haven't completely mastered it. Please, I'm begging you, don't let him. He could force you to kill me, Draco."

Draco paled. Taking Hermione's virginity would be bad enough. But he would not have her blood on his hands. That was not a chance he was willing to take. "You're right. I'll be gentle, I promise."

Hermione nodded.

"Draco, you are wasting my time. Climb onto the girl and do your part as a Malfoy."

Draco lay on the bed beside Hermione and rubbed her arm. He looked deeply into her honey eyes and whispered, "Please forgive me."

Hermione stretched out and opened herself to him. He took a moment to marvel at her beauty and the curves of her body. If he had been given the chance to discover her on his own, he would have been ready and willing. However, the situation couldn't have been less romantic, and for that reason, he was flaccid.

"Do you need help, Draco?" Lucius asked.

Before Draco could respond, Lucius flicked his wand at Draco, which caused him to become erect. "There, now you are ready."

Draco closed his eyes in humiliation. He reached down to Hermione and used his fingers to get her ready for him. He knew he would never be able to look her in the eyes again.

"ENTER HER!" Lucius bellowed.

Draco looked into Hermione's eyes once more and slowly entered her. She gave a small yelp of pain when he broke through her hymen. Then he had begun to move slowly.

"Harder, Draco. You are a Malfoy! Act like one!"

Draco swallowed and moved faster. He looked into Hermione's eyes, hoping to give her some comfort and to let her know how very sorry he was for hurting her.

Hermione blinked back tears and, to let him know that she didn't blame him, she started to move with him.

It was the first time for both of them, so Draco wasn't surprised when pressure started to build in his groin. He couldn't stop it if he had wanted to. He looked pleadingly into her eyes as he emptied himself into her. He was humiliated and horrified at what he'd done.

As their heartbeats slowed, Draco rolled off of Hermione and stood.

"Bravo, Draco, bravo." Lucius gave a mock clap. "Now, for the finale."

"Father, please, you have hurt her enough. Please don't kill her," Draco whispered.

Lucius contemplated his son for a moment, then strode over to Hermione, who was lying on her back, tears now pouring freely.

"I'll not kill you, Mudblood. However, you will pay dearly for turning my son against me. You shall regret the day you stepped one filthy foot into my home. No, I'll not kill you; I have something better planned for you. I may not have been able to rape your body, Mudblood, but I will spend the rest of my days raping your mind; smartest witch of your age, indeed. When I am finished with you, I will rip you from your navel to your heart. Rest assured, Mudblood; I. Will. Break. You." Lucius finished in a terrifying whisper.

Lucius stood and pointed his wand at Draco, clothing him with a wave. He then stood back from them and pointed his wand at Hermione. Before the black light hit her, Draco was on top of her.

"No... Draco," Lucius whispered. Lucius stood still, not knowing which way to turn. In the aftermath of the day's events, Lucius' madness was starting to subside.

He walked over to the unconscious bodies of Draco and Hermione. He took a moment to comb his hands through his son's platinum hair, so much like his own. Then he took a moment to look at Hermione's slack face. He traced the lines of the bruises he had left there.

Lucius took a step back and stared at them both, and then he sank to his knees. "What have I done? I am his father. What have I done to my own child?" Then he looked at Draco again and whispered, "I don't know how, but I will make this up to you, Draco. I will repent for my sins. Please forgive me, Son. I will make this up to you both. But I can't let you know what I have made you do. She will be your wife now, Draco. I cannot let you know."

Lucius stood and walked swiftly to the desk in the corner of the room. "There is only one way to fix this." He pulled out two phials from the desk drawer.

After extracting the memories from his victims, Lucius corked the phials and gave one last fleeting look at the couple. "I hope you will forgive me one day. I hope you will find love in the end. Whatever sacrifice is necessary, I will make it, if it means you will find peace."

A moment later, Lucius Disappeared with a pop, and the memory ended

Draco and Hermione pulled themselves out of the Pensieve. They didn't speak at first until Harry finally asked, "Well?"

Draco sighed and rubbed his tired eyes. Hermione just stared into space, trembling, but neither said a word.

The sound of Violet's crying startled them all out of the moment. Harry was still holding her, and he tried to rock her back to sleep in his arms.

"Here, I'll take her," Hermione started, still shaking.

"No, let me take her," Draco pleaded.

Draco took the baby into his arms. After bouncing her for a moment, she finally fell back to sleep. When Hermione's trembling began to subside, she finally spoke.

"I don't understand it; how did we see all of that stuff after we were knocked out? If those were my memories, how did we see what Lucius did?"

"Because he added his own memories," Draco whispered. He became lost in thought, and something he had meant to ask his mother earlier dawned on him.

"Mother, do you know if the crescent moon birthmark means anything? Does it symbolize anything?"

Narcissa cleared her throat. "My grandmother used to tell me that it was a sign of someone who will have great power, but not necessarily great magical power. There are all kinds of power. She once told me that I had the power to find the good in people. Why do you ask?"

"I was just curious to know what's in store for us. I believe Violet will be a very special little girl. After all, she is my daughter," Draco said softly.

A/N: Please review. I have sweated and worried over this chapter until I received a migraine. Now... back to our regularly scheduled program.

The Aftermath

Chapter 22 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: I have just returned from a most relaxing trip to Ireland. Beautiful! Please forgive me for the amount of time it took to get this out. As always, RobisonRocket is my Queen.

The Aftermath

Chapter 21

Silence descended upon the room after Draco's simple but earth-shattering pronouncement.

"Draco," said Narcissa. "Are you absolutely sure?"

"Yes, Mother. She can only be mine. With the evidence that is so plainly on the back on her neck, and quite literally in her eyes, there is no other man that can be Violet's father."

Just then, Violet woke and started to cry. Narcissa smiled down at her granddaughter. "You're hungry, aren't you? Harry, won't you join me for some tea while my granddaughter gets her belly full." This was not a question.

Harry was brought out of his stupor. "Yes, of course. I need to Floo call Ginny as well, so I can check on her and Abby. I told her I'd be gone a while, but I still want to look in on them."

"I understand. I hope that beautiful wife of yours won't mind that you have tea with an older woman," Narcissa teased.

Harry blushed crimson and grinned. "I guess I better tell her up front so rumors don't start swirling around."

Narcissa laughed. "I can see the headlines now: Married Boy-Who-Lived Spotted Canoodling with Fiancé of Feared Potions Master!"

Narcissa waited a beat until the three faces around her contorted into understanding. When Draco's eyes widened, Narcissa grinned. "Caught on?"

"You? You and Severus? You're getting married?" Draco was gobsmacked to say the least.

"Yes, darling, he asked me to marry him while we were still in Paris. We will make it official in a private ceremony in a few months when term is over."

Draco glared at his mother with pursed lips and then broke out into a full-fledged grin. "I think it's wonderful, Mother. You deserve happiness after all these years."

Narcissa blushed prettily and whispered, "Thank you."

Harry held out his arm. "Shall we?"

Narcissa giggled. "Yes, we shall."

After exiting the room, Draco and Hermione were once again engulfed in silence. Draco watched as Hermione pulled down her dressing gown and helped Violet get settled in for a feeding. Once Violet began her feast, Hermione looked up to catch Draco watching her. She raised one eyebrow, and he blushed at being caught.

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to stare. It's just fascinating, you know, watching you do something so natural." Draco flushed again as he realized the words that had just tumbled from his mouth.

"That's okay, Draco, you don't have to apologize. It is quite fascinating, isn't it? I never thought I'd want to be a mother, and now that I have Violet, I can't think of ever wanting anything so much."

Draco gave Hermione a small nod and looked down at his shoes.

Hermione sighed and fell back into her pillow that had been propped up to make her more comfortable. "Draco, we have to talk about this. We have to talk about what we saw."

"I know that, Hermione, but I'm not sure what there is to say. I mean, it happened. I forced myself on you."

"Is that what you saw? If it is, then you and I have very different opinions of what was in that Pensieve," Hermione said, pointing at the Pensieve.

Draco scowled at the offending object that still held Hermione's memories from that monumental day.

Hermione took his lack of response as an invitation to continue. "Draco, come here and sit down."

Draco hesitated, but with Hermione's persistent patting of the spot on the bed, he walked over to her. More hesitation ensued, and finally he acquiesced.

He was there, but he'd be damned if he'd speak first. Hermione had to be the one to open the proverbial can of worms.

"Draco, look at me. You did not force yourself on me. Don't you see, all these months, I've been going crazy because I thought I was raped. Draco, I almost died because I thought I was broken on the inside. Hermione Granger, the brave little Gryffindor know-it-all, had been raped by Death-Eater extraordinaire, Lucius Malfoy. But, because of you, Draco, that didn't happen. You didn't let him curse you, and you were gentle to a fault."

Hermione let a blush creep into her cheeks before she continued. "Actually, if we had been under different circumstances, I believe I would have enjoyed it."

Draco had to fight to keep his smirk at bay. "So, you don't blame me? You're not angry with me?"

"Angry with you? Draco, you saved my life. You also left me with some dignity. Besides, as bad as things were, we were given a gift." Hermione's gaze drifted to the baby in her arms. Draco smiled down at Violet as well.

"Do you, um, still want to marry me, Hermione?" Draco asked almost absently.

Hermione was surprised by his vulnerability. She balanced Violet and moved over enough to leave room for Draco. "Here, lay next to me," she said.

Draco did as he asked and tentatively stretched out next to her, turning to his side so he was facing her. They stayed that way in silence until Violet stopped suckling and fell into a deep sleep. After burping her, Hermione bundled the baby back into her blanket and turned to her side, facing Draco. She placed Violet between them and delicately moved some of Draco's fallen hair out of his eyes. With that same hand, she cupped his cheek and whispered, "Draco, I can't wait to become your wife. You make me happy, and I love you."

Draco kissed the inside of Hermione's hand. "I love you, too, Hermione." They let the silence stretch between them until they both fell into a contented sleep.

An hour later, Narcissa opened the door just enough to peek in. She smiled at the scene before her. Hermione on her side with her hand resting on the baby's chest, and Draco with his arm stretched possessively over both of them.

She closed the door and smiled at Harry. "They are asleep. I think our work here is done, Mr. Potter."

"I hope they are going to be okay," Harry said.

"Do you? Hmm, I remember a time when you wouldn't have wanted such a thing where my son was concerned."

"I guess times have changed. People grow up. If I learned one thing from my time with my aunt, I would have to say it would be forgiveness."

Narcissa smiled at Harry and then patted his cheek. "No, darling, you learned that from your mother. If she could forgive your father for all of his transgressions, I believe she could forgive anyone. And she was able to forgive me for marrying a Death Eater."

Harry smiled sadly at Narcissa. Their tea time was mostly talk about Abby and how Severus and Narcissa rekindled their romance. They hadn't broached the subject of his mother again. But Harry wanted to make Narcissa understand that he didn't blame her for anything.

"You didn't have a choice, Narcissa."

"Didn't I? I don't know. I wasn't brave enough to stand up to my family. I was afraid I'd be chucked out on my bum. But that's all in the past now. It wasn't all horrible. I got a wonderful son out of the deal. I got a cottage in Hogsmeade that Lucius never stepped foot in. And I got to watch my son grow up, even though he didn't know it. I also got to attend his matches."

Harry's eyes grew wide. "You watched the matches? I never saw you. I could have used that information to take the mickey out of Draco."

Narcissa laughed. "I'm so sorry I didn't give you ammunition."

"Well, I'll have to find a way to work it in," Harry said while rubbing his hands together as if he was plotting.

Narcissa laughed again. "I have had a really nice afternoon, Harry. You are a terribly sweet young man."

Harry grinned. "Thank you. I had a nice time as well. Severus needs to bring you by the house some time. Ginny loves to fuss over guests, and I believe you'll take a liking to Abby."

"Oh, that would be wonderful."

"Have a good evening, Narcissa. I've got to get home to my girls."

Narcissa kissed Harry on the cheek and bid him farewell.

Harry stepped out of the Floo and dusted himself off, taking care not to get ash on the floor. He looked around the empty sitting room. The house was way too quiet for his liking. He'd been part of the Weasley family since he was eleven years old. Quiet and Weasley just did not go together. Now he was married to the most spirited Weasley of the bunch, and she was not making any noise at all.

"Ginny!" Harry yelled, slightly panicked. He figured he'd always have a bit of panic in his system. But Ginny hadn't said anything about leaving, so he felt he had a right to panic a bit.

He heard the breaking of a teacup coming from the kitchen. Drawing his wand, he approached the door. Harry turned the knob and peeped into the kitchen. "Gin," he said again.

"I'm in here, Harry." He heard Ginny's quiet voice from the kitchen table. He walked in and approached her cautiously. She was sitting at the kitchen table sipping tea. Harry looked around and saw the broken teacup still on the floor. He cleaned it up with his wand and glanced at this wife.

"What's wrong?" Harry looked around the room. "Where's Abigail?"

"She's with Mum and Petunia. They took her to the zoo in Muggle London."

"That's brilliant. I'll bet she has loads of fun. Are you okay?" Harry asked, watching Ginny worrying over her cup.

"I'm fine. However, I just got the strangest news from Mum."

"What is it? Is Arthur alright? It's not one of the twins, is it?"

"No, it's not Dad. The twins are always into something, so it's not them, either. It's Ron."

Harry stilled. Ron. Something's happened to Ron. "W-what could have possibly happened to Ron?"

"He's gotten himself a new job. He's taking over for Madam Hooch. You know she got married, right?"

Harry shuddered. "Yeah, I heard. But, why is that bad? I think it's wonderful, and they couldn't have found a better person for the job. Ron knows Quidditch better than anyone."

"Yes, it's wonderful, Harry. But that put him in close proximity to one Pansy Parkinson. Mum informed me that they have been seeing each other. He hasn't said anything because he was worried about how Hermione would take it. And I dare say she won't be pleased."

Harry cringed. "I can't believe he's hooked up with her. But Ron's a smart bloke. If she's no good, he'll see it."

"That's not all, Harry. He told Mum that Pansy's been researching how to get Draco out of his binding with Hermione. He was upset at first, but she made him believe that she was only doing it because Draco was her friend and nobody should have to be forced to get married."

"Gin, there are a lot of things we just found out about Draco and Hermione. I will let Hermione go into detail with you, but it turns out that Violet is Draco's baby. Lucius tried to force him to rape Hermione, but it didn't really go that way. Voldemort used some nasty spell on Lucius and, without going into too much detail, rendered him useless."

Ginny's hand was on her mouth and her eyes wide. "Oh, dear Merlin, Harry."

"Yeah, I know. Look, I don't know much about this bond or whatever it is, but I think the fact that Violet is Draco's baby complicates things."

Ginny smiled evilly.

Harry suddenly became nervous. "What?"

"Oh, I don't know. Poor little Pansy is doing all this work for nothing. And she is probably going to fall for my brother before this is all over. He will turn on the Weasley charm, and she won't know what hit her."

Harry leaned forward. "Tell me about this Weasley charm. I don't believe I've heard of it. Anyway, I thought you said Ron was an idiot."

"Oh, he is an idiot. But, he can be a charming idiot. And, Harry, you succumbed to the Weasley charm a long time ago. And there will never be any hope for you, Mr. Potter."

Harry leaned closer and whispered, "And why is that, Mrs. Potter?"

"Because, between me and your children, you will never be able to escape the Weasley charm."

"Believe me, I can take you and Abby on any day, Ginevra."

Ginny stood up and gave Harry a kiss on his nose. Grabbing his hand and placing it on her belly, Ginny smiled and said, "I said *children*, Harry."

She then left the kitchen, hips swaying, before Harry ever caught on to what she said. She was at the foot of the stairs when she finally heard him yell, "Ginny!" She giggled and ran up the stairs, knowing he would find her.

"Why are you staring at me?" Hermione asked with her eyes still closed.

"How did you know?" Draco asked in response.

Hermione opened her eyes and whispered, "I can feel it."

Draco grinned and rubbed her cheek. Before they could continue their conversation, Violet started to wake.

"Oh, is my pretty baby ready for some breakfast?" Hermione asked, sitting up and preparing herself to nurse.

Draco picked the baby up and handed her to Hermione. He watched, mesmerized, as Hermione began to feed Violet. He looked up at her face and noticed tears sparkling in her eyes.

"Hermione, what's wrong? Does it hurt?" Draco started searching for some way to help her.

"No, Draco, it doesn't. I was just thinking I could have killed her, Draco." At this Hermione started to cry a little harder.

"I could have killed my own daughter your daughter. I keep thinking that if Remus and my mum hadn't found me, we wouldn't have her."

Draco wrapped his arm around Hermione's shoulder, and she sobbed into his neck while still nursing the baby. "Shh, love. It's alright. She's alive, and she's fine. Look at her. She's beautiful, she is." Draco used his free hand to tilt Hermione's chin up toward him. "And you are alright. You are alive. And you are beautiful."

Hermione smiled, and Draco gave her a soft kiss.

After Violet was finished with her feeding, Draco took her from Hermione and stood.

"Where are you going?" Hermione inquired.

"I think my little angel needs her nappy changed, so I'm going to do it."

"You? You must be joking. This, I have to see." Hermione watched with amusement as Draco struggled with removing the nappy. Then, she giggled when she saw the face he made over the contents.

"You, child, cannot possibly be a Malfoy," Draco said to his daughter. "Malfoys would never make a mess such as this. Ah, well, you do have some of Granger's blood, I suppose."

"Hey!" Hermione yelled with mock indignation. She grabbed a pillow and pulled it back as if to launch it at him.

"You can't throw anything at me, woman! Have a baby with me." Draco gave her his trademark smirk, which rarely came out these days and Hermione sighed in exasperation.

"Draco Malfoy, I will get you."

Draco finished with the nappy and picked his daughter up. Holding her close, he turned toward Hermione and looked at her intently. "You already have me."

A/N: There is a little fluff to get me back into your good graces.

Oh, Brother

Chapter 23 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: Please enjoy this fun little chapter. I am already writing the next one, so hopefully it won't take very long. Again, to RobisonRocket -- without you, I'd be lost.

Oh, Brother!

Chapter 22

"My goodness, I'm exhausted." Hermione sat heavily on the sofa in her flat. Draco came in behind her, carrying his infant daughter. After depositing her in her basinet, he sat heavily next to Hermione.

"It was quite a long ceremony. Do you think ours will be that long?"

Hermione stretched out and laid her head in Draco's lap. "Oh, I don't know. I think it will be different with us. It will be *our* ceremony then. I think the only thing we'll be anticipating is the honeymoon."

Draco smirked. "And why is that?"

Hermione looked up at him with her eyes twinkling. "You, sir, are incorrigible. Oh, but I hope ours is at least half as beautiful as your mother's. And I can't get over how incredibly handsome Severus looked. I've never seen him with his hair pulled back and looking so happy."

Draco chuckled. "True. Severus and happy don't usually go in the same sentence. He seems to make her happy though, doesn't he?"

"Yes, he does. But enough about them, we need to discuss arrangements for our own ceremony. Where would you like for it to be? Where are we going to live? I would suggest you move in here, but it will get awfully cramped after a while."

Draco sighed. "You're right. I think I have that worked out. But there are some details I want to take care of first. I would like to get married at Hogwarts. I don't know if that's possible, but I was thinking we could do it by the lake."

Hermione threw her arms around Draco and squealed. "Oh, Draco, that's perfect. I hadn't even thought of that. We could do it in the spring. You know how beautiful it is there in the spring."

There was a tapping at the window, and Draco extracted himself from Hermione to retrieve the parchment that was tied to the large Tawny owl. Violet stirred at the sound, but didn't wake.

"What is it?" Hermione asked, rewarding the owl with a treat before it flew away.

Draco read over the parchment with his eyes smiling. "The details I have been waiting for. Look, I need to take care of a few things. I will be gone for a while, but I won't be gone long. Perhaps we could ask Gin if she'll watch Violet tonight. If everything goes according to plan, I want to take you to dinner."

"Why? What plan are you talking about?"

"Nope, I'm not going to tell you. I promise that you won't be disappointed. Just trust me?"

Hermione giggled. "Trust a Slytherin. Isn't that kind of an oxymoron? I don't know if one can trust a Slytherin."

Draco wiggled his eyes at Hermione. "You don't really have a choice."

Before Hermione could give her rebuttal, Draco Disapparated away.

"Ah, Mr. Malfoy, there you are. You didn't waste any time."

"No, Mr. Johnson. I didn't want to wait another second. Do you have the papers drawn up for my mother?"

"Yes, Mr. Malfoy. I had them sent to her by owl this morning. I believe she will be delighted. However, I do wonder what she and Mr. Snape will do when the new term starts."

Draco grinned. "Mr. Johnson, don't worry about that. If everything works out like it should, things will fall into place."

Just then the door to the solicitor's office opened. "Ah, there you are Theodore. Mr. Malfoy, you remember my sister's son, Theodore Nott."

Nott stuck out his hand. "Hello, Draco. It's been a while."

"Yes, it has been. You stayed out of Azkaban, I see impressive," Draco sneered.

Nott grinned. "That's the beauty of staying neutral in a war. You win either way."

"Yes, well, that's very brave of you. Listen, I'll be on my way. Thank you, Mr. Johnson. Let me know the moment my mother's owl sends a reply. I'd like to have things taken care of before term starts."

"Yes, of course, Mr. Malfoy. I'll stay in touch."

Draco made his way out the door and into the streets of Diagon Alley. The streets were alive with children readying themselves for the new school term, and Draco took a moment to enjoy the excitement in the air. "Not long and it will be Violet's turn," he said to himself. The thought alone was enough to make him happy, but with a slight bit of dread. How on earth would the other children react to the child of Draco Malfoy and Hermione Granger?

Before he could get lost in the crowd, Nott appeared from the building Draco had just vacated. "Hey, Draco, care for a drink? I was just on my way to the Leaky."

Draco didn't really want to spend much time with him, but thoughts of Violet growing up and leaving home drove him to need some relaxation. "Sure, why not?"

As they started walking, Nott spoke up again. "So, Draco, I hear you've been getting your hands dirty."

Draco stopped dead in his tracks. "What are you on about?"

"Oh, come on, Draco. Don't pretend you don't know. I heard a rumor that you and the Mudblood Granger were getting hitched because you knocked her up. What's that all about? She got you under some kind of spell or something? You can tell me. What's she really got hiding under those robes? I'll bet the little know-it-all swot has some pretty good stuff. I wonder how Lucius would feel about a little half-blood grandchild."

They were just passing Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes when Draco grabbed Nott's arm and pulled him into an alleyway. He slammed Nott against the wall and had his wand out and digging into Nott's throat before Nott ever knew what hit him.

"It's interesting," stated Draco, "the kind a training one gets when they fight for the right side. Training with Harry Potter you remember him, right? Dark-headed bloke with the scar? The one who defeated the Dark Lord? We became pretty good friends, he and I. I trained with him. Amazing the sorts of things we learned."

Draco's voice dropped the casual tone. In a deadly whisper, Draco dug harder into Nott's throat and spoke very plainly. "If you ever so much as whisper her name again, I will not hesitate to practice every curse I ever learned. I will not kill you, you sodding bastard, but I will make you wish you were never born."

A pair of hands grabbed Draco's shoulders. "Come on, mate, he's not worth it."

It was Ron. He had just emerged from the twins' shop when he caught the commotion in the alleyway.

Draco pulled away and pocketed his wand. He turned to leave with Ron, when Nott got his nerve to speak again.

"You think you're one of them now, don't you, Malfoy? You think you're better than everyone because you're in with the bloody Chosen One and his bloody friends? Well, you aren't. You are just like me, Malfoy. You are just like your father. You will always be a Malfoy. A leopard can't change his spots, and you will always be a Slytherin."

Draco was seething. Nott had been speaking to Draco's back as Draco was retreating. When he turned back around, he felt a bit of triumph to see Nott flinch.

"You're right, Nott. I am a Slytherin. And while a leopard can't change his spots, a snake *can* shed his skin. I'm not sure you've notice the world changing around you, Nott, but it has. You don't deserve to even *know* Hermione. You will never speak of her again. Do you understand me?"

"You're just like us, Malfoy. I don't care how much time you spend with the Mudblood."

Draco pulled his wand again, stepping closer. Ron had pulled his wand as well.

Nott snorted. "Going to hex an unarmed man, gentlemen?"

Neither Ron nor Draco made a move.

"I didn't think so. Now, Malfoy, why don't you run along to your new little friends? I'm sure Potter needs someone to polish his wand for him. And then you can change the nappy on that brat that he had with his little whore--."

Nott didn't get another word out. Ron had dropped his wand and punched him.

"What the fuck was that for, Weasley?" Nott was on the ground holding his jaw.

Draco was doubled up, laughing. "You IDIOT! Harry Potter's wife is Ron's sister. Don't you know any better than to insult Ginny Potter?"

"Something the matter, mates?"

Ron and Draco swirled around to see Fred and George entering into the alleyway.

Fred gestured toward Nott. "We heard a noise; what's going on?"

Ron, still furious and nursing his hand, said, "That git broke my hand with his face."

Draco grinned. "I've something for that back at Hermione's flat. I'll fix you up."

"So," George continued. "Why did you let him use his face to break your hand?"

Draco shook his head at Nott. "You're in for it now."

Ron grimaced at the pain in his hand again. "First, the idiot called Hermione a Mudblood."

Draco smiled again at the look of pure hatred on the twins' faces.

"Then, he called Gin a whore," Ron finished.

Draco and Nott both looked toward the twins to gauge their reaction. Draco almost felt sorry for Nott when he saw identical grins spread before him.

"It's sad, really, isn't it, Fred?"

"Too right, George."

"I've never known anyone so stupid, have you, Fred?"

"Nope. Never in my life, George."

"W-who's stupid?" Nott asked, trying but failing to hide his creeping fear.

"Well," said Fred.

"You insulted our Hermione," finished George.

"That was pretty stupid, seeing as how she has loads of people who love her. Why, even Snape is rather fond of her," continued Fred.

"But, the funniest thing is," George started again. "You insulted our sister. That was really, really stupid."

"I'm not afraid of you," Nott said with a little less vigor than he had meant.

"No, you may not be afraid of us, but you see, Gin has six brothers," replied Fred.

George looked quizzically at Fred. "Can we really count Percy? I mean, I know he's our brother, but he's not very scary."

"There is strength in numbers, George, focus."

"Right," George said. "You have a point there. Besides, there's always Harry. You can't just piss Harry off and get away with it. He's loved Ginny for ages. She's our sister, so we *have* to protect her. It's the law or something. Harry, though, he *chose* her. That's some scary business, mate."

Nott pulled himself off of the ground and winced at the pain still in his jaw.

Fred took a step closer. All the amusement left his eyes, and he spoke quite seriously to Nott. "I'll tell you this once and only once. If you ever insult or go anywhere near Hermione or our sister, you will have the whole lot of us come down on you." Then Fred gave him an evil grin. "And when we're finished with you, we'll hand you over to the witches in question."

George snorted. "Oh, I wouldn't want to be in your shoes. Hermione's reputation precedes her. But, Gin can bring all six of her brothers and Harry to our knees just by pulling her wand out. She's right wicked with charms. I'd watch your back if I were you."

"Well," Draco said. "I think our work here is done. Come on, Ron, I was just on my way to get a drink. Oh, and Nott, don't forget that these two," Draco said, indicating Fred and George, "were the wizards behind Umbridge's departure from Hogwarts."

Just as Ron and Draco were heading down the street, talking animatedly about the things that Fred and George would do to Nott, an owl landed on Draco's shoulder.

"Oy, what's this?" Draco called. Noticing the parchment tied to the owl's leg, he pulled it off. The owl was gone before Draco could even worry about not having a treat to give him.

He opened the parchment and read. With a grin he looked up at Ron. "This just turned into a celebratory drink, my friend."

Hermione had just closed the Floo connection after talking with Ginny and making arrangements to drop Violet off at Harry and Ginny's for the evening. She was now pacing about the room, getting worried. Draco had been gone for a while now, and Hermione didn't know if she should start getting ready for their evening or not. Before she could think on it any longer, there was a knock at her door.

Hermione gave a sigh of relief. Opening the door, she said, "Finally." Then she halted when she saw who it was.

"What do you want?" Hermione asked, not letting the visitor in.

"I'd like to talk to you."

"You can state your business here, Parkinson."

"Please, Granger. I have something important to say to you."

Before Hermione could protest any further, Violet started to cry. Hermione left the door opened and went to the baby. Pansy took the opportunity to come inside the flat.

Hermione heard the door close and looked up. "Why are you still here? I didn't invite you into my home."

"I'm sorry, Granger, I just need to talk to you." Then Pansy looked closely at the baby. "She's really very beautiful. I only got a glimpse of her at the wedding."

"Well, the only reason you got to go to the wedding was because of Ron. Severus and Narcissa wouldn't have invited you. Anyway, that's not why you're here, so get on with it. I want you gone by the time Draco gets home."

"So, he's living here, then?" Pansy asked, looking around for signs of Draco's habitation.

"Not exactly, but that's not really any of your business. We are waiting until after we are married if you must know."

"What's the point?" Pansy asked her. "Everyone knows that Draco is that baby's father."

"Well." Hermione blanched. "I'm sure Ron has shared the circumstances of her birth with you, seeing as how you two are so close and all." Hermione did nothing to hide the sarcasm in her voice. She was still furious with Ron for hooking up with Pansy and daring to take her to the wedding.

"Look, Granger, what if I told you that there is information that could change your circumstances? There is new evidence that could change things for you and Draco."

"What are you talking about, Parkinson? Is this just another one of your schemes to get Draco away from me?"

"It started out that way, yeah, but my own circumstances have changed. I don't want Draco for myself anymore, Granger. I know he's happy with you, and to be honest, I have fallen in love with Ron. So do you want to know or not?"

Hermione stared at Pansy, looking for any traces that the girl was lying. Finding none, she gestured for Pansy to sit down. Pansy did so and squared her shoulders. She was caught off-guard by the beauty of the baby before her for a moment, and words failed her.

Hermione made a coughing noise, which shook Pansy out of her thoughts.

"Alright, Parkinson, this had better be good."

Pansy gave Hermione a timid smile and said, "You and Draco are not bound."

A/N: Ooooh! That nasty Pansy is such a trouble maker.

A House-Elf's Story

Chapter 24 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: You can thank the wonderful RobisonRocket for the quick turn on this chapter. She is one of a kind, and I don't know what I'd do without her. Bless you, RR!

A House-Elf's Story

Chapter 24

The atmosphere at the Leaky Cauldron was excited. There were people running in and out, and Tom the barman was at the top of his game. Draco and Ron took the only table available, which was in the corner. After placing their orders, Draco sat back, grinning like the Cheshire Cat.

"What?" Ron asked, slightly uncomfortable at Draco's display.

"Weasley, my friend, I am a very happy man today very happy indeed. And tonight, if Gin will watch Violet for us, Hermione will be very happy as well."

Ron grimaced. "Draco, there are some things a bloke doesn't need to hear about his best friend especially if that best friend in question is a girl. I don't want to know about what you and Hermione get up to that makes you so *happy*."

Draco chuckled. "No, no nothing like that. I would tell you, but it's only right that I tell Hermione first. You understand, right? So, let's make a toast, shall we?" Draco raised his glass. Ron hesitantly followed suit.

"Okay, to Hermione, our future, and the thing that I can't tell until I tell her." Draco clinked Ron's glass and smiled.

Ron took a drink of his Firewhiskey and regarded Draco thoughtfully. "You really love her, don't you?"

Draco almost spit his drink out, but recovered in time. "Yeah, I do. I don't know how it happened, but I guess just going through the things we went through and spending so much time with her, I fell for her. I am sorry that it took something so horrible to bring us together. I wish I had a Time Turner so I could go back to first year. If I could do that, I'd change a lot of things." Draco said this last bit more to himself than to Ron.

Ron nodded his head in understanding. "It's not your fault, you know. You can't help the kind of man Lucius tried to turn you into. You were just a kid. You should be proud of yourself, though. Not many men do what you did, you know, go against your father."

Draco just stared at Ron.

"What? It's true. I mean look at it this way: I've known all of my life what a foul creature Voldemort was. I've always been on the side of the light, so I never had to do anything that brave. It is one thing to fight for what you believe in, mate, but quite another to fight *against* what you *thought* you believed in. Seems to me that it could all get very confusing." Ron sat back and took another drink.

Draco was absolutely gobsmacked. "You know what, Ron? You are a lot wiser than people give you credit for."

Ron smiled. "If I were cleverer, I would never have let Hermione get away from me. However, I believe you're the right one for her. She's too intelligent for her own good, and I don't think I'm a match for her. You're not either, but you might keep her interested, at least."

"You loved her, didn't you?" Draco asked pleasantly.

"A part of me will always love her, but that part is still at child at Hogwarts. I don't think I could take the grown up Hermione. She's a bit scarier than the one from school, and that one was downright mad sometimes. Brilliant, though."

Draco smiled. "Yeah, brilliant," said Draco, swelling with pride for being the lucky one to have Hermione. Then, remembering something that he meant to ask, he looked intently at Ron again.

"Do I have something on my face? It wouldn't be the first time," Ron said.

"No, mate, I want to know what's going on with you and Pansy."

It was Ron's turn to smile like the Cheshire Cat.

Back at Hermione's flat, the silence that descended upon the room was deafening. Hermione gaped at Pansy.

Blinking rapidly to shake off Hermione's penetrating glare, Pansy asked, "Granger, did you hear what I said?"

"I what? What are you on about? I've read about the bond. I've talked to the Weasleys, who happen to be a very old pureblood family. I've talked to Draco, who knows quite a lot about it. How on earth would you know more about it than anyone else?"

Pansy sighed. "I didn't talk to the humans, Granger. I did what you would have done what you *should* have done. However, in your defense, I understand you were a bit preoccupied."

"Alright, I'll bite. What did you do?"

"I talked to an old house-elf," Pansy said simply.

Hermione's face contorted into a look of absolute self-hatred. "I can't *believe* I didn't go to a house-elf." She rubbed her forehead in exasperation.

"Don't be too hard on yourself, Granger. You wouldn't have gotten it anyway with just *any* house-elf. I don't think Dobby could have given you the information that I got from Willa."

Hermione furrowed her brows. "Who is Willa?"

Pansy smiled. "She's my family's house-elf. She's worked for my grandmother forever. Willa's a descendant of the first house-elf to ever work for the Parkinson family. Her family has been a part of mine since the time of the founders of Hogwarts."

Hermione grimaced.

"I know what you're thinking, Granger, but not all pureblood families are horrible to their elves. To be perfectly honest with you, my great-great grandmother freed one of Willa's ancestors when she was very young. The house-elf refused to leave, even though she was free. She stayed with my family, and her descendants did the same. Granger, I love Willa. She has taken care of me since I was born. She took care of my father when he was born. Regardless of what you might believe, there has never been a Death Eater in my family. We are good people."

"Why did your great-great grandmother free her elf? If your family is so good to their elves, why would she free her? I remember with Crouch freed Winky, and she was devastated."

Pansy giggled. "My great-great grandmother was only a child when she did it. She was a lot like you. She didn't think house-elves should be enslaved either."

Hermione smiled. "So, tell me what you know. How is it that Draco and I aren't bonded?"

"Well, I was doing research on it, and Willa happened to come into the room. So, I asked her how it worked. She said that books and legend never got the workings of a house-elf quite right because most wizards don't understand the ancient history of a house-elf."

Hermione looked at her incredulously. "I've never heard of a house-elf being so frank with their family. Dobby still tries to punish himself, and he's free."

"I told you that my family doesn't treat house-elves the same as most families. I've always told Willa that I want her to be completely honest with me at all times, and she's forbidden to punish herself. I told you, Granger, I love her. Willa is family to me."

Hermione nodded and gestured for Pansy to continue.

"I told Willa about you and Draco. She told me that the only way the binding can be complete in a marital state is if you consummate your bond. Like everyone else, I thought Lucius was Violet's father, so I dropped it. When we found out that Draco was the actual father, I asked her again. She said that you would have to consummate your marriage. I told her that the marriage hasn't actually taken place yet, but the bond had already been consummated. Willa was a bit confused by that. So I asked her if a bond could be broken if the caster was dead."

"And what did she say?"

"Well," said Pansy. "She said that could only happen if the caster's death was by his own wand."

Hermione could not believe what she was hearing. "What of a marriage bond?"

Pansy smiled. "If the marriage has not been consummated, then there is no bond. When the marriage is consummated, you still aren't bound because the caster died by his own wand."

Hermione didn't know how to take all this. "Why are you telling me all of this? I thought you and Ron were happy together. Why would you go to all of this trouble to split up me and Draco?"

Pansy didn't speak for a moment. She seemed to warring with herself on how to answer Hermione's question. Deciding the best way to react was to act. "Do you love Ron? I mean, not in the way a husband loves a wife, but in the way you would love someone you'd die for."

"Of course I love Ron. What sort of question is that? Ron and I have been through more together in our short lives than most people go through in an eternity. Harry and Ron are my family. Everyone knows that. And, yes, I would die for him."

"But there was a time, wasn't there, that you loved him in a different way. You probably would have married him if all of this hadn't happened."

"Yes, Parkinson, I suppose I would have. What is your point?" Hermione was getting angrier by the second.

"I'm not incapable of love, Granger. Not even the kind that you have for Ron and Harry. Draco means the world to me. He understands me better than most. I didn't do all of this because I wanted to split you up. Ron and I yes, Ron helped did this because of the respective love that we have for you two."

"I don't understand," said Hermione.

"For the smartest witch of your age, Granger, you can be so stupid. I started all of this, not because I wanted Draco for myself, but because I care enough about him that I wanted to help him. I wanted him to be free, Granger. I wanted him to be free to make his own choices. Ron wanted you to be free as well. So, you see, there was nothing sinister about it."

Hermione didn't know what to say. She looked down at the sleeping baby in her arms. *Free*, she thought. She stood with Violet and placed her in her bassinet. She turned back toward Pansy.

"How do you know for sure that the bond has been broken? Is there a way to tell?" Hermione inquired.

"I believe there is a way, but you'll have to ask a house-elf."

Pansy stood. "I'll just show myself out. I want you to know something, Granger. I really do love Ron. I'll never do anything to hurt him. He's good to me."

Hermione regarded her and gave her a nod. "I believe you. Um, thanks, *Pansy*, I know this wasn't easy for you."

Pansy grinned. "You're welcome, *Hermione*."

Pansy took one last look at the baby resting peacefully in her bassinet and smiled. "I would love to be able to sleep like that, like there's no care in the world. Then again, thanks to Harry, we can all sleep a little easier." More to herself, she whispered, "I hope you always find peace Violet Ginevra Malfoy."

Without another word to Hermione, Pansy let herself out.

Hermione was deep in thought when she heard a distinct pop.

"I'm back, love." Draco's voice sounded from the entrance of the flat.

Hermione came into the living area, carrying a freshly fed Violet.

"I'm sorry it took so long. I ran into Ron, and we had a couple of drinks. Did you talk to Ginny about watching Violet?" Draco decided not to mention his run-in with Nott as he dropped a kiss on Violet's head.

"I did talk to Ginny. She'll be here soon to pick Violet up. What time do you need me to be ready to go?"

Draco looked at his watch. "Probably by seven o'clock. I've made reservations, so I don't want to be late. Are you alright?" Draco couldn't help but notice a distance in Hermione's eyes.

"I'm fine." Deciding not to let anything linger, she asked Draco to have a seat.

"I had a visit from Pansy Parkinson today, Draco."

Draco's demeanor changed instantly. "What did she want? Surely she's not still trying to get us to split up. Ron told me that he was in love with her, and he plans to ask her to marry him. He has the ring and everything."

Hermione beamed. "That's wonderful."

"It is? I mean I'm happy for them, but I didn't think you would be. You hate Pansy."

"Draco, Pansy brought me some news that might change the way you feel about me." Hermione went into the long speech about the house-elves and their bond, and when she was finished, she finally chanced a glance at Draco.

He looked at her with his mouth gaping open like a fish. "So, we're not bonded?"

"No," Hermione said. "Draco, I can understand if you don't want to go through with the wedding. I mean Pansy's right, you're free."

"So are you, Hermione. You know what, I'm glad Pansy came here today. I'm glad she figured everything out."

Hermione looked at him, slightly taken aback. "You are? I mean, of course you are. I understand completely. Listen, you can have visitation with Violet. I won't stand in your way. We can work something out."

Draco stood and grabbed Hermione around the waist, forcing her to look at him. "Is that what you want?"

"I want you to be happy, Draco. And I want our daughter to be happy." Hermione fought hard against the threatening tears.

"Then, I would suggest you put on that pretty blue dress of yours and get ready. We have reservations that I don't want to miss."

Hermione just stared at him.

Draco sighed. "I'm glad she did it, Hermione, because it means we are both free to make a choice. If you'll have me, I still choose you. I love you, you crazy witch. And now the whole world is going to know that I chose you because I love you and not because of some stupid bond. Now, go get dressed."

Draco left before Hermione had a chance to answer. She looked down at the baby in her arms and, remembering Pansy's parting words, whispered, "You know something, Violet Ginevra Malfoy? You might always find peace after all."

A/N: Only a couple more chapters and an Epilogue.

Cordially Invited

Chapter 25 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: I am so sorry for the delay on this chapter. I had to finish DH and deal with some personal issues. All is well now and back to normal. Please leave a review. Only one chapter and an Epilogue left after this. Enjoy!!

Cordially Invited

Chapter 25

Hermione had just finalized the guest list for her wedding when she heard a knock at the door. Hermione rushed to the door and whispered, so as not to wake the baby. "Who's there?"

The visitor chuckled and whispered back, "Remus."

Hermione opened the door and gave her old friend with the gentle smile a welcoming hug. "Hi, Remus, how are you? Please, come in."

"Why are we whispering?" Remus asked. When Hermione indicated the baby, he nodded his head. "I need to speak to you about something."

Hermione waved Remus into the kitchen. Setting out the tea, she took her seat. "This sounds serious, Remus. Is everything alright? Is my mother alright?"

Remus grinned. "Slow down. Your mother is fine. I do need to ask you something, though."

Hermione nodded for him to continue.

"You know that I have been seeing her for a while now, Hermione. Your mother and I, well, we love one another." Remus took Hermione's grin as a sign of encouragement and went on.

"I guess what I'm trying to say is that she and I aren't getting any younger. She has accepted me and my lycanthropy, regardless of how much I tried to change her mind. She's hard-headed, that one."

Hermione laughed.

"What I'm trying to say ask is... Hermione, I would like to ask your mother to marry me, and I would very much like your blessing. I know it seems too soon, but like I said, we aren't getting any younger. I, that is, we, would like to start a family together."

Hermione was taken aback. This wasn't at all what she had expected. Sure, she had a feeling that, if Remus and her mother stayed together, they would end up married. But the idea of having a little brother or sister younger than her own daughter was, well, strange.

Remus started to fidget at her silence. Hermione noticed his nervousness and smiled. "Remus, of course you have my blessing. I would be honored to have you as a step-father. You are a kind and gentle soul. My mother is very lucky."

Remus beamed at her. "Thank you, my dear, but I am the lucky one."

"When are you planning to ask her?"

"Tonight. I already have a ring; I just wanted to make sure it was okay with you first. And if she accepts, I am hoping to shoot for next weekend. I don't want to wait too long, and I hope to be married before you and Draco leave for your honeymoon. I don't have to worry about a full moon until the end of the month. I'm actually very excited to help your mother take care of Violet. I haven't had the opportunity to look after an infant since Harry was a baby. Blimey, that was a long time ago."

"You'll be fantastic, Remus. I know my mother will say yes." Hermione's eyes became sad for a moment.

"What is it?" Remus asked, concernedly.

"I've been thinking about my father a lot lately. He was a wonderful man, Remus. Unfortunately he won't be able to walk me down the aisle." Hermione gave Remus a pointed look.

Remus sighed. "Hermione, your wedding will be a beautiful affair. I would gladly do the honors, but your mother will need me. You will not be the only one feeling your father's absence. I'm sorry, Hermione. I just can't leave Susan to herself."

Hermione gave Remus a sad smile. "I understand. I wouldn't have it any other way."

Remus stood. "Well, I must go. I need to see to some dinner reservations. Wish me luck."

"You don't need luck. My mother loves you, Remus."

The following morning, Hermione had just returned from dropping Violet off with Mr. and Mrs. Weasley when she heard a tap at her window. She recognized her mother's owl right away.

"Come in, boy." Hermione handed Jupiter an owl treat and untied the scroll. It was simple and said only three words: *I said YES.*

Hermione beamed. "Well, what do you think of that? My mother is marrying a werewolf. Oh, Jupiter, this world will never cease to amaze me."

Hermione scribbled a quick reply and sent Jupiter on his way. Moments later, there was a knock at her door.

My goodness, I'm popular today, thought Hermione.

Hermione asked who it was and grinned stupidly when she heard Draco's sing-song voice answer, "It's me."

She opened the door wide and threw her arms around him. "I wasn't expecting you until tomorrow. Did you get everything squared away? What's going on?"

"Slow down," Draco said. "Where's Violet? I miss her terribly."

Hermione blushed. "She's with the Weasleys. I had some last minute wedding plans that needed tending to, so Mrs. Weasley offered to watch Violet for a while. I'm terribly sorry. We can go back and get her if you'd like."

"No, no, we'll wait. I can help you with whatever you need helping with."

Hermione beamed at him. "Oh, thank you so much. But, right now, I want to know about your trip."

Draco sat back. He had been in Positano, finalizing the details on the Villa that he signed over to his mother in exchange for the cottage in Hogsmeade. His father had wanted Draco to have both of them, but he felt like the final decision should be his mother's. The cottage was her hideaway, after all. He didn't feel right about taking it right out from under her. He didn't want his father to have the satisfaction of giving Draco something that shouldn't have been his to give in the first place.

"All the details are finalized... Professor." Draco grinned.

"Oh, Draco that's wonder what did you call me?"

"You know that Hogwarts will need a new Professor for Potions. Now that Severus and my mother will be living in Italy, Severus has decided to retire. They have enough money to live on. Besides, the only reason that Severus was still teaching was because he needed to act as a spy for Voldemort. Now that the little snake is in reptile hell, Sev can do whatever he wants."

"Better not let him hear you call him 'Sev.'" Hermione laughed. "This has really turned into a wonderful day. But, Draco, I think you are being a little presumptuous calling me Professor, though. I need to apply for the job first."

"I'm sure you'll have to fill out a formal application, but Severus has already recommended you for the position."

Hermione stared at him open-mouthed.

"Um, Hermione, you might want to close your mouth. You're creating a vacuum, and my ears are starting to pop." Draco laughed.

Hermione hit him on the arm. "You're joking, right? I mean, Severus Snape has recommended *me* for the job? I don't believe it."

"Well, it's true. You should be very proud of yourself. You are as clever as you are beautiful, so you will do brilliantly."

"Wow!" Hermione exclaimed again.

Draco wrapped her tightly in his arms. "I better not catch any adolescent, pimply-faced buggers gawking at my wife. I might have to hex someone."

"Oh, Draco, you are so cute when you're jealous. Come on, we have loads to do, and I need to get up to the school so I can talk to Professor Dumbledore."

"That sounds good. We can have lunch at Rosmerta's, and then we can go by the cottage. I really want you to see it. It's spectacular. It's not huge, but it'll be perfect for our little family and, of course, any other children we might want to add to our brood."

"Oh, Draco, do you mean it? You want more children?"

"Of course, I do. I love Violet so much it hurts. I would love to give her a brother or a sister. I never had any siblings, and I was incredibly lonely."

"I know," said Hermione. "I didn't have any siblings either. But, that could change sometime in the near future."

Draco furrowed his eyebrows. "What do you mean?"

"Remus and my mum are getting married. He mentioned that they would like to start a family as well. My mother's only forty years old, so she's still young enough. I think it would be wonderful, actually."

"That is great news. Come here."

"I am *here*," Hermione giggled.

"No, I mean here," Draco said, patting his lap.

Hermione maneuvered herself until she was sitting across Draco's lap. She turned so that she was straddling him and then wrapped her arms around him again.

Draco brought her face down and kissed her. Soon, the kiss deepened, and Draco wrapped his arms tighter around Hermione's waist.

Draco broke the kiss. "I need to feel you, Hermione. Please, let me feel you."

Hermione's eyes clouded over. She nodded and allowed Draco to pull her t-shirt over her head. Then she, feeling brazen, pulled his shirt off as well. They were skin-on-skin now. Feeling another surge of bravery, Hermione unclasped her bra and let it fall from her shoulders.

Draco, not wanting to miss this perfect opportunity, pulled the bra off of her arms and threw it aside. He gaped at her and whispered, "Beautiful."

Hermione felt her flush creep all the way up her spine. "So are you."

They were kissing again. Draco's hands were all over her. He wasn't sure if she would let him touch her breasts, but he slowly inched his hand toward them. Hermione didn't seem to mind. Quite the contrary because when he placed his hands on his target, he elicited a soft moan from Hermione.

Draco used the pad of his thumb to rub the hardened nipple of one breast. Hermione protested with a groan when Draco broke free of her mouth. Her moment of exasperation was changed to excitement when Draco trailed kisses down her neck. Draco reached her other nipple, and she squealed when she felt him roll it with his tongue.

"Oh, gods, Draco, I "

Draco couldn't help but grin. He had rendered the unflappable Hermione Granger speechless. But, Draco knew they had to stop. They had decided they wouldn't have sex until they were married, and he wanted to make sure there were no regrets. He extracted himself from Hermione and looked up at her. His resolve was nearly lost when he took in her disheveled hair and the glazed, passionate look in her eyes.

"Hermione, we have to stop," Draco said, reluctantly.

"What? Why? Don't you, I mean, did I " Hermione was stammering, and she knew it.

"You didn't do anything wrong. You did everything right. It's just that I made you a promise that we would wait. I don't want to break that promise. I want you, Hermione. I want you so much, but I absolutely will not break my promise to you."

Hermione wrapped her arms around Draco. "I love you, Draco Malfoy."

"And I love you," Draco said. "But, Hermione you are going to have to get off of me if I intend to keep my promise."

Hermione stood and started to gather their discarded clothing. At that moment, the fireplace came alive, and they both jerked their heads toward the Floo. Before Hermione could make a run for it, Harry's head popped out.

"Hey, Hermione, Ginny's oh, um, hello, Draco." Harry flushed crimson. "Did I um, interrupt something?"

Hermione had her bare back turned toward Harry, and she squeaked in response.

Draco, on the other hand, was very amused at Harry's discomfort. He slowly walked over to Hermione and took his shirt, which she was clutching tightly to her bare chest. He reached down and picked up her shirt and handed it to her. She nodded her thanks and ran from the room.

"Come on through, Potter."

Draco was slipping his shirt back over his head when Harry stepped through the Floo.

"Sorry about that. I wasn't expecting you to be back until tomorrow."

"It's no problem," said Draco. "Have a seat. What is it that you need?"

Harry sat down on the sofa and frowned. Something was poking him in the leg. He reached down and pulled out Hermione's bra, which had been sticking out from between the cushions. He held it up to Draco. "Um."

Draco turned toward him and grabbed Hermione's bra out of Harry's outstretched hand. Draco took it from him absentmindedly and stuffed it in his pocket. Harry grinned sheepishly.

"Are you sure I'm not interrupting anything?" Harry asked.

"No, we were, uh, finished."

Harry raised his eyebrows.

"We didn't do *that*," Draco spluttered. "Not that I would have to answer to you if we had."

"I didn't say you did," Harry defended.

"Anyway," Draco prompted. "Why are you here?"

"Oh, Ginny finished the design for the invitations. I brought one for Hermione to go over before Gin makes copies." Harry pulled an envelope out of his pocket.

Hermione came back into the room, refreshed and nonchalant. "Did I hear you say you have the invitations?"

"Well, she needs your approval before she copies them." Harry handed her the envelope.

"It was so thoughtful for Ginny to offer to do this for us, Harry. I know Abigail keeps her busy."

"Correction, Hermione: Abigail keeps *me* busy. Gin was put on bed-rest again, which she hates, so she needed something to do. I swear I'll be glad when this baby is born. I really want my wife back. Sometimes I'd rather have tea with Voldemort than confront a pregnant Ginny. She's right scary, that one."

Hermione grinned at Harry and pulled Ginny's design out of the envelope. She nearly dropped it as tears immediately blurred her vision. "Oh, Ginny."

Draco and Harry exchanged nervous glances. Draco put his hand on Hermione's shoulder and seized the invitation from Hermione's shaky fingers.

He noticed the cause of Hermione's reaction in an instant. At the top of the thick parchment, there were two wands emblazoned and touching in the middle. She had spelled them to give a little spark at the wand tips. The wands were drawn in exact replicas of Draco's and Hermione's wands. But, what sparked Hermione's tears were the words that were written underneath:

Mr. and Mrs. Remus Lupin

And

Mr. and Mrs. Severus Snape

Cordially invite you

To the bonding ceremony of their children

Hermione and Draco

To be held on the lakeshore on the grounds of

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Three o'clock p.m.

May twenty-first of the year two thousand

Please wear a white rose in remembrance of the late John Granger and Lucius Malfoy

Draco froze. "Why would she put my father's ?"

Hermione interrupted him. "It's perfect."

Draco looked into Hermione's eyes, still shining with tears, and smiled. "Yeah, I suppose it is."

A/N: I know I am a wicked little tease. My husband tells me that all the time.

Daddy's Girl

Chapter 26 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: We are nearly there! Just an Epilogue left. Thanks so much to RobisonRocket. I have comma-use dyslexia, which I'm sure drives her mad!

Daddy's Girl

Chapter 26

Severus was pacing. Narcissa knew that when Severus was pacing, he was nervous. "What is it, darling? Aren't you happy?"

"Of course I'm happy, Cissa. I'm just, you know, worried. I don't know how to be a father. Mine wasn't much to learn from in case you've forgotten," Severus said vehemently.

"No need to snap," Narcissa retorted. "You have always been good with Draco, and you are quite attached to Violet. I've even caught you playing with Abigail and cooing baby James. Really, Severus, you don't fool anyone. You are a big softy."

"I am no such thing, Narcissa, and I don'tcoo. Violet is basically my own granddaughter, so naturally I would have a soft spot for her. Abigail looks just like Lily, and she's

extremely intelligent for her age. No doubt she got that from her mother. And James, well, I've decided to reserve my opinion of him until he starts Hogwarts. Besides, as my own godson is godfather to both children, I feel that I must learn to adjust to them. But that doesn't change the fact that I have to figure out how to be a good father to my own child a daughter for that matter."

"Well, you'll figure it out. In the meantime, we need to pick out a name for her. I want to be prepared when she comes along. I know we still have six months to go, but I just want it out of the way so I can start calling her by her name."

Severus rolled his eyes. "You are a ridiculous woman, do you know that?"

Narcissa wrapped her arms around her husband and gave him a chaste kiss. "Yes, but you wouldn't have me any other way, would you?"

"Indeed, I wouldn't."

"So, have you thought of anything?" Narcissa asked, clearly not giving up.

"I have." When Severus told her, Narcissa hugged him tighter.

"Oh, Severus, that's perfect."

"But before we make it official, I need to get permission. I know that to some it's just a name, but it's important to me, and I believe it would be important to her as well."

"Yes, I understand."

"If you will excuse me, I believe I will be off. I need to have my dress robes cleaned before the wedding. And I also need to see a man about a name."

Harry and Ginny were lying on their bed, playing with baby James. Abigail was visiting with her Uncle Fred and his new wife, Gwen, who worked with Ginny.

"I do believe he will be a great Seeker, Gin. Look how strong he is." Harry picked his hand up, with James' small hand still wrapped firmly around Harry's finger.

"Oh for Merlin's sake, you think Abby will be a great Seeker, too. Do you think that our children will only take after you, Potter? I'll have you know that they might both be wonderful Chasers."

"Right, Gin. You see the thing is, while you are at work, I will be teaching our children how to fly. And with that training, I will teach them to be Seekers like their dear old dad. And now that I'll be teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts, we'll have all that time at Hogwarts for their Uncle Ron to teach them the fundamentals of the game. They'll be playing for England before we know it."

"It's weird, isn't it?" Ginny asked with a faraway look.

"What's weird?"

"Us going back to Hogwarts it's weird. Who would have thought that we would all be back? You, me, Hermione, Draco, Ron, and Pansy it's just weird."

"No, what's weird is Ron and Pansy getting married in a couple of months. Who would have thought that would happen? And now that Severus is gone, Ron said Dumbledore made Pansy the Head of Slytherin. I never thought I'd see the day when there would be a Professor Weasley as Head of Slytherin House." Harry laughed and kissed his son on the nose.

Ginny giggled. "Actually, Harry, I'm more surprised that they made a *woman* Head of Slytherin. But, she's already made a lot of changes. She's going to allow girls to play Quidditch."

"Oh, that's great. Maybe one day Severus and Narcissa's daughter will play for the team. You know she'll be a Slytherin."

"You never know," said Ginny.

They both started when they heard a voice from downstairs.

Ginny looked at Harry. "That sounds like Severus. I hope everything is alright with Narcissa. Go see what he wants. Let me know if I need to go over and check on her."

Harry raced down the steps and found Severus' head floating in the fireplace.

"Hi, Severus, come on through." Harry said jovially.

Severus stepped through and regarded Harry with a grin. "Wipe that silly grin off of your face. You are beginning to remind me of one of the Weasley twins."

"I can't help it. I'm a happy man. I have a beautiful wife and two beautiful babies. You just wait, old man, your time is coming. So, to what do I owe the pleasure of your visit? Is Narcissa alright? Ginny said she'd look in on her if you'd like."

Severus held up his hand. "That won't be necessary. Narcissa is fine. I need to talk to you about the baby, though. I don't know if you've heard, but we are having a girl."

"Yeah," said Harry. "Draco told us. Congratulations, really, you deserve it."

"Thanks. But I want to talk to you about her name. I need to ask you something."

Harry was surprised to see Severus flush. This wasn't like the snarky bat of the dungeons that Harry had come to know and respect. "Have a seat, Professor. I'll get you some tea, and then you can ask me whatever you want."

Just minutes after Harry left the room, he returned with a tray of tea and biscuits. Severus couldn't help the smirk that appeared on his lips.

"What?" Harry asked.

"You certainly are a *domestic* Defense instructor. Congratulations on that appointment, by the way. Now that Voldemort is gone, the position shouldn't be cursed."

"Thank you, sir. Now, help yourself to the spread and tell me what's on your mind."

"I have a request, Harry, and I really don't know how to ask except to just spit it out. I would like to name my daughter after your mother. I want to name her Lily Eileen Snape, if that is alright with you."

Harry was aghast. He gaped at Severus, who took his silence negatively.

"I would understand if you would not like to grant me this request," Severus said, slightly bemused.

"No, no. I'm sorry. I'm just shocked, that's all," Harry said. Harry knew how much his mother had meant to Severus, so he didn't need to hear an explanation as to why the older man wanted to name his daughter after her. Harry grinned.

"I believe my mother would like that, Severus. Of course I don't have a problem with it."

Severus gave Harry a rare, albeit genuine, smile. "Thank you, Harry. I really appreciate it."

They talked for a little while longer about the upcoming school year and Severus and Narcissa's plans when they get to Positano. An hour later, Severus bid Harry a farewell.

May twenty-first

Her dress was made of the finest silvery-white silk. When she saw it in the shop, she knew it would be perfect for the occasion. Small beads of crystal encircled the bodice, which fit snugly against her breasts, and the bottom half of the dress danced around her loosely, like the shimmer of the ocean. She definitely felt like a princess...

Except, she had one small problem...

Hermione couldn't get her veil right. It kept sliding off of her head, and her hands were shaking so badly, she couldn't pin it to stay on. She finally gave up and pulled it off of her head. She realized she'd have to calm her nerves before she could do anything else. Suddenly, there was a small knock on the door.

Exasperatedly, Hermione told the visitor to come in. When the door opened, Hermione brightened immediately. It was her mother.

"Can I help you with something, sweetheart?"

"Can you ever! Mum, I can't get this veil to stay on my head. I do believe I am going to cut all of this mass off of my head."

Susan stepped up behind her daughter and took the veil from her. She spoke to her while she worked on the veil.

"You know, when I married your father, I had the same trouble with my veil. I had hair much like yours, you know, and I didn't have my mother to help me with it. I *did* give up on my veil. When I got down the aisle, John didn't even seem to notice." Susan stopped for a moment to blink away the tears that threatened to come. With her voice shaking just a bit, she continued.

"After the ceremony, while we were dancing, he asked me where the veil was that I *just had* to have. I told him I would have missed the entire ceremony if I had continued to try and put that veil on. He told me he was glad I didn't have the veil. He said that he actually loved the way my hair grew all over my head, and he didn't want a stupid veil to mar what he thought was pure beauty. And when you were a child, and your hair started to grow the same way, your father loved it. I'll never forget the time you were about four, you came out of the bathroom with a comb stuck in your hair. You were crying and your father picked you up and placed you on the counter top. He gently worked through all of those curls until he had gotten the comb out."

"I remember that day. I will never forget that comb getting stuck in my hair. I was angry that Dad wouldn't let me cut my hair," Hermione said wistfully.

"No, he would never have let you cut it. I even tried to talk him into it, but he stood his ground. He told me that your hair was just as beautiful as mine had been on the day we married. He also chuckled to himself and told me that maybe we wouldn't have to fuss with a veil for you, either. Your father would have been proud of you, Hermione. You have become a very strong young woman."

Hermione's mother gave her a small squeeze on the shoulder once the veil was firmly in place.

"Now, I have to go. Remus is on Violet duty at the moment. I daresay I should get some time with her before Narcissa gets here. I love you, darling."

Hermione hugged her mother. "I love you too, Mum."

Hermione showed her mother to the door. When she opened it, she couldn't help but laugh at what was waiting on the other side.

"I hope you don't mind, Hermione, but I told them they could probably see you if they would allow me to see you first."

"Mind? Absolutely not. I would have been extremely put-out if they hadn't come. Come in, boys."

Harry and Ron, shifting their feet, came into the room. Harry spoke first after kissing Hermione on the cheek.

"You look gorgeous, Hermione. I can't believe you're in a dress."

"Harry, you idiot, of course I'm wearing a dress. I am a girl, you know. I don't think Draco would want to marry me if I walked out there in dress robes for a wizard, do you?"

Ron's ears went pink. "I don't know, Hermione. I imagine he would marry you even if you were wearing Hagrid's old hairy suit."

They all three broke into laughter. "Seriously, did you two come to wish me well, or is there something else on your mind?"

Harry and Ron exchanged furtive glances. "You tell her, Ron."

"No, Harry. I told you, I won't do it. You know how I feel about it."

"Ron, it won't be that difficult. It's just standing and stuff."

Hermione cleared her throat. "Boys, as much as I have always loved trying to guess at this maniacal banter that you two call conversation, I really need to go down to the lake and get married."

They both looked at her like she had interrupted a really great Quidditch match.

"Harry wants us to give you away, and I flat out refuse," Ron said pointedly.

Hermione felt a small lump in her throat. "Why, Ron? I would be so honored. You know my father isn't here, and my mother needs Remus with her. I don't have anyone, Ron. Not unless you want me to call Severus." Hermione lowered her head to hide the tears that threatened. "Or I could just go alone."

Ron gave Hermione a hurt look. "Hermione, you don't understand. Harry said that Muggle tradition states that someone has to give you away. I can't do it. I care too much about you to take you down there and tell Malfoy, 'Well here you go, mate, she's all yours, you can have her, I'm giving her to you.' I'm sorry, I just can't do that."

Harry and Hermione stared at one another. "Is that what you thought I was telling you to do, Ron? I wasn't telling you to *give* her to anyone. We're basically going to escort her down the aisle, and when they ask who gives this woman to this man, we say that we do. It's just a way of saying that we trust Draco and as her family, we approve of the marriage."

"Oh," Ron said. "Alright, then, let's go."

But Hermione stood frozen in her spot.

"What's wrong, Hermione?" Harry asked.

"You two!" Hermione sobbed.

"Oh, no, Harry. I think she's about to hug us."

"She can't do that. Ginny will kill me if Hermione gets that stuff from her face on my dress robes. She'll probably even accuse me of making her cry."

"You boys are the best friends a girl could ever dream of having. I love you, I really do."

"Ah, come on, Hermione. We're going to be late. We can't keep the ferret waiting, now can we?" Ron jested.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "No, we can't. And, Ron, don't call my future husband a ferret."

"Now that's not fair. It's bad enough that I'm giving him to you. Can't I at least call him a ferret now and then?"

Hermione giggled. "Just don't let him hear you."

The three of them made their way to the entrance hall of the castle where Ginny was waiting in her baby blue bridesmaid gown. Harry swallowed hard. He didn't know how he was supposed to pay attention to the wedding when his own wife looked so incredible.

"There you are, Hermione. What's wrong? Did my prat of a brother or git of a husband do anything to you?" Ginny asked as she gave Ron and Harry a death glare.

It's amazing how someone can look like an angel and sound like a banshee at the same time thought Harry.

Harry gave Ron an *I told you so* look while Ron mumbled something that sounded a lot like "mental."

Harry swallowed again. "You look stunning, Gin."

Ginny smirked at her husband while she waved her hand, putting Hermione right.

Harry stared open-mouthed at Ginny. "That was *wandless* magic! And where did you learn to do a cleansing charm without wiping off all of that stuff on her face?"

Both Hermione and Ginny answered, "Lavender."

Hermione allowed Ginny to smooth her hair out of her face.

Ginny looked at Hermione. "I thought you had your hair up."

Hermione ran her hand down the wild mane that fell down her back and shoulders. "I did have it up. I took it down."

Ginny lifted both eyebrows. "Alright, um, are you ready?"

Hermione nodded. "I am." She linked her arm through the arms of her best friends, and Ginny handed her the bouquet of fresh lilies and white roses. "Alright, Gin, let's go and get me married."

Before Ginny opened the door, she stopped. "Wait! Hermione, where is your veil?"

Hermione grinned. "I'm not going to wear it."

Gin frowned. "Hermione, I thought you loved that veil. Why aren't you wearing it?"

Hermione gave Ginny a sad smile. "For my dad."

A/N: Ah, a little fluffy there, I know. Thank you for being patient with this chapter. I will try to get the Epilogue up by next week.

White Roses -- Epilogue

Chapter 27 of 27

Draco Malfoy has changed sides. When he decides to leave Malfoy Manor, he needs help packing. While at the Manor, a surprise arrival changes everything. The warnings show abuse and violence, but I promise that nothing will be bad. It really is more of a romance, but the other stuff is necessary.

A/N: I dedicate this entire story to my wonderful beta, RobisonRocket. RR, through your own personal triumphs and tragedies, you never gave up on me or this story. As a first time writer, I cannot tell you how much your dedication means to me.

For my wonderful readers... please read my footnote at the end of this story.

White Roses

Epilogue

Draco Malfoy stood nervously at the end of the aisle, waiting for his bride-to-be. Acting as his best man, Severus put a hand on Draco's shoulder and whispered words of encouragement. Draco looked at all the people gathered together to witness his and Hermione's wedding.

If someone had told him two years ago that he would be standing by the lake on the school grounds, with an audience full of Gryffindors, waiting to marry the most Gryffindor of all the Gryffindors, he would have hexed someone. However, here he was, the Slytherin Prince, waiting for his Gryffindor Princess.

He was beginning to sweat.

Suddenly, the large oak doors opened, and the sight that caught his eyes took his breath away. There she was his Hermione. When this was all over, she would be his wife.

Hermione was glowing. He could tell by the smile on her face that she was pleased with the abundance of white roses. Draco wondered for a moment how many of the roses were for Hermione's father and how many of them were for Lucius. He did take note of the people who wore two white roses on their lapels. He couldn't help the feeling of pride when he saw the second rose

All of the guests stood as she began to walk slowly towards the marquee, flanked on either side by Harry and Ron. Draco was pleased to see her hair down, even though it was blowing wildly with the breeze.

Draco frowned a bit when his perfect view of his angel was marred by all of the guests standing. When Hermione had asked him if they could impart some of the Muggle traditions into their wedding, he gave a reluctant nod and a promised to behave himself. At the moment, though, he had to fight the urge to tell everyone to just 'SIT!' so he could

see her.

As she came into view, Draco watched as Hermione caught her mother's eye. They exchanged a knowing look, and Susan gave Hermione a huge grin. Draco would have to remember to ask Hermione about that later, but for now all he wanted was for her to get down the aisle so they could get married and get to the honeymoon.

She finally made it to the marquee and joined hands with Draco.

"Please be seated," Dumbledore said. Draco wanted to turn to the crowd and stick his tongue out triumphantly, but thought better of it. "Who gives this woman to this man?"

"We do," said Harry. At Ron's silence, Harry raised his eyebrows at him.

Ron shrugged. "Yeah, alright, we do." Hermione giggled when Ron gave Draco an 'I'm not really *giving* her to you' look.

Dumbledore gave the normal wedding speech, Draco and Hermione exchanged rings, and they were ready to end the ceremony. The sound of a small voice coming from a baby that was not quite a year old made the entire wedding party turn.

It was Violet, sitting up in Remus' lap with her arm outstretched, blabbering "Da Da Da Da" over and over again.

Draco grinned and looked at Hermione. She gave him an amused nod, and he ran over and picked his daughter up. Draco was ready to give Hermione a kiss so he could get on with things, but Dumbledore just smiled at him.

"You know," started Dumbledore, "I have performed hundreds of weddings in my lifetime for many of my ex-students. I don't believe I have ever performed a ceremony such as this, however. Draco Malfoy and Hermione Granger have had a history of animosity, and yet they find themselves here today coming together in matrimony. They have a beautiful daughter, whom I predict will give her parents as many blessings as she will give heartaches, as children often do. But, with those blessings and heartaches, therein lies something else. That, my dear friends, is called forgiveness. It cannot be taught, and yet, it's the hardest lesson to learn."

Dumbledore observed the crowd with his usual twinkle back in place. With a small curve of his mouth, he thought of those who had finally learned the lessons of forgiveness. He, himself, had to learn the same lesson over and over again. Pulling himself out of his reverie, he spoke once more to the crowd.

"I stand before you today with the honor of presenting Mr. and Mrs. Draco and Hermione Malfoy and Miss Violet Malfoy."

Holding Violet tightly to him, Draco grabbed Hermione's hand and practically sprinted down the aisle.

Hours later, after they left the reception and bid their daughter farewell, they took the carriage to Hogsmeade and to their cottage. Draco, recalling Susan's lessons in Muggle tradition, picked Hermione up and carried her over the threshold.

Once inside their bedroom, Draco didn't waste any time. He pulled out his wand, ready to hex Hermione's dress off, when she grabbed his wand.

"What are you doing?"

"Well," Draco said sternly, "I thought this was our wedding night. I thought we were going to, you know."

"We are, Draco, but we have the rest of our lives. I want to change into something a little more appropriate." Hermione started to turn toward the bathroom.

Draco grabbed her hand. "Hermione, I know you think I'm being too anxious, but I feel like I've been waiting a lifetime."

"Oh, honestly," said Hermione, throwing her arms up. "Alright, take it off."

Draco grinned childishly and divested them both of their clothes with two flicks of his wand. He stared at her.

"You are undoubtedly the most beautiful woman I have ever seen in my life. If Violet is half as beautiful, I will have to lock her up."

Hermione giggled and wrapped her arms around him. Draco picked her up and carried her to the bed. He laid her down gently and eased in next to her.

"I'm going to take my time, Hermione. I want to remember this moment for the rest of my life." Draco started with a kiss. As the kiss grew deeper, so did his desire. He kissed his way down her body, leaving chills upon her skin.

"Draco, I can't wait any longer. I need you, please," Hermione pleaded. "We can do it slow and easy later. Right now, I need you inside me."

Draco looked into Hermione's eyes and sank into her. He closed his eyes as he melted into her tight heat. Where he was hard, she was soft all woman. He started to move when he felt Hermione moving under him. It had been so long, he didn't think he'd last very long. He scrunched up his face in concentration.

"Let go, Draco, just let go. You don't have to wait for me," Hermione said.

Draco did wait, though. He sped up a little, and Hermione moaned from the friction. Hermione pleaded with him to go faster. He obliged her.

The heat and the excitement went straight to her core, and she couldn't stop it she didn't want to. When Draco reached between them to rub her, she became undone. Her orgasm exploded around Draco, which brought his own to the surface.

After they caught their breath, Draco dropped beside her and pulled her close to him. "I want to tell you something. If I don't do it now, I might not have the nerve to be so mushy later."

Hermione didn't speak. There was no way she would interrupt this.

"I've been thinking a lot about what Dumbledore said about forgiveness. I just want you to know how happy I am that you were able to forgive me for all of my past transgressions. I wasn't kind to you when we were kids, Hermione. I know I never told you, but for what it's worth, I'm sorry."

"Draco, you don't have to---," Hermione started, but Draco stopped her.

"Yes, I do. I need for you to understand how sorry I am for everything I did to you and your friends. It's important for you to know that. I realize now why you asked for the white roses in memory of my father. At first I didn't get it. I didn't know why you would allow my father the same honor as your own. But, I get it now. You forgave him, and I guess it's time for me to do the same."

"I love you, Hermione. I'm sure I will disappoint you in our lifetime. I'm absolutely not perfect, but when I do, you have my permission to kick my arse. I am by far the luckiest bloke in the universe because you are not only an incredible witch, but you are a phenomenal woman, Mrs. Malfoy." Draco finished with a soft kiss.

Hermione gave Draco a sleepy smile. "You aren't so bad yourself, Mr. Malfoy."

Many Moons Later

Severus Snape sat heavily down at the bar where his godson was waiting for him.

"Hello, Severus," said Draco.

"Hmph!" was the only response.

"What's the matter, old man? You look like you've been hit by a Bludger.

"I just had a talk with your godson. The smarmy little git wants to marry my Lily," Severus said with a scowl.

Draco chuckled. "Ah, come on, Jamie's a good kid. He'll make Lily happy. Wonder what their kids will look like?"

Severus gave Draco a look that he usually reserved for anyone belonging to the Weasley family. It was hard enough to look at the young James Potter without seeing his namesake. With James' hazel eyes and messy, black hair, it was like looking at a ghost. He knew any grandchildren who looked like him would do Severus in for good.

"You don't understand, Draco, my daughter is marrying a Potter. Do you know how disturbing it is that the world will have to endure *another* Lily and James Potter? It's disturbing. If they have children, do you realize I could have a grandson named Harry? God, I hope they won't do that to me. I'll have to have a stern talk with Lily. I have survived Voldemort, Death Eaters, and the madness of Albus Dumbledore. I don't think my heart could take another Harry Potter."

Draco laughed.

Draco paced back and forth in front of the flames. "Where is he?" Draco said out loud.

A moment later, the green flames came to life and Severus stepped out, wearing a grin that no one had ever seen before.

"Hello, Draco. What seems to be your problem this afternoon?" Severus asked with a snicker.

"You think it's funny, don't you? I suppose you've already heard the news?"

Severus barked with laughter. "I think it's wonderful, Draco. Besides, Prewett Weasley is a *good kid*," Severus said, hoping Draco's own words would come back to haunt him.

Draco rolled his eyes. "I can't believe Vi is marrying a Weasley. It's just wrong."

"We might as well get used to it. At least Prewett has Pansy's blood. Their kids might turn out to be Slytherin," Severus offered.

"Probably be Ravenclaw like Lily and Violet," Draco added.

"Or Hufflepuff like the Longbottom kids." Severus gave Draco another evil grin.

Draco choked on his drink. The thought of his grandchildren going into the same house as any offspring from Neville Longbottom and Luna Lovegood made him cringe. "That's sick, Sev. Oh, thank Merlin Violet didn't end up with one of their kids."

Severus laughed. "You need to be careful, boy, you still haven't married Luca off to anyone yet."

Draco groaned and gave Severus a sideways glance. "My son has his eye on Fred Weasley's daughter, Isabelle."

Severus laughed again. "Well, that's trouble. Any offspring from one of the Weasley twins is likely to put you in your grave."

Draco smiled. "That's the truth."

Abigail Potter sat splayed on the grass in the backyard of the Burrow. The summer breeze blowing through her thick red hair was just enough to tangle it, but she didn't care.

They had all gathered there for the first birthday of James and Lily's daughter, Rebecca. Abby had found herself a little niche next to the pond and away from the crowd. She loved her extended family very much, but sometimes a person could get exposed to too many Weasleys.

She smiled when she saw the familiar woman with the long, curly, blond hair walking in her direction.

"Hey, Vi, come sit down with me," called Abby. Violet grinned at her best friend and quickened her pace.

Abby laughed. "I see you were able to get away from the kids. Are my dad and Uncle Draco trying to teach them the basics of Quidditch again?"

Violet rolled her eyes. "It's ridiculous really. But, Ron is the funniest of all. He is trying to coax Luca and James into a game with him and Uncle Harry. My mother tried to explain that he's getting too old to play Quidditch. Of course Pansy completely agreed with her, and they shared a really nasty fit of giggles over the look on Ron's face. I mean, really, he and Uncle Harry are grandfathers now. He doesn't need to play Quidditch."

Abby giggled. "Hey, where is your Aunt Elizabeth? I thought she'd be here with your grandmother. I know Remus couldn't be here because of the full moon, but I really thought we'd see Liz."

"She's doing an internship at the Ministry. She's on some sort of retreat this weekend with the members of her department. But if you ask me, I think she's just going because of Edward Zabini. You know his dad was a friend of my dad's when they were in school."

"Yeah, I'd heard that," Abby said.

"Anyway, Mum's all freaked out about it." Violet continued in an uncanny impression of Hermione, 'My sister does not need to be fussing about with that Zabini lot. She needs to worry about her internship and stay away from boys.' Dad got a real kick out of that. I think he goads her just to see if he can get her temper up."

Violet eyed her friend for a moment. "So, Abby, who do you have your eye on these days? Here we are all married with kids, and I don't ever see you with anyone."

Abby grinned sheepishly. "Um, nobody, really."

"Come on," Violet urged.

"Okay, I have been seeing someone, but I haven't said anything. Can you keep a secret? I mean, it probably won't be a secret long, but I don't know how to tell my dad. He's so protective of me."

"I swear I won't tell. Who is it?"

"Albus."

Violet's eyes widened. "Albus Snape? My nephew? Abby, he's about three years younger than you."

"I know that, Vi. But now that we're both out of Hogwarts, I don't think it matters. You aren't angry, are you?"

"No way, but I think you should tell Uncle Harry. I don't think he'll be upset. Listen, we'd better get back to the party before little Molly starts crying for me."

"I'll be right there, Vi."

Down by the house, Draco and Severus were observing their granddaughters playing in the playpen. Severus smiled at little Rebecca. She was trying to take away a bear that was clutched tightly against little Molly's chest. There was another small boy sitting in the playpen watching with fascination at the two little girls.

Draco and Severus spoke with one another for a few moments about Draco's pending retirement from St. Mungo's. Ginny had retired the year prior to spend more time with her growing family.

"You know that Minerva is leaving Hogwarts, right?" Draco said.

"I heard. She needs to retire. After Albus' death, that poor woman took over the school with a vengeance. Any word on who will take her place?" Severus asked, with a grin.

"You know very well that my lovely wife will be the Headmistress. I'm very proud of her, you know."

"Ah, yes, as well you should be," Severus said.

"And just who is it that you're proud of, Malfoy?" Hermione appeared around the corner with a grin, handing Draco a drink.

"I said I'm pretty proud of my wife, Granger. What's it to you?" Draco loved this game.

"You're wife is pretty proud of you, too," Hermione said, and she kissed him.

"Merlin, can you two get a room or something? There are children here." This was from their daughter, who came over to put another teddy bear in the playpen.

Draco wagged his eyebrows. "Maybe we will; what do you say, Granger?"

"Later, you randy little boy, later. Oh, by the way, I'm going to go with Harry and Ginny tomorrow to see his Aunt Petunia. She's in the hospital, and she's very ill. Would you like to join me?"

"Yeah, okay. I'll go with you." Hermione kissed Draco again and went back to the guests.

Draco and Severus went back to their silent watch of the children. They watched as the little boy crawled over to the girls. The three children played silently together. Draco smiled again as he watched Molly give Rebecca a slobbery kiss on the cheek.

Severus laughed. "Babies are really incredible, aren't they?"

"Yeah, they are something," Draco said. They both chuckled when the little boy also gave Rebecca a slobbery kiss.

"Who is that child?" Severus asked.

"I'm not sure," Draco said, searching the crowd of their friends and family. "He might be Finnigan's grandson. I saw him earlier."

Draco caught Abby as she was making her way back to the crowd *and Albus*, mused Draco. "Hey, Abby, who is that little boy in the playpen with Molly and Becca?"

"Oh, that's Jack Longbottom. He's Frankie's little boy. He came here with his grandparents, Neville and Luna."

"Alright, thanks. You can go see Albus now." He gave Abby a knowing smirk, which earned him a delightful blush from his goddaughter.

She walked on, and Draco exchanged a furtive look with Severus. "That's Neville Longbottom's grandson."

Severus said, very calmly, "Is that right?"

"Yep," said Draco.

"Well, they are only children, Draco. I'm sure it's alright that they play together," said Severus.

"Yes, you're right, Sev. They are only children."

They watched a moment longer, until shrieks of laughter shook them both. Turning toward the sound, Severus saw his son, Albus, with his arm around Abigail Potter, talking to Harry. Harry then shook Albus' hand and accepted a rib-crunching embrace from Abby. Her ear-splitting words of "Oh, Daddy, thank you for your blessing!" carried down to Severus and Draco.

Severus frowned. Then he looked about the yard. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed Draco doing the same thing. All around them, the children of Potters, Weasleys, Malfoys, and Snapes, ran and played. They turned their attention back to their granddaughters, playing with the Longbottom boy in the playpen.

Severus caught Draco's eye. Draco sighed and said, "Right."

With a silent agreement, they each reached down and pulled the girls out of the playpen and into their own protective arms.

They shared an evil grin as they watched George Weasley drop his own granddaughter into the playpen.

Stepping back, George asked, "Who is that little boy?"

Severus and Draco gave each other a pointed look. Severus shrugged his shoulders.

With a very Slytherin smile Draco replied, "I have no idea."

Gathering the babies close to them, Severus and Draco shared a laugh as they rejoined their families.

Finite Incantatem

A/N: I really hope you all enjoyed my first full-length fanfic. For all of you that have reviewed, I can't tell you how much I appreciate you. Please continue to leave reviews for all the stories that you read. It really does give the author pleasure to get a nice pat-on-the-back.

Now, indulge me for a moment while I give a special "thank you" for special someone. I believe in the law of six degrees of separation. Every one of us is connected in some way or another. If this thank you ever gets to Jo Rowling, it would be wonderful; if it doesn't, that's okay too.

Jo, thank you so much for giving us Harry Potter. You are a remarkable woman, and you deserve every bit of good fortune that comes your way. You have brought together so many people readers and writers. I picked up your last book on the day my grandmother died. The days following her death were pretty tough, but I lost myself in the world you created. It was nice to get a way and not focus on reality for a while. For that, from the bottom of my big Texas heart, I thank you.

I will always be a POTTERBRAT!