

Aparecium

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Aparecium

by [LadyKenz347](#)

Summary

Hermione Granger has been away from London for six and a half years. When she returns, her son in tow, she runs into the one person she was hellbent on avoiding.

Chapter 1

AUTHOR NOTE:

This story is a rewrite of one of my very first fanfics! I'm working through the chapters and find myself incapable of not posting it seems. You guys keep me accountable in updating this every few days, yeah?

This is unbeta'd but has been lovingly read by MCal!

Hermione stood on the landing of Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place, with her face tilted, greeting the rain misting from above. It'd been years since she stood on this stoop; back then she'd been brimming with hope for the future, she'd been strong.

Now?

Well, now there was an hardness in her, a bitterness that the years had left lingering in her.

Bursts of nervous energy inched down her arms, manifesting in an endless twitch in her fingers. Two weeks. That was all, and then she'd be back to New York, London once again behind her.

"Mummy..." A small, impatient voice whined from next to her, its owner still gripping her hand as he shifted on his feet back and forth.

Staring down at her child, she chuckled at the mess of chestnut curls on his head and ran a hand his hair. She *needed* the spell to hold, needed him to control his magic for the next few hours.

Offering a final silent prayer up to the heavens, Hermione smiled tightly at her son and nodded. “Sorry, love. Let’s go.”

Before she’d even taken her finger off the doorbell the front door flung open.

“I was wondering how long you were going to lurk on my doorstep.” His wide, disarming smile had always the uncanny ability to cut through her nerves and for the first time in long time, she felt at home.

He’d grown up in the six years since she left London; his hair was still messy, but in a more intentional type of way and his glasses were forever smudged and crooked, but his frame had filled and he had a thick covering of a beard on his jaw.

She gave him a crooked smile. “And just how did you know I was out there?”

“I’m an *Auror*, Hermione,” he deadpanned. “Since when did you start making a habit of standing in the rain outside of people’s houses?”

“I needed a moment.” She smiled weakly, eyes travelling to the walls and it’s many accoutrements. It’s been quite awhile since I’ve been back to Grimmauld Place.” She shook her head, scattering the memories that were pushing forward and turned to her son. “Harry Potter, meet Liam Granger.”

“Hello, Mister Granger. I’ve heard alot about you!”

“I’ve heard very little about you,” Liam replied easily.

“Oh, well—” A strange, nervous chuckle rippled from Harry and his cheeks stained a light pink. “Well, that’s a first!” Harry clapped his hands together and gave the pair of them an awkward raise of his brows. “Not one that I mind, if I do say so myself.”

To Hermione's supreme horror, Liam snorted softly. Reaching down she gave him a light pinch on the arm and fixed him with a pointed stare. She was too often mortified at his no nonsense approach to human interaction, it *certainly* wasn't a trait he got from her.

"Can I go read?" Liam dismissed the situation with Harry and peered up his mother with bored eyes.

Sighing, Hermione waved him off. "Yes, fine. Just for a minute." Turning back to her friend, she mouthed a silent apology before wrapping her friend in a warm hug. "It's good to see you, Harry."

"Yeah, maybe don't let it take four years next time, eh?" Harry smirked and jerked his head in the direction of his sitting room where Liam was now perched with a book open in his lap. "Leave it to Hermione Granger's son to be reading multi-chaptered books by six. Albus can't sit still long enough to hear a joke."

Hermione gave him a playful poke to the ribs. "Where're the boys?"

"Upstairs. I had no idea how long you were planning to stand in the rain brooding." Harry gave her a nudge and called towards the stairs, " *BOYS* ! Come on down! Aunt Hermione is here!"

Looking over her shoulder, Hermione couldn't help the smile that tugged at her lips. Her son was sitting at Grimmauld Place.

There had been many times when Hermione thought this day would never come, now that it had, it felt almost... *anticlimactic*. In so many ways, he was just like her, ever serious and brutally honest. He grew up in her lap with a book in their hands and a strong sense of his morality.

Raising him had been mostly easy. He was quiet, never one to cause unwarranted mischief, even if his dry wit often gave her a headache.

“Are you staying at the house, then?” Harry asked, shattering her reverie.

“No.” Shaking her head, she tried her best for a smile. The atmosphere surrounding her parents was still painful, even all these years later. “No, we’re at a hotel in London.”

A thunderous noise interrupted her thoughts as two young boys barrelled down the stairs and stopped abruptly in front of her.

“*James Potter* ! Is that you?!” she blurted out, eyes wide.

“Hey, Aunt Hermione.” James blushed; he was the spitting image of Harry, all messy black hair and green eyes. His glasses were square, more modern, and he wasn’t quite as tall, but still, it took Hermione’s breath away to see the young man before her. Like meeting her dear friend all over again.

“Hullo!” An even smaller version of Harry piped up from behind his brother, although this one had fiery red hair. “I’m Albus! Mummy says you are bringing me a friend.”

“Hello, Albus, it’s nice to meet you.” Hermione smiled at the pair of them. “Liam, come say hello!”

“*Muuuuuum* !”

Her jaw snapped shut, teeth gritting as her eyes rounded. “*Liam!*”

A loud, exasperated sigh, followed by begrudging feet being dragged along the floor announced her son’s reluctant arrival.

“Hello.” Chin tilted and lips pursed, Liam’s gaze dripped down the tip of his nose even though he was the smallest person in the room. Arrogance and aristocracy ran thick in his blood. “Can I go back to my book now?”

“No.” She’d implored him to be on his best behavior for tonight, and as the minutes wore on she became more and more terrified this might be the best he could do. “Don’t you want to play with Albus?”

“ *Play?* ” He balked, mouth puckering around the word as if it was contaminated. Hermione gave him a wide eyed silent warning, and he grumbled to himself and tucked his book under his arm.

“D’ya wanna see my new broom? S’not a big boy broom. Mum says no, but Dad said yes. Maybe for Christmas...” Albus looked hopeful, rocking up on his toes.

Liam sighed, rolling his eyes. “If I say no I’ll get in trouble.”

“ *Liam !* ” Hermione hissed again, her cheeks turning a heated crimson. His name was a constant chastisement.

Full of faux contrition her son looked up with round eyes, his lips in a small shocked circle. He made this face whenever he was being reprimanded, as if he could trick her into thinking his rudeness was an accident. Affronted, he mouthed a silent, ‘ *What?* ’

Hermione raised a warning brow at him.

Groaning, her son followed Albus, who was positively skipping up the stairs. Moving as if his shoes were filled with concrete, Liam turned to give one final woeful look over his shoulder back at his mother.

Chuckling to herself, Hermione waved him off, reveling in her son’s discomfort when forced to interact with other children.

“Keep an eye on them, will ya?” Harry clapped a hand on James’ shoulder and gave him a wink. Nodding, the eldest Potter child jogged up the stairs.

“Drink, Hermione? Ginny should be here any minute.”

“Wine, please,” she said, absently meandering through the sitting room. It’d been beautifully redecorated since their time here during the war. Deep rich gem toned upholstery and dark wood furniture. She could only just recall where the hostile portraits had hung or where the piano had sat in the corner.

Harry returned, two drinks in hand and motioned for her to sit on the large sofa next to the fireplace as he fell into the seat across from her.

“The house looks great, Harry. I barely recognize it, honestly.”

“That was kind of the point.” Harry chuckled to himself. “I wish I could take credit for any of it, but it was all Gin. I’m happy I kept it, I feel like Sirius would be proud of how it turned out.”

A beat of silence followed, guilt twisting at her insides as she thought of her childhood home and her reason for returning to London at all. Hermione began drinking her wine too quickly, a nervous habit just for something to do with her hands and she could nearly hear the gears grinding loudly in Harry’s head. That, matched with the incessant sound of his finger tapping against the leather of his armchair, was setting her teeth on edge.

A loud sigh pushed past his lips and Hermoine braced herself. “I know you’ve told me you don’t want to talk about it...”

“ *Harry ...*”

“Hermione, you up and leave—out of nowhere. Then almost a year later, an owl arrives telling us you had a son.” Impatient questions began tumbling out of his mouth so quickly he

seemed almost out of breath. “I need to know what happened. Why’d you leave? Who’s the father? Is it someone from London? From the states?”

“Harry... you don’t *need* to know those things. You *want* to know. That’s a very big difference.” Some things needed to stay hers; her exodus from London and Liam were two of those things.

Harry huffed, a petulant little noise that meant he didn’t get his way and Hermione changed the subject. “Heard from Ron lately?”

“Hardly. Big shot hardly has time to see his own family, the tosser.”

“He’s your best friend, Harry,” she chided.

“Is he?” He cheated on my other best friend, sold all of our stories for profit, and now travels around visiting every pub in Europe, reminiscing about the golden days, peddling books that were basically written by Rita Skeeter. With friends like that...” He clucked his tongue and took a long swig of Firewhisky.

“You know,” Hermione began thoughtfully, staring at the dew forming on her glass, “even after everything, I don’t think he’s a bad guy. He’s just so... so lost. Maybe he always was.” She looked up at him again, her eyes misting. “You’re a hard act to follow, Mr. Potter, even I can attest to that.” She tipped her wine glass at him, and then followed him in a too-long drink.

The Floo roared to life and Ginny strode through, decked out in her Quidditch jersey and fumbling with her hold all and broom.

“Shit, *sorry-sorry-sorry* ! I know, I’m late!” She dropped her gear by the door and leaned over to kiss Harry on the cheek. “Hermione! Merlin, you’re a sight for sore eyes if I ever saw one. We’ve missed you!”

Rising to her feet, the witches wrapped their arms around each other. “Missed you too, Ginny! The boys are just dashing. I can’t believe after everything you’re still stuck in a house of boys!”

“Ah, I’m still holding out for a girl, just have to get this old grump on board.” She crooked a thumb in Harry’s direction. “Let me change out of this disgusting uniform and I’ll get dinner heated up.” After kissing Hermione quickly on the cheek, Ginny hurried up the stairs.

Harry’s gaze followed his wife before turning back to Hermione. “So, what’s on your agenda the next couple weeks? Any big plans?”

Her shoulders lifted in a sad shrug. “Just cleaning out the house and getting it up for sale. I’ve been in touch with the estate agent. The market is doing well; hopefully won’t take too long.”

“You doing okay with it?”

Inhaling sharply, Hermione thought about it for a moment. She wasn’t. There had always been a part of her that hoped her parent’s memories would return, but year after year, disappointing healer after disappointing healer, her hope had diminished until she realized it was finally time to say goodbye.

“It’s what needs to happen. Having the property and taking care of the taxes these last few years has been hard, and — ” she paused, a tired breath pushing past her lips, “my parents aren’t coming back.”

“ *You* could always come back. I bet Liam would love it and you know we’d love to have you close.”

Tears pricked the back of her eyes and her ribs pressed in on her lungs until she couldn’t *breathe*. “I can’t.” There was no air of indecision in her voice, this was how it had to be. “I’m planning on being here two weeks, max. MUNY needs me back as soon as I can, the whole department will probably be in shambles — ”

“Tell me what the hell that stands for again? I’m having horrible flashbacks to spew.”

“It’s S.P.E.W, first of all.” Hermione shot a warning glare at him. “And second, it’s the Magical University of New York; I work in the Magical History Department.”

“Right. Knew that.”

“ *Right* .” She rolled her eyes and laughed.

A moment later Ginny hollered for help, and they made their way into the kitchen. It was an exceedingly good sign that Liam had not snuck away from the Potter boys yet. He wasn’t *exactly* a social butterfly and the longer he stayed in the company of kids his age, the better. The guilt that lingered at Liam’s loss of childhood was an ever present current in her life.

They began busying themselves around the kitchen and Hermione barely noticed the sound of the Floo roaring to life in the foyer.

“Expecting someone?” Ginny turned to Harry and he shrugged his shoulders, craning his head around the corner.

“*Potter!* Bloody hell, don’t you answer your interdepartmental memos? It says URGENT for a reason.”

The blood in her veins ran cold at the sound of the approaching voice. Tight and aristocratic, a long drawl and an edge of disdain. Ceramic shards of the plate that had been in her hands bounced off the tile floor as Hermione stood frozen.

With a grimace, Harry rushed around the corner. “Malfoy, it’s not a good night…”

“It’s always a good night where I’m concerned. Where’s Gin? I’m starved—had to skip lunch.”

The sound of blood *whooshing* in her ear's drowned out everything and she vaguely made out Ginny fussing over her, checking her for cuts and other signs of distress. The footsteps neared and Hermione braced her hands on the counter behind her.

Draco Malfoy strode comfortably into the room, stopping dead in his tracks when their gazes locked. "*Granger?*" His brows furrowed for a moment and Hermione felt ridden with panic. She wanted to run, wanted to scoop Liam in her arms and flee Grimmauld Place, and London, for the last time.

Shallow puffs of hair worked its way through her too tight throat and the edges of her vision turned blurry.

Draco Malfoy hadn't changed all that much in six and a half years. He was still tall, still blond, still agonizingly beautiful. He still had the arrogant smirk twisting up his face and his too-familiar silver eyes were currently burning holes into her skull.

"Sorry." Hermione gulped, blinking herself back into the moment.

"You look as though you've seen a ghost," Ginny laughed nervously, her eyes flitting between Hermione and Draco.

Eyes fluttering towards her friend, Hermione's lips tilted in a barely there smile. "Maybe I have. London always was full of them."

The floorboards creaked overhead and a desperate need to escape flooded her body.

Malfoy seemed to leave his shocked trance, and glided across the room. "Hey Gin." She offered her cheek and he kissed it quickly. "Sorry to drop in on you like this."

Ginny gave him a flat stare, "No, you're not."

“Nope. I’m not.” He grinned back at her and plucked a slice of bread from the counter, dodging her wild slaps.

A soft wind could knock Hermione on her arse right about now. “ *What in the fuck is going on right now ?* Have I been drugged?” Hermione started violently patting down her body, trying to ground herself that this wasn’t a twisted dream. Maybe she would find an arm or something sprouting from her middle, giving her a clue that this was an extreme hallucination.

“Erm, Hermione. Don’t freak out... you always freak out.” Harry sighed. “Well, Malfoy and I have been working together. He’s the contact I was telling you about, if you can believe it. He’s actually been working with the Auror office for... what is it? Six years?”

“Six and a half.” Malfoy swallowed a hunk of bread, his narrowed eyes never leaving Hermione.

“And you—you didn’t think to mention it?” She balked incredulously at her friend. “And he’s in your house? Kissing your wife? And all is well? Nothing at all strange to see here.” Her voice climbed, nearing impossibly high pitches and despite that everyone else seemed far more comfortable, she was nearing a panic attack.

“We’ve become... shite, I guess you’d say friends?” Harry cringed. “Yeah, we’re friends — kind of. I *swear* he’s not the same prat we hated at Hogwarts.”

“ *Hey!* ” Draco growled, his mouth full of stolen bread.

“C’mon mate, even you know you were a right git.”

“ *Still ...* You shouldn’t say it. It’s rude, you know?” Malfoy feigned hurt and then sneered for good measure.

Harry returned his attention to Hermione. “Sometimes, he shows up unannounced and eats my wife’s cooking and plays with my kids. I was planning on telling you while you’re here but I *thought* he had a date tonight. Didn’t think he’d be gate crashing our dinner plans. *Obviously*, I was wrong.”

She shook her head and flashed him a tense smile. “I was just a little taken by surprise.” Hermione’s heart was still pounding wildly and she was sure she was having double vision. “I think I should actually go. You guys hang out. I’m totally knackered after travelling and we ought to get a headstart on this jetlag business.”

A stampede of feet thundered above them and a tremble settled into her limbs.

Ginny shook her head. “You and Liam are eating before you leave. I am my mother’s daughter after all, you aren’t leaving on an empty stomach.”

“Who’s Liam?” Draco whispered, nodding at Harry with a squinted expression. “Boyfriend?”

“Kid,” Harry whispered back, as if Hermione couldn’t bloody well hear them.

Draco choked on his surprise. “*Kid*?” Granger, you have a kid?”

“Uhm, well yes. But I really do need to go, okay? I’ll pop by again,” Hermione rushed.

The stampede landed in the kitchen. She was too late. “Hey, Draco.” James nodded and the blond ruffled his already messy black hair, then playfully punched Albus’ shoulder and threw his arm around him.

Right, definitely drugged or worse... maybe dead?

“You still up for some Quidditch this weekend?” Draco asked.

“Yep, been practicing. I think we’re gonna take Mum and Dad finally. I’ve been working on my dives and I never realized the secret—”

Hermione didn’t get to hear what the great secret to Quidditch dives were. She didn’t hear much of anything once Liam shuffled his feet into the kitchen, his nose buried in his book again.

With bated breath, she watched as Draco’s eyebrows furrowed, no doubt noticing the familiar sharp features, his full lips and silver eyes.

“You’re...Li-Liam?” Draco stuttered. “You look...” He couldn’t finish, just stared intently at the small child. “How old are you?”

“Liam Granger, how do you do?” He extended his hand. “Mum makes me say that, but you don’t have to tell me; I don’t really care.” He shrugged. “I’m six.” Turning towards Hermione then and she couldn’t help her trembling. “Mum, I’m starving.”

“*See !*” Ginny pointed at them with her wooden spoon. “He’s hungry! You’re eating. Sit down.”

“I wouldn’t fight her on this, ‘Mione.” Harry gave her a nervous grimace and sat at the head of the table.

As she took her seat, Hermione swore to whatever God might be listening to get her through this meal and out of this house and she would be forever in their debt. She reached for Liam and hugged him close, kissing his curly hair. In typical Liam fashion he bristled and shrugged her off.

There was a beautiful roast. Tasteful tableware. The exquisite company of her friends.

But everything paled next to the horrible, echoing silence that pulsed all around them.

“This is wonderful, Mrs. Potter. Thank you,” Liam said formally.

“Does your mother make you say that as well?” Harry asked, smiling at his plate.

“Only the thank you. I actually meant the compliment this time.”

“*Liam*,” Hermione groaned, about to reprimand before remembering their company.

“You’re very well spoken for a six year old...” Draco narrowed his eyes curiously at the small boy at the other end of the table.

“I can read too. Better than most,” he boasted with a proud smirk.

“Yes, well he *is* the offspring of Hermione Granger,” Ginny quipped.

The sharp slice of steel against porcelain caused the fine hairs on her arm to rise. “I didn’t realize you’d gotten married, Granger.”

“I didn’t,” she rushed, taking a big bite of potato. “Ginny, tell me about the Harpies! I bet you’re the best on the team!”

Draco hummed, still staring.

“Since when do *you* want to talk about Quidditch?” Ginny laughed.

“Mum,” Liam whispered too loudly. “He has hair like mine, have you noticed?” Liam nodded at Draco.

She shushed her son sharply from the corner of her mouth, her eyes trained on the piece of roast she was shoving around the plate.

“It’s odd, don’t you think?”

“What’s he saying about my hair?” Draco called from his seat, an eyebrow lifted.

“Probably that you spend far too much time on it. Always trying to get it how naturally good mine looks,” Harry ribbed.

“It’s nothing,” Hermione supplied quickly, her heart beating so violently she swore it was bruising itself on her ribcage.

But she should have known; Liam Granger was not to be quieted.

“I *said* we have the same hair,” Liam turned to Draco and stated matter of factly. The air rushed from her lungs in a harsh gust and she placed her palms on the wooden table to calm herself. “Which is odd, because I’ve never seen anyone else with hair like mine.”

Draco’s eyes narrowed at Liam and he responded lamely, “You have brown, curly hair.”

From the far side of the table, Albus and James snickered amongst themselves. Liam cheeks flushed crimson and the lights flickered in a fit of accidental magic.

“*No, I don’t!*” he defended ardently. “It’s just a spell. Mummy charmed it, said she wanted it brown while we were in London.”

Draco eyes rounded, a long swallow working its way down his throat. Removing his wand, he flourished it through the air. “*Finite Incantatem*.”

Bile rose in her throat, her body breaking out in a slick unwelcomed sweat as Liam’s chestnut hair faded from the root, giving way to soft platinum curls.

Liam grinned. “See! Told you Albus!”

“*Shite* !” James laughed, as Ginny reprimanded him about his cursing. “I’m just saying! He said he was blonde, and we literally laughed at him until we cried. We thought he was crazy!”

“Sorry, Liam.” Albus blushed.

Hermione paid none of it any mind, instead staring intently at a knot on the worn wooden table while she awaited the inevitable.

“How old did you say you were, Liam?” Draco whispered, his voice hoarse.

“I’m six.”

A beat of silence followed, pressing in on Hermione until she finally lifted her gaze to the end of the table. Draco’s gaze was dark and dangerous, his lips pulled back slightly baring his perfect teeth. “Granger, might I have a word?” Pushing back his chair, Hermione flinched at the sound.

Hermione gulped. “You know, I really don’t think it’s a good time—” Her gaze flittered over to the Potters, both wearing matching gaping expressions, their mouths full of half chewed roast as their eyes darted between Liam and Draco.

Draco threw his napkin against his plate. *“I insist.”*

“Mum?” She looked at her son and his nervousness was plain on his face.

“It’s ok, love. I’ll be just a moment.”

The lies were piling up around her tonight.

AUTHOR NOTE: Hope you enjoyed the first installment! Be back soon with more :D

Chapter 2

May 2, 2003

The Firewhiskey was shit.

Seriously—stupid memorials and this was the best they could fucking do? The Leaky Cauldron served better to their rats.

Frankly, the entire soiree was a waste of a good Friday night. He'd spent too many years in this fucking hall, watching these tossers get their arses kissed by his peers and the Hogwarts faculty; did he need to do it again every couple of years?

Tonight, the Golden Fuckwads of Gryffindor would be getting crowned—or sainted, or *whatever* you wanted it to call it—into the Order of Merlin.

Draco? Well, Draco Malfoy would be getting very drunk and despite the shitty fucking firewhisky, he was well on his way to establishing that end.

“Malfoy?”

Groaning at the familiar voice, Draco turned with a tight, fake smile on his face. “Potter... Lady Potter. How wonderful of you to stop by and ruin my night.” With a scowl, he tipped his glass lavishly at them and turned back to study the crowd.

“Oh, hush, Ferret. We're just being polite.” Ginny grinned, wiggling her fingers vaguely at some other blithering idiot behind him that was no doubt infatuated with all things Harry Potter.

Potter stole his attention again, winding his arm around his wife with a polite smile. “I hear you'll be collaborating with us next month in the Auror Department.”

Draco took another large gulp of his drink and winced at the bitter taste. “No need to pretend with me, Potter. I dislike you as much as you dislike me, I assure you.”

“Ginny,” Harry paused, turning towards his wife, “can I have a moment with Malfoy?” She nodded, kissing his cheek.

Draco never understood why these three twits were so celebrated for being reckless in their pursuit of victory, so willing to die for their cause. Draco had never been willing to die for anything, but if he had, he would have at least tried out a few other options before jumping feet first into a mess of Death Eaters.

“Time for nasty words now that the missus is out of earshot?” he drawled after a stiff gulp of whisky.

“What happened when we were kids—it’s over. It’s been five years, for Merlin’s sake. I know you’ve been doing a lot since then, and I just wanted to say: I can look past what happened if you can.”

Eyeing him warily, Draco stared at Potter’s outstretched hand for a long minute. He didn’t particularly like the sod, but it probably made sense to procure a good working relationship with him. With a grimace he took Potter’s hand and shook it once.

“Eh, what the hell? Nothing to lose at this point. Cheers.” After downing their Firewhiskeys, Draco looked back to his new found non-rival and flinched. Potter was grinning like a maniac and he feared he may have spoken too quickly in accepting the Gryffindor’s olive branch.

“Do you want to join our table?” Potter jerked his chin over his shoulder, motioning to a large cluster of their classmates. A loud guffaw burst from Draco’s chest, tears stinging the corner of his eyes as he vehemently shook his head.

“That’s a little soon, Potter. I do have some semblance of self-preservation.” The messy-haired wizard nodded, lips twitching in a smile as he made to walk back. “And Potter!” He turned. “Congratulations. On the award and the uh... obvious addition.”

Draco nodded in the direction of Ginny’s swollen belly, earning a genuine grin from Harry. “Thanks, mate.”

At the all too familiar term of endearment, Draco scowled and ordered another firewhisky. Mates with Harry-bleeding-Potter? Merlin, what had his world come to.

One hour and two firewhiskys later, Minister Shacklebolt stood at the front of the room, flanked by Headmistress McGonagall and the Chief Warlock of The Wizengamot.

“My dear friends, esteemed colleagues, and honored guests, I am so delighted to commemorate the end of a truly awful time in our wizarding history. Five years ago, our country was torn apart, divided in hate. Over time, we’ve rebuilt what was broken, fortified it, made it stronger. We would not be here without the efforts of each and every one of you.” Shacklebolt paused as a gentle applause rippled through the room and with a begrudging roll of his eyes, Draco also joined in.

“Tonight, we celebrate those who rose to the call for greatness. The Order of Merlin has chosen to initiate five individuals, the most at any given time in the Order’s long celebrated history.

“We will begin with the recipients for the Order of Merlin, Second Class.” Pausing to clear his throat and adjust his glasses, the Minister tilted his chin proudly. “The Order would first like to honour Narcissa Malfoy.”

He must have heard wrong—damn, how many of these shitty firewhisky’s had he had? But as a soft murmur of surprise and awe bubbled through the room, realisation fell heavy on his shoulders. Blanching, Draco’s gaze started fluttering nervously around the room, wiping his sweaty palms on his trousers.

His mother was decidedly *not* in attendance tonight, and she *certainly* had not let on that she would be accepting a bloody Order of Merlin. Lips pulling back in a grimace that was meant to be a smile, Draco made uneasy little noises that if heard, would be mortifying.

“Narcissa Malfoy was, and remains to be, a beam of bravery in the darkness. Her actions during the war saved Harry Potter’s life—and us all.” Draco sputtered on his whisky, choking back a laugh that anyone would call a Malfoy a beam of bloody bravery. “She has been nominated by Mr. Harry Potter, and has requested that her son, Draco Malfoy, accept the award on her behalf.”

Fucking perfect . Rolling his eyes, he stood, buttoning his robe jacket, before making his way to the stage.

Harry Potter, with a grin that looked dangerously close to splitting his entire head into two pieces, held out a medal attached primly to a thick purple ribbon. “Draco Malfoy, please accept this honor as an inductee of the Order of Merlin, Second Class for achievement or endeavor beyond the ordinary for your mother, Narcissa Malfoy, and all of her sacrifices. It also comes with my sincerest thanks for saving my life.”

Draco swallowed a laugh. Narcissa Malfoy may have let Harry Potter play dead for a few minutes, but she, too, played dead for the entirety of the war. Never one to stick her neck out, never let herself be known. She did as she’d always done... *survived* . Apparently, lying to one Voldemort was enough these days to earn yourself fancy awards and personal thanks from Potty himself.

Accepting the ribbon, Draco smiled tightly at the audience. Shacklebolt stepped to the side, gesturing for him to take a place at the podium and his knees buckled. Bloody hell, his mother could be such a pain in his arse.

“Hello, I’m Draco Malfoy.” *Fucking obviously, good start you dolt*. “I would like to thank the Wizengamot, Order of Merlin, The Ministry, and...” he paused, the taste of vinegar heavy on his tongue, “*Harry Potter* for his nomination. I know my Mother would have loved to be here this evening, and I’ll make sure she knows the immense pride I feel in accepting it on her behalf.”

Something caught his eye as he spoke, a besotted Weasley clawing at Granger’s gown, as she swatted his hands away from her. “Thank you, again.” He nodded and stepped back, shaking the hands of the Minister, Headmistress, Chief Warlock and his Royal Highness, Harry Potter.

With a final tight pull to his lips, Draco made to leave the stage but was silently instructed to stand off to the side. Sighing, he obliged. *Fan-fucking-tastic*.

His lips screwed up in a lopsided smirk at the sight of Weasley and Granger having it out in a hushed argument. It’s not that he wished any of them any ill will, but old habits die hard and he’d forever be the first person in line to watch Weasley get his arse handed to him.

Granger looked alright— *more than alright*. She was fit. The shimmering black evening gown hung from razor thin strips over her slender shoulders and the gentle curves of her post-Hogwarts body were hinted at under the thin material. But as much as she had changed, the

fierce scowl and icy cold glare as she ignored her boyfriend were more than familiar. Hell, they'd been shot his way a time or two back in school.

The minister went on to recognize Longbottom for killing Nagini; apparently, they were low on nominees and basically anything would be enough for an Order of Merlin.

“Now, it's time that I move to our Order of Merlin, First Class. I think it comes as no surprise, that we'll be honoring three very important individuals this evening—”

For several long-suffering minutes, Shackbolt droned on about the bravery of the three most reckless bastards in Wizarding history. Draco zoned out, instead staring at the quarrel between Weasley and Granger. She was fucking livid, shaking with a rage that was almost comical as she spit low insults from the corner of her mouth.

A standing ovation spread through the crowd, applause shaking the room. The three of them ascended the stairs, afixed with the brightest hero smiles and graciously waving into their sea of adoring fans.

“Thank you, Minister,” Potter said as the applause faded. “I know I speak for Hermione and Ron when I say *thank you* ; thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Your endless and unwavering support is not unnoticed. We often receive praise for our actions during the war, but we weren't alone. We may have been the face, but behind us were dozens of fighters, strategists, mothers, fathers, siblings, warriors. They were the heart. That victory is shared between us all.” A thunderous applause rose from the crowd and a dozen camera flashes went off.

Gesturing for the crowd to quiet, Harry continued, “We'd like to take a moment of silence to remember those who lost their lives, all those years ago.”

Everyone bowed their heads, including Draco. Although, at the sound of a hiss he peeked up through his lashes to see Weasley trying to hold Hermione's hand. She was fitfully batting him away, widening her eyes and showing her teeth in a snarl. Draco stifled a chortle at her attempt at a menacing expression. What could the Wizarding World's second favorite couple possibly be sparing about?

The ceremony ended with a few reporters snagging photos of them for tomorrow's paper. Once Draco had finally descended the stairs and was away from the limelight the twits behind him seemed to crave, he beelined for the bar.

“Double firewhiskey.”

“Make that two, please.” A tight feminine voice piped up from beside him and he jumped at the near proximity, eyes widening at the sight of Hermoine Granger in all her wrathful glory.

“Err, Granger,” Draco greeted her, his voice smaller than he was used to. After all, he'd been watching her private quarrel for the last thirty minutes and couldn't help the discomfort at the invasion of her privacy.

The bartender deposited two tumblers in front of them; Granger downed hers in a single long chug, while Draco stared at her with horrified eyes.

“What?” She rolled her eyes, turning over her shoulder with a narrowed expression. “Never seen a girl drink before?”

“I’m pretty sure you just drank sewer water. I’m simply stunned you didn’t gag at the taste. This shite is abhorrent”

“Eh, s’not so bad.” She shrugged.

A smirk played on the corner of his mouth and he turned the way she was glaring, eyeing Weasley at his table with his head hung low. “Clearly, you’ve never had proper Firewhiskey,” Draco said absently, his curiosity piquing.

“I’ll take it you don’t need that, then.” Reaching over, she quickly plucked his glass from his grasp, ignoring his protest and downed it. This time a small droplet of whiskey escaped the corner of her mouth, gliding down her chin and neck before disappearing into her cleavage.

Shaking his head and turning away from the distracting droplet, Draco leaved a disgruntled breath. “Something on your mind, Granger? Celebrating a little excessively, wouldn’t you think?”

She turned to him, eyes flashing with. “I’m celebrating, Malfoy. Do you want to know why?” Her voice pitched louder as the spirits took a quick effect on her senses.

Using all his well-polished manners, Draco was trying to disguise his laughter. His lips betrayed him, turning up into a smile. “There is quite *literally* nothing I want to know more.”

Turning, she pointed a straight finger through the crowd. “That sombitch, right there! You see, he was missing from the party. I, being a dotifully, dotifill —?” Her brows knit, mouth failing to pronounce the words she clearly wanted to say.

“ *Dutiful* .”

“Right! Dutiful! I being a dottifully girlfriend, went to find him so he could get the big flashy award he cared *so* much about. Do you know where I found him?”

“I honestly don’t, Granger.” Draco turned, signaling for another round for the two of them.

“ *He* was snogging Romilda-bloody-Vane, the trollop.” She sneered and then turned back to her drinking companion, snagging the drink that had been delivered. “She always was such a coat-tail rider. She tried to dose Harry one year, did you know?”

Holding his laughter in was proving a strenuous activity; there was nothing quite so enjoyable as the public humiliation of the Weasel at the hand of a belligerent, drunken Granger.

An idea seemed to bloom to life inside her, her eyes crinkling with mischievous glee as she wound her fingers in his slender tie. “You—You come with me.”

Draco had not a clue how he'd stumbled onto such good luck. But here he was, front row seat to Weasley's demise. He nearly rubbed his hands together in gleeful anticipation as Granger tugged him to where her friends had gathered.

"Harry? Just wanted to say goodnight." Granger said brightly, leaning into Draco's side and wrapping her arm around his waist. He jumped at the sudden and foreign contact, peering down at her with a shocked frown. Just as Draco was about to extricate from the witch's tentacles, she pinched him hard under his ribs as he nearly cried out, whipping his face down to glower at her instead.

"You're—" Potter paused, eyes narrowing. "Leaving? With Malfoy?"

The curly-haired pain in his arse snuggled deeper into her side and her fingers found the exact same spot she'd just assaulted; before she could repeat the offense, he quickly draped his arm over her bare shoulder and smiled faintly.

"I'm certainly not leaving with *him* ." Turning her chin up, she didn't acknowledge Weasley further, keeping her gaze trained hard on Potter. " *He* cheated on me this evening in a bloody broom cupboard, effectively ending our relationship and freeing up the rest of my evening to spend with my dear friend, Malfoy."

Draco could hardly enjoy the moment, however, because he began hacking on his firewhiskey... He was pounding on his chest as the acid that was this blasphemous firewhiskey burned at his esophagus and nasal passages. A hushed admonishment came from their friends as they turned their heavy glares on the abashed ginger slinking further back into his seat.

Potter didn't seem surprised, his thick brow inching high above his spectacles. His gaze flickered to Draco for a splinter of a second before settling back on the witch at his side. " *Dear friend?* "

"Well..." Clearing her throat, she shifted once, her features pinching a little at the fabrication. "That may be pushing it, but regardless, I wanted to say goodnight."

" *Granger,* " he hissed, ready to pull her aside and see exactly what she was playing at, but before he could she tangled her arms around his neck, her lips pressing against his.

Eyes wide, he couldn't get his mind to settle as her full lips worked against his still ones. Then, in a brush so soft he barely felt it at all, her tongue darted out to taste the horrid firewhisky still on his lips. The kiss stole all reasonable thought from his brain, and his free hand wound around her waist, pulling her closer. She bowed perfectly into him and when a contented little noise rumbled from inside her, he forgot his surroundings entirely.

There was a strangled cough from Potter, and the kiss abruptly ceased but he didn't release her. Instead staring down at her with a curious awe. Her lips were puffy and parted, eyes a little hazy as her gaze flickered between his.

He could hear Weasley having a fit and an Irishman pulling him away but Draco couldn't be bothered.

"So...you're leaving?" Potter reiterated, and at that they both stepped back, blinking back into the moment. "Or you wanted to stay here and snog in front of me? Because you do know how much I adore watching these gratuitous displays of fake affection, but I could probably find other things to occupy my time."

Downing the rest of his drink, Draco stepped forward and placed the empty tumbler on the table behind Potter and then turned back to Granger. Resting his palm on the subtle curve of her lower back, he nodded at her motley crew, and led her from the Great Hall.

Once safely outside, his hand fell away and he turned towards her, an ill twist in his belly at the thought of saying goodnight. "You're fucking crazy, I hope you know. But, the party was lame and I needed an escape, so, thank you, I suppose." Pulling his wand free, he presented it to the table of House Elves manning the coat desk.

"What! You can't leave, you have to come to my hotel." Reaching out, she grappled for his elbow, tugging him back towards her.

"I... *what?*" For the life of him, Draco couldn't remember a time he'd been such a stuttering fool. "You want me to shag you? That seems a little brash, Granger."

Eyes narrowing, she deadpanned, "No. Of course, I am not casually inviting you back to my hotel for sex." She marched past him and presented her wand as well, both cloaks materialized moments later. "But Ronald is definitely going to get pissed drunk and stumble back to our room. I need you to be there."

"And *why* would I agree to come and have such a scintillating sexless night with you?" Draco snorted. He could have a perfectly nice sexless night at home, thank you very much, one that didn't include any drunken Weasels.

"Well, you *could* consider it atonement for terrorizing me for years." She arched an accusing brow at him and he winced. That was true... he did do that. "*Or* you could do it because the look on Ron Weasley's face when we answer my hotel door later is going to be something you really don't want to miss."

Draco thought for a minute, pursing his lips as he considered her offer. "One condition."

"Fine."

"You forgive me."

"For what?"

"For everything."

She scoffed, snapping her cloak closed. "You never apologized."

"Well, it should be obvious. It's implied."

Her features twisted as she reeled on him, that heavy brow she was so known for present yet again. “You can’t have an implied apology, that’s not an apology. You have to actually—”

“Do you really need to make this so difficult? You know I’m sorry.” He supplied her with a withering sort of look and marched towards the front gate.

A loud indignant noise rose above the sound of her chasing him down and she eventually matched his stride. “Do *you* need to make this so difficult? You know, for someone who’s asking forgiveness, you’re surprisingly antagonistic and combative. If it were *me* who wanted forgiveness, I’d be far more—”

“*Fuck*, Granger! Fine! I’m sorry. Better?”

She paused, studying him for a long moment before shrugging. “Moderately better, but your apologies could still use some work. I will accept if you get some of your fancy pants whisky you were bragging about.” Wagging her eyebrows at him, Draco couldn’t help the pucker of his brows as he studied her. For all the years he’d known this particular witch, he’d never known her to be quite like this.

And he’d never thought that he’d like it.

Sitting cross-legged on the bed of a mediocre hotel room, Draco picked at the nacho flavoured crisps she’d demanded they pop into Muggle London for. They were the most gods-awful colour and he wasn’t exactly sure what the orange dusting was, but they tasted alright. The flavour profile paired horribly with the Ogden’s Finest they were passing back and forth, but the buzzing between his ears had made it easy enough to look past.

In all his wildest dreams, he would never have thought he’d be in this particular situation. Taking up Weasley’s side of the bed with a right pissed drunk Granger, laying back in her ball gown on the pillows next to him. The highlight of the evening thus far was Granger begrudgingly admitting that he was, indeed, right; the previous firewhisky was shite after all.

They’d even laughed a bit, which was the most ridiculous thing Draco Malfoy could remember doing in recent history, and although at one time he would have bet an indecent number of galleons that Granger’s laugh would grate his senses, it didn’t. He almost rather liked it.

She yawned, arms stretching high over her head, “I’m officially tired. Will you hand me my bag?”

He handed it over, eyes narrowing as she reached elbow deep into the tiny clutch and pulled out two small vials and an ivory silk nightgown that left little in the way of imagination.

Draco gulped.

Rolling off the bed, Granger made for the loo.

Peeking over at the vials she'd left behind, he noted she carried sobering and contraceptive potions. The Sobering Potion was a nice touch, it would definitely help to clear her head; she should be feeling relatively normal in an hour and effectively avoid a hangover tomorrow.

The second vial at first made his eyes widen, but then, it was probably a habit. He'd heard Contraceptive Potions worked better if you took them every day, so she was probably just being safe against a brood of Weasel pups.

Draco stood, unbuttoning his now wrinkly white oxford and sliding his tie free from the collar. Letting the fabric slide off his shoulders, he caught it in his palms and was just about to fold it when he thought better of it and threw it haphazardly at the foot of the bed. His trousers followed suit.

The door clicked and he turned; Granger padded out, her hair piled up on her head in a messy knot and nightgown hanging on thin straps from her slender frame, barely clinging to her breasts. His belly churned at the peaks of her nipples and he quickly averted his gaze, gulping thickly. But he found that the vision was relentless in making itself known and he was now dangerously close to pitching a tent in his pants and alerting Granger to his nefarious thoughts.

"*Holy shite,*" Granger gaped, walking around him with a wide berth. Her chocolate-coloured eyes traveled the length of his nearly naked body and a fevered blush spread from his neck to the tips of his ears.

Glaring at her, he tried his best to call his confidence back to him. He'd nothing to be ashamed of. "It's not polite to stare, Granger."

"Did you..." She paused, lips curling up in a smile as she took a step closer. "Did you *always* look like that?"

"What're you on about?"

"Oh, *come on*, you know!" Her finger lifted, gesticulating in his general direction. "With the abs and the biceps. I always figured you were more a runner bean, but you're quite fit."

Draco had never been insecure a day in his life, and he didn't quite like the sensation at all. "Stop looking at me like that!"

"I'm just saying is all." She laughed, palms raising in her defense. "Who would have thought? Gangly little helmet-haired Draco Malfoy turned into such a stud," she clucked her tongue, teasing him as she climbed into bed.

"You're especially annoying when you're drunk, did you know?" Throat tight, he rounded the bed and climbed in next to her, laying flat on his back and staring at the ceiling although she was on her side facing him.

"I mean it, you're fit. You're a prat, but you're fit!" She giggled, reaching for the two vials and hitching her knee up a little higher.

Draco refused to give in and stare down at the few inches of creamy thigh now exposed. He refused.

A yawn tore itself from her throat again and she tipped the first vial to her lips. “But, in all seriousness, thanks for doing this, Malfoy. I know it’s immature and *ridiculous*. I know that. But, I was just so—” Her voice shook and he could tell she was on the verge of tears.

Felt horribly out of his element, Draco tried to imagine what a Hufflepuff would do in such a situation and settled for reaching out and patting her knee a few awkward times. “Don’t mention it, Granger.”

The bed shook lightly with her laughter and she sat up with the second vial between her fingers. A quick rattle of the door knob made them both jump and Granger gasped, both hands flying to her chest.

“*HERMIONE!* I know you’re in there!” Weasley. Pounding on the door in the middle of the night like a besotted fool he was. “I’m so sorry, love. You know it’s nothing; she meant nothing!”

Hermione's eyes rounded, her shoulders shaking with fresh anxiety. It took her a moment, as Weasley prattled on but finally she tossed her legs over the side of the bed.

Something almost protective and completely foreign overtook Draco and his hand shot out to stay her. “I’ll handle it. You just pretend to sleep.”

Eyes snapping up to hers, she seemed to sag in appreciation, her lips mouthing a silent *thank you*. Quickly, she fell back against the pillow, her hair still a mess and her nightgown askew. Grinning to himself, Draco reached down, sliding the strap down over her shoulder, and she smiled with her eyes closed.

Rising to his feet, Draco gave his core muscles a quick flex—glad to know Granger had appreciated them so—and rested one hand on the wall, cracking it open with the other.

Weasley was there, eyes puffy from tears long since shed and mouth hanging open at the sight of another man in his room. “You son-of-a—”

“*Shhhh shhhh*, Weasel.” A wicked smirk played on Draco’s lips as he gave a quick peek over his shoulder.

“I’ll fucking kill you.” Eyes wild with drunkenness and rage, Weasley took an impassioned step towards the door, eyes catching on his witch in the bed.

“Keep your voice down you uncouth animal. Wouldn’t want to have to call security, would we? I don’t think they take the trash out til morning, would hate to have them make a special exception on your behalf.”

“Death Eater fucking trash, how dare you touch her!”

Rage bubbled to the surface and Draco was quick to tamp it down, his lips pulling back in a low snarl before returning to a tight smile. “You’ll have to forgive me, but my witch is a bit

knackered from our rounds earlier. Would you mind popping back in the morning? Thanks, mate.” He winked, then quickly slammed the door. *Fucking wanker.*

After a long minute, he crossed the room and fell into bed next to Granger.

“Thank you,” she whispered, eyes still closed.

Folding an arm behind his head, he let out a long sigh. “He’s a fool, Granger. You deserve better than that.”

They didn’t speak again, and eventually her breaths evened and she began shifting in her sleep. The strap that had precariously been hung from her shoulder before was now inching even further south, revealing the soft swell of her breast. It physically pained him to look away.

Common sense told him he could probably leave now—the Weasel had been shamed, Granger had been tucked in safely—but he didn’t and he didn’t really know why.

Draco was lost in the most wonderful dream. Soft lips trailed against his collarbone, reaching the hollow of his neck, then his ear.

The smell of jasmine and firewhisky surrounded him and wayward curls brushed against his cheek; his eyes snapped open.

Hermione Granger was straddling his waist, her soft body pressed against his chest. *Not a dream, then.* Of their own volition, his palms found the tops of her thighs, sliding up until they were at the juncture of her hips.

“Granger,” he choked, “we shouldn’t, you’re completely—” Her tongue darted out, tasting his jaw as she worked her way closer to his lips. A moan rumbled in his chest and his hips flexed into her. “We can’t.”

It seemed his mouth and mind were working separately from each other, his palms sliding back to the curve of her bum and gripping her firmly.

She chuckled, her lips bumping against the corner of his mouth. “Sobering potion, Malfoy.” Rising up, she stared down at him, eyes lidded and lips parted. “But ten points to Slytherin for being ever the gentleman.”

His cock twitched and his balls ached, a slew of filthy teenage fantasies rushing to the surface as she rocked her hips on top of him.

“Still—” One brazen hand moved up the curve of her waist, thumb brushing the gentle swell of her breast through her silky negligee.

“Come on, Malfoy.” She grinned down at him, her fingers moving to run dangerously through his fringe. “Live a little. It’s just one night.”

The last of his resolution withered and died; he swiftly sat up, crushing her body back against his. One arm banded around her waist, while his other hand buried in her curls, slanting his

mouth over hers. *Fuck*, she was more than he'd imagined. Their tongues brushed in a delirious dance as she rolled her hips and wrapped her arms around him.

Then, like the snap of a band, they moved frantically together, pushing and pulling, teeth and nails. With a quick roll, she was on her back and he'd settled between her legs, pressing into her center as her knees hitched high on his hips. His hands never stopped roaming, mapping out new courses as her back arched off the mattress and the fabric of her nightie slipped higher still.

Her arousal wet his pants, causing him to stiffen to the point of pain. With a desperate haste he couldn't have foreseen, they divulged each other of their clothes and his only lament was not being able to take the time to fully appreciate the vision of Hermione Granger naked and writhing underneath him as he positioned himself at her entrance.

Their gazes locked, her chest rising and falling with quick breaths. This seemed like an important moment, one where things changed irrevocably. It deserved pause. Her eyes glittered and she shifted underneath him, her slender fingers curling around his bum and pulling him inside. A low groan pushed past his lips, his eyes fluttering closed as the warmth and pressure of her sex closed around him.

Fuck, he wasn't going to last. He moved inside her, hips snapping forward as she lifted off the mattress to meet him.

"Draco," she keened, long finger nails dragging down his back as he winced.

He slipped a hand between them, finding the apex of her folds and rubbing in firm, purposeful strokes until she was clenching on his member, cresting and falling apart under his touch. When her body relaxed, he let out a groan of relief and drove into her with a new intensity, desperate to find his release inside her.

The feeling of her breasts against his chest and her lips latching onto his neck, sent him reeling, emptying inside her as his fingers dug into her arse and his mouth found hers. When he was spent, he rolled to his side, collapsing next to her, trying to catch his breath.

Shite, he'd just fucked Hermione Granger.

To his right, she looked perfectly pleased with herself, biting down on her lip to keep from grinning as she saddled up next to him and curled around him.

Idly, his finger tracked up and down her spine as her leg tangled around his. She'd taken that second potion, right?

Of course, she had.

AUTHOR NOTE: Well first, I can't BELIEVE the response to chapter one. Like WHAT. I am so glad you guys are enjoying it! This is the only flashback and I seem to remember readers being angry at me last time for jumping back in time for a chapter so forgive me!

*But I liked it so here you are! Liam will be back! This will *probably* be the only chapter written from Draco's POV as well... there were some weird things going on there in the original so for now it's all Hermione but idk what I was doing lol maybe some Draco later.*

This is unbeta'd so all errors are shamefully mine. Big thanks to MCal for her support and love during this rewrite!

AND HAPPY EARLY BIRTHDAY SUTSOP! Hope this smutty chapter pairs well with your pizza and cake. Mwah!

Thank you endlessly for reading and your reviews, I can't begin to tell you how much they make my day!

XO

Chapter 3

“You’d better start talking, Granger.” Draco paced back and forth, his fury rippling off him in waves. Her brain was a tangle of excuses, her wits still back at the dinner table with Liam.

Pulling on her fingers, she tried to bring some string of words together. She’d practiced this very conversation a hundred times. There were points she was going to make, things she was going to explain. Now that the time was here, all she could focus on was the clamoring in her chest and the hot shame staining her cheeks. “Draco, I—”

The words died in the air between them when he sliced his hand through the air, his lips pulling back in a snarl. “I changed my mind. Why don’t *I* start talking. For the love of fucking Morgana, tell me that’s not my son. *Please.*” Pressing his palms together, his eyes fluttered closed for a moment. “Please tell me you can’t be so fucking stupid as to keep the fact that I have a child from me.”

Hermione let out a long breath she didn’t realize she’d been holding onto. Every fibre of her being felt tightly strung with taut anxiety.

“He’s yours.” The words drifted past her lips, hanging between them like a noose.

As if he’d been punched, Malfoy quickly doubled over, bracing himself on his thighs as he sucked in hard, greedy breaths.

Straightening his spine, he turned his face towards the night sky and groaned, dragging his palms down his face. “How could you?”

Her eyes darted to the treeline behind him; she found herself unable to witness this moment. There was never any love lost between her and Malfoy. They were never close—never friendly—but in the years that followed their tryst, she looked fondly on their evening together. Not only had he’d been there for her when she needed... but that night had brought her Liam.

The guilt that weighed heavily on her heart had nearly consumed her on multiple occasions. She dealt with said guilt rationally—by ignoring it. Everytime it threatened to overwhelm her, she quickly tamped it down, tying it up nicely and storing it in the recesses of her mind.

It was now time to deal with the consequences.

“It all just got so out of hand.” Clenching her lids shut, she grappled for the truth. “I was always going to tell you, of course. I just...” Growling under her breath, she turned towards him, shoulders sagging. “I sat down a hundred times with a quill in my hand and—I *couldn't*. I tried; I swear it.”

“Bloody fucking brilliant. *Inspired*, Granger. So happy you *tried*. ”

Shaking her head, she studied the cobbled stones beneath her feet. “I did, Draco. I really did. I wanted so much to make it right, but every time I tried, I thought about how I’d be ruining your life.”

“ *What?* ” Draco hissed, taking a menacing step towards her. The hair on her arms stiffened and she felt tears prickle at the back of her eyes.

“I just meant—”

“Ruin my life? *Ruin it?* Damn, Granger.” Running his tongue across his teeth, he chuckled mirthlessly to himself. “You know, I always knew you were an arrogant little know-it-all, but I never thought you could be so fucking stupid.”

Rage bubbled to the surface and she took a hard step towards him, slicing her hand through the air. “Back off, Malfoy. You’ve no idea what I’ve been through all these years, alright? I’m sure you feel like you’ve missed out—”

“ *Missed out!* ” Draco let out an indignant snort, slamming his palm against his chest. “Granger, you’ve just turned my entire world on its arse and you have the *audacity* to

minimalise this? We have *a son* . A son who reads and is a bit of a prick at times, if I'm being honest. How are you so blase about this?"

"I am *not* blase!" Huffing indignantly, she turned sharply on her heel. "I have changed every nappy, done every meal, and kissed every skinned knee for seven years. And I've done it without complaint! So maybe you could maybe ease off a little."

"*Right!*" He pointed a weighted finger in her direction. "Because you made that decision! Don't act like the martyr; you knew what the bloody hell you were doing."

A headache was blooming to life at her temples, and she pinched the bridge of her nose as she collapsed onto the bench in their backyard. This wasn't hard. This was *impossible* . "I didn't want you to feel obligated."

"Obligated?"

"To claim him or some such nonsense," she said flippantly, waving her fingers through the air. "I know my blood status complicates matters and I didn't know—"

She was silenced by his obnoxious snort. "First of all, you didn't bloody know! You didn't know, because you didn't bloody ask. Second, how fucking presumptuous of you to think I give two fucks if you're Muggleborn. I don't care who you were parents were—they could be bloody trolls for all I care. I have a son and you're prattling on about this bloody nonsense."

"*Your son?* That's rich! I don't remember you pushing him out of *your* vagina."

With a withering sort of sneer, Draco deadpanned, "I know you've always been a self-important, self-righteous type of witch, but may I please remind you that females are, as of yet, incapable of reproducing on their own. Not even the all-fucking-powerful Hermione Granger."

“You’re ridiculous.” Hermione jumped to her feet, marching towards the house in an effort to cease this trainwreck of a conversation. Draco’s hand shot out, his firm grip catching her elbow.

“You’re telling him.” For the first time, maybe ever, she felt slightly terrified of him.

“It’s not that easy...” she began.

“Do you honestly think I give a shit if this makes your life easier? No ‘buts’, no more excuses.” He straightened, glaring down at her. “I can always hire a solicitor if you prefer, and we can handle this through the court system.”

She yanked her arm from his grasp and even she was surprised by the low growl that rumbled in her chest. Draco surprised her by dropping his offensive stance, his features crumpling.

“This is, yet again, your decision, Granger. You decide how we move forward. I’d like to meet him properly, let him know I’m not some deadbeat who wrote him off, but if you can’t find it in that cold heart of yours, then I’m fully prepared to throw galleons at the situation to get my way. Your call.”

Her eyes locked on his and she felt her heart stutter and fail in her chest.

“Think on it, Granger. Owl me tomorrow with your answer.”

Turning, Draco stormed past the wards before Disapparating with a loud crack.

Every awful decision she’d ever made crashed down around her. She was supposed to be courageous, supposed to be clever. Nothing in the last six years pointed towards those qualities at all.

She always knew this was an inevitability; Liam was too wonderful to keep all to herself. But all these years, it had just been them. Life had felt so impossible at times, and there had been more than once that she would've sold her left arm for a partner. Hell, she'd have sold it for an hour alone, but that boy was all she had.

Liam was her life.

She wasn't sure how to make more room for anyone else. With one long sobering breath, she rose to her feet and stared at the spot where Draco had disappeared. She'd run out of time.

With a heavy step, she turned for the house. Inside, she found the table cleared, the kids gone and Harry and Ginny sat sporting expectant smiles. Merlin, they were nearly vibrating with excitement.

She sighed heavily, chuckling under her breath as she dragged a chair free from the table. "Hello, Potters."

"Hermione!" Ginny gaped, rocking forward to lean excitedly over the table. "I didn't think you'd *actually* shagged Malfoy that night! I thought you were just fucking with Ron!"

"Yes, well—" She grimaced. "That was the intent. The follow through, however, ended quite differently." Dragging her dry hands over her face, Hermione released a low groan into her palms. "Where's Liam?"

"Front room," Harry said, words tumbling free quickly. "But, what just happened out there? What did Malfoy say? Is he pissed?"

"Potters, it's been a hell of a day. I can't rehash it now." Hermione craned her neck and rubbed at her temple, trying to push away an impending headache. "I'll talk to you both soon, okay?"

She stood on shaky legs and turned for the front room.

“Hermione!” Harry called out, causing her to pause midstep. She turned, finding her friend looking thoroughly abashed. “I *am* sorry. I know you weren’t anticipating this tonight. If I’d have known—”

“I know.” Quirking her lips up in a barely there smile, Hermione waved to her friends. “Goodnight.”

Liam was sitting primly in the high backed armchair that Harry had occupied earlier.

Leaning over the couch, she smiled at her son, now sporting his usual platinum curls. “Hey, you.”

“Am I in trouble?” he asked quietly, eyes flickering over the edge of his book cautiously.

“Of course not. Let’s get some sleep, yeah?”

A bright grin spread over his face and he nodded. “Yeah.”

xXx

The next morning, Hermione cradled her steaming mug of tea to her chest as she leaned over the balcony of her shiny new suite. The morning air was a little humid for her liking, the ends of her hair frizzing and lifting away from her head.

Upon arriving at the hotel late last night, she had been informed that her standard room had been upgraded to a suite. She’d tried to argue that it was far from necessary but the clerk had been almost forceful that she accept, saying it was already paid in full and it was *far* nicer than the room she reserved.

After serving him a disdainful little smile, she'd ripped the roomkey from the idiot's hand and taken the lift to the very top floor.

Now, her mind was busy replaying the events of the night before. She'd known coming back to London wasn't going to be easy after all this time... but this? This was almost more than she could bear.

Turning at the shuffling of tiny feet across the floor behind her, Hermione smiled and sank to a crouch. "Morning, love. How'd you sleep?"

"Alright." He yawned, rubbing his tiny closed fists into his eyes. "This room is very fancy, fancier than we are."

She laughed at his candor. "Yes, it is. What do you want to do today? I need to make a few calls, but that can probably wait 'til later."

His sleepy eyes brightened, brow inching towards his blond hair. "I want to see Hogwarts!"

With a soft grimace, she cupped his cheek. "Anything else?"

"Diagon Alley?" he amended, a bright grin splitting his face.

"I think I could arrange that." She leaned in to kiss his cheek and then her palm fell away. "First, I need to talk to you about something. Do you remember when we spoke about your father?"

"A little." He shifted where he stood, bare feet toeing at nothing in particular.

Hermione felt as if she were swallowing a toad. "Well," she started, before sinking all the way to her knees in front of him, "I'd hoped you would have met him more properly but the man you met last night was— *is* your father."

“The man with my hair,” he stated matter of factly.

“Yes. His name is Draco Malfoy. We went to Hogwarts together and he lives and works here in London.”

“That’s an odd name.”

She swallowed, a weak smile playing on her lips. “I suppose it is. Do—” Merlin, she’d spoken thousands of words everyday of her life, why were these ones so hard to form. “Do you have any questions for me?”

“Should I call him Dad?”

The simple question knocked the breath from her lungs and her eyes fluttered closed. In the darkness, a dozen scenes played out, each one was of Hermione and Liam, together. All she’d done, all she’d sacrificed...

Logically, she knew it was ridiculous. They could make room for Draco.

Illogically, her mind wandered to dangerous places. Had she ever really been enough for Liam? She’d done her absolute best, had fought through endless loneliness and crippling postpartum depression. She’d conquered every late night feeding, every nappy, every tantrum. Still, it would seem she’d fallen short in Liam’s eyes.

At the end of the day, he was still without a father.

Maybe that’s why he didn’t like sports, why he didn’t like to talk to other people and always had his head in a book.

Maybe she'd failed her son.

Swallowing the knot that had lodged in her throat, her lips quirked upwards. "You'll have to talk to him about that, but I'm sure you guys can decide on something together."

"I don't really like talking to people," he admitted, his mouth screwing up to one side.

"I know and I think he'll understand that." Hermione tried to summon her courage, tried to remember the fire that had never left her in all her years, even if it had quieted to a low burning ember. "Liam, there's something else I need to tell you." It wasn't natural how loudly her heart was racketed in her ribcage, the thundering shaking in her eardrums. "Your father —"

"Draco," he corrected and Hermione rolled her eyes.

"Yes, *Draco*. Well," she paused, her chest constricting as she forced the rest of it out, "Draco never knew about you. I never told him." Her lips folded in as she studied Liam's blank expression. "When I found out I was pregnant with you, I was *so* happy. Truly. But... I was also very scared. I left London quickly before anyone found out and went to America."

"*What?*" Liam withdrew from her touch, his face crumpling into a disdainful sneer that was far too familiar.

"It was a horrible mistake, Liam. I know that now, I just... I wanted you to be older or wanted him to be more ready. I didn't—"

"You *lied*!" he shrieked, stamping his foot on the ground as a sizzle of accidental magic permeated through the air.. "You said *not* to lie! You always tell me that!"

"Liam, that was *never* my intention. I just needed more time."

“It’s not fair! Did he want me?” His magic pressed in around her and she reached out to grasp his tiny fingers. She didn’t know how to answer that question.

“I’m going to owl him and we can set up a time to have him come by, and you can meet him properly. Would that make everything better?”

“No! S’not better!” He paused, mouth folding into a hard line as he collected his thoughts. “I need some alone time,” Liam said with a disappointed shake of his head. He turned and walked calmly into her bedroom, closing the door quietly behind him.

“Fucking brilliant,” she hissed to herself. After another few minutes of staring out at the London skyline, she turned to send the owl that she dreaded most.

xXx

Liam didn’t leave the bedroom; when she went to check on him, he’d simply requested that she respect his privacy. To which she rolled her eyes, and granted his wish. Merlin, the child was sometimes just too much.

As she waited for Draco’s arrival, the tension rose around her, pulsing in the air like a heartbeat. No matter how one looked at it, she was the bad guy. She’d kept them apart— *lied* —denied them of a relationship they’d never get back. She was abhorrent.

A knock sounded sharply at the door and Hermione’s heart dropped with a nearly audible *thud*.

She wasn’t ready. *She couldn’t move.*

Another knock, this one far more irritable— if such a thing were possible—and on shaky legs, she crossed the room. With a final fortifying breath, she opened the door.

“Granger,” he greeted formally, his jaw seemingly wired shut as he forced the word through clenched teeth.

“Malfoy. Come in.” Gesturing for the fine sitting room, she took note of him as he passed. He still wore that air of aristocracy and confidence that she was sure you had to be born into; no amount of refinement could escalate her to such a state. His robes were immaculate, far nicer than a Saturday afternoon deigned necessary and above all, he was still painstakingly handsome. “Thank you for the suite, by the way. It was unnecessary, but appreciated.”

“It was necessary,” he quipped, eyeing her disdainfully. “I’m not about to have Liam sleeping on the ground in the maid’s quarter as you’d have it.”

She snorted, rolling her eyes as she shut the door. “That’s not —“

“Have you told him?” He cut her off sharply.

Sucking in a harsh breath, her anxiety swelled painfully in her chest. “I have.” Her chin tilted proudly but her hands shook at her sides until she tangled her fingers together nervously.

“Everything?”

“Well I left out the exact mechanics of how he was conceived.” His eyes narrowed into slits, and she grimaced at her poor attempt to lighten the mood. “Yes. The rest of it, including that you didn’t know about him.”

“*And?*” Draco’s eyes bulged and he gesticulated wildly, clearly exasperated by Hermione reluctance to elaborate.

“And what?” she snapped. “He’s furious with me. Is that what you want to hear?”

“It certainly helps.” A condescending smirk played on his lips and Hermione felt her magic push forward, begging to be unleashed on him.

“Listen, we need to talk before any of—” she paused, waving a hand towards the bedroom door, her voice dropping in resignation. “Well, any of that. We haven’t talked about how this is all going to work. I’m not sure how much involvement, if any, you’d like.” Hermione began pacing, tugging on stray curls as she avoided looking in his general direction. “He’s asked if he can call you dad, for crying out loud, and I’ve no idea what to say. No idea what it is you even want. This is all completely new for me.”

Malfoy scoffed; she could feel his anger rolling through the air. “*For you?* You’ve got to be kidding me. You’ve lied for the last six years, withholding a child from his father, and now you want my sympathy? Get over yourself, Granger.”

He shoved past her, approaching the door to the en suite. His closed fist raised and hovered over the wood for a moment, his chin ducking before knocking lightly.

Liam’s curly, blond mop of hair appeared through a small crack, disappearing quickly for a moment before he finally emerged, chin tilted high. She never was sure which parent he’d gotten that personality trait from; they both pulled it off so effortlessly. Liam was wearing his khaki trousers, and little white button up adorned with a red clip on tie that was adorably crooked.

“Good afternoon.” Liam spoke as though he were speaking to the King of England, and Hermione couldn’t help but stifle a laugh, earning her a sharp look from her son.

“Well, don’t you look sharp,” Draco smiled.

“It’s good to make proper first impressions, my mum says. I—I know we met last night, but I didn’t—” Pausing, his gaze fell to his shoes. “I didn’t know, then.”

Draco knelt, leaning forward on his knee towards her son. Hermione’s instinct was to intrude on the moment, to share in it, or facilitate in some small way. But she kept her feet planted, swallowing the words clawing up her throat.

“Let’s start over, shall we?” Draco smiled kindly and Hermione remembered just how wonderful he could be when he was trying—not that it negated how awful he could be when he wanted to be, too.

“Alright.” Liam kicked at the floor.

“I’m Draco Malfoy, but you don’t have to call me that, if you’d prefer something else.”

“I’m Liam.” He paused in thought. “—And I’d like it if you called me that.” Draco and Hermione shared a chuckle and Liam’s cheeks darkened, his lips setting in a hard line.

A few fat tears slid down her cheeks; she’d avoided even the thought of them meeting for so long that she had never let herself have any expectations.

But this? This was ok.

“I’ve brought you something.” Malfoy reached into the inner pocket of his robes and Hermione barged into the private moment without thought.

“Oh, you didn’t need to do that!” She all but shouted. They both glared over at her, silencing her with matching contemptuous expressions. With a loud breath, she raised her palms defensively and mouthed a silent, *sorry* at the pair of them.

Reaching in his pocket, Draco pulled out a small black box, which he promptly opened. Liam stared at the small object for a long time, speechless and clearly confused.

“I’ve no idea what that is,” he stated clearly and without enthusiasm.

Laughing, Malfoy plucked the small item from its home. “It’s a crest. Well, it’s a pin, but it’s my family crest... *your* family crest. You’re a Malfoy.” Draco beamed with pride and something hot and painful lanced through her heart.

“Malfoy?”

“It’s my surname, of course. It’s a very respectable wizarding family, if you tell them your name is Malfoy, you’ll be respected.” Hermione scoffed, but apparently everyone was now ignoring her. “We’re Sacred Twenty-Eight, if such a thing matters in circles you run in.”

“But... my surname is Granger,” he announced placidly.

“Well, yes, of that I am aware.” Draco shot a narrowed glare over his shoulder.

“And he’s also the son of a Muggleborn, I think that might interrupt your family’s exalted status on that archaic list of ridiculous—”

Draco cut her off, his scowl deepening in her direction before returning his attention to Liam. “You’re also part of my family now, and we’re Malfoys. You don’t have to wear it, I just, I got one when I was born. You would have too if... if circumstances had been different.”

Studying his new father for a moment, Liam eventually nodded and took the trinket into his hands. “Ok, I’ll wear it. I like snakes. Did you know that certain snakes have over 200 teeth? They don’t bite, though, the teeth point back to keep their prey trapped in their mouth.”

“Merlin,” Draco blanched. “No, I didn’t know that. But I *am* glad to hear you like snakes, maybe we still have time to make you a Slytherin. That’s the best house, bar none.”

“I can’t be in Slytherin. Slytherins are only at Hogwarts.”

Snorting, Draco grinned down at the little blond. “Where else would you possibly go? Don’t tell me your mum wants to send you off to Beauxbatons; though, I wouldn’t be surprised.”

Liam walked over to Hermione and held out the ornate pin, puffing out his chest as she attached to his shirt. “He’ll go to Ilvermorny, of course.”

“*In America?!* ”

“We *live* in America. We have an apartment, and a cat. I’ve a job...” Hermione was embarrassingly enough running out of things to claim in New York.

“Mummy lets me come to work with her sometimes. Her university has the largest library I’ve ever seen! Do you like reading, too?” Liam’s excitement twinkled in his eyes.

“I do. And I’m sure I have a library at my home that would put your mothers to shame.” Draco lip curled in a sneer over his shoulder and she threw her hands up in exasperation. “We will discuss your schooling later, but I do have a strong feeling it *won’t* be in America,” Draco was trying to speak kindly to Liam, but Hermione could hear the warning that was meant for her.

“Do you have a mother and father?” Liam questioned.

“I do; they live in France, so I don’t see them much.”

“Do they know about me? I’ve never had grandparents.”

Hermione chest tightened to the point of pain.

“Well, no, they don’t know about you—I’ve only just learned about you. But I’m afraid they left a lot to desire as parents; I’m not sure how they will fare as grandparents.”

“Ok,” Liam replied, unaffected.

“I was wondering, if you’d like to spend some time with me. I don’t know if you have time.”

“Mummy, do I have time?”

“Sure, honey.” Hermione smiled at him. “I’d like to come though, if that’s alright.”

“I guess...” they both said in the same dry voice, wearing eerily matching expressions.

“Liam mentioned wanting to see Diagon Alley, are you up for that, Draco?”

“You know, I think I have a few spare Galleons burning a hole in my pocket with your name on them Liam,” Draco said with a conspiring grin. “Diagon Alley it is.”

AUTHORS NOTE: Hope you enjoyed! I appreciate each and every reader and review and can't thank you enough for following along! Big thanks to Mcal for her Alpha eyes before posting! All errors are well and surely mine. Mwah!

Chapter 4

They arrived in Diagon Alley with a *pop!*

Clenching his eyes shut, Liam steadied himself. When he opened them, they were wide, brimming with wonder and excitement despite his inevitable sickness.

“Mum! We’re here! We’re really here! Mr. ... *Draco* ,” Liam stuttered, and Draco frowned. “Did you know my mother freed a Dragon from Gringotts? It’s true. She wouldn’t lie, she never lies. Well except about me to you— and you to me.”

“ *Liam!* ”

“You know I think I *did* hear something about your Mother doing some rather reckless things; freeing a Dragon doesn’t surprise me all that much. She has very *stupid* friends, after all.” That earned Draco a sharp slap on his shoulder, but he didn’t react.

“Mum, do you still have a Gringotts account?” Quickly, Liam turned his attention back to his father. “Mr. Draco, I’ve read all about these vaults, and the amazing things inside. You can take a cart down to your vault, and there are goblins working there!”

Turning over his shoulder, Draco jerked his chin at Hermione. “Don’t you lot have wizarding shops in America?”

“Of course. But this is different. He’s obsessed with wizarding London, we’ve kind of assimilated into No-maj life, so a whole secret world is pretty exciting for a small boy.”

“No-maj?”

“Muggles.”

“Why on earth wouldn’t you just say Muggles?”

“Because, you insufferable git, I live in America where they are called No-maj.”

A soft growl rumbled from Draco’s lips. “Well, *Liam*, even if your mother *does* have a Gringotts vault, I can guarantee, mine is better. Let’s pay one a visit shall we?”

“Really? Mum, is it okay?” Her son gawked up at her, starry-eyed and hands locked together. Something in her withered and died and with a shrug, she acquiesced.

“Well, alright. But I’m not sure if we shouldn’t glamour your hair? We’re getting rather a lot of looks.”

“*Mum...*” Liam’s body shook in a petulant pout. “I like my hair; I don’t want you to charm it.”

“I understand, love. But Mummy and Draco walking around Diagon Alley is going to turn enough heads. Let alone—”

“I’m not ashamed of him,” Draco said flatly and Liam’s small face. “Come on, Liam.”

“I didn’t say you— oh, Merlin. You two are just going to gang up on me all day then?”

“Probably,” they said in unison and Draco snuck a look down at the little man who was staring at him. Their matching smirks made her eyes roll. Raising Liam alone these past six years had its challenges to be sure. But seeing those endless similarities between him and the boy she knew from Hogwarts was infuriating at best.

They made their way towards Gringotts, the two boys just a step ahead, and that sinking feeling returned. Like she was an outsider in her own family and the thought alone sat on her tongue like vinegar.

As soon as the looming columns came into view, Liam visibly began vibrating, his excitement running over as his foot met the first step.

Upon entry, they were immediately greeted and escorted to a private room. Of course, Draco Malfoy wouldn't be waiting in line for a teller; he was probably the wealthiest patron. People like that were probably allowed certain amenities that weren't normally available to the rest of the plebians who frequented the bank.

"Mr. Malfoy, how are you today, sir?" A small goblin with beady eyes and weathered lavender skin spun in his chair, gesturing for them to sit. There were two chairs and Hermione took the first, Liam scrambling into her lap. She didn't miss the second-too-long glance from Draco.

"Very well, thank you." Draco undid the button of his jacket and sat gracefully, the muscles of his jaw tight. "This is—" He paused, gaze flickering to his right. "This is my son, Liam, and his mother, Hermoine Granger."

Shock etched its way onto the goblin's features, his jaw slackening for a heart-beat for he seemed to remember himself. "Oh, I didn't realize..."

"Can you begin the paperwork for the heritage account? We'd also like to visit the vault."

"Sir? You're sure? Maybe we ought to reach out to your—"

"I'm sure. Make arrangements. *Immediately.*" Draco spoke with such authority that even Hermione felt a little quieted. There was a confidence that had come off as arrogant in their youth, but now it held its substantial weight.

“Of course, one moment.” The goblin bowed his head, his nose almost brushing the top of his pristine desk, and exited the private office.

“Mummy, *did you see him?*” Liam gawked and Hermione hugged him a little closer, fighting a smile and holding her finger up to her lips.

Draco seemed amused as well, one brow arched and his lips pulling into a smirk. “They don’t have goblins in America, I take it?”

Hermione giggled. “I’m sure that they do, but the wizard world is much different, especially in New York.”

“Are they No-maj, mum?”

“No, they have wonderful magic, my love.” She pressed a kiss to the top of his head.

“They *are* wonderful. Do we have any books on goblins?”

“Probably at home. But there is a book store just up the—”

Draco scoffed. “Don’t worry, Liam. You’ll come by the manor and have more books than you know what to do with.”

The edges of her vision twinged bright crimson and her hand involuntarily closed into a fist, trapping the magic that wanted to lash out against the prat. “This isn’t a competition, Draco.”

“Thank Salazar for you; you’d be losing horribly.”

The goblin came back into the room then, handing over a long piece of parchment to Draco. He read it over, nodded a few times and then signed the bottom. Without a word he handed it back to the goblin.

“Shall we?” he stood, rebuttoning his suit jacket and motioning towards a door in the back of the room. When it opened, it revealed a small strip of stone and a vault car waiting on a precarious-looking set of tracks.

Hissing, Hermione clutched Liam to her side and her hand shot out to twist in the fabric covering Draco’s arm. It’d been quite some time she’d been in one of these and it’d been under duress that she’d gone at all.

“Scared, Granger?” When she looked up at him that blasted smirk was twisting his lips, but Merlin if it didn’t look good on him.

Some of the tension evaporated between them and Draco offered his hand to her, helping her into the car. Liam was next, excitement and fear wracking through his small body as he tucked into his mother’s side. She assumed Draco would sit in the front with their teller but he surprised her as he found room next to Liam, his arm draping across the back of the seat.

As the car began to move, Hermione noticed the way Draco’s gaze kept flickering down to Liam’s, like he was waiting for a big reaction. Liam didn’t disappoint, eyes brimming as the cart tipped over a steep drop. She couldn’t help her squeal as she clung to her son as though he were going to be thrown from the seat at any moment.

Over the rattling sound of wheel against track, Liam began to prattle off facts he’d read about Gringotts, asking their driver an endless list of questions as they passed door after door.

At last, they slowed before a large double door with the Malfoy Crest engraved in the center and Hermione felt like she could breathe again. Draco helped Hermione and Liam out of the car and pressed his hand into the center of the crest. The doors responding by swinging slowly open.

Both Liam and Hermione’s face fell in awe as they noticed stack upon stack of glittering coins that filled every inch of the room. There were trunks of priceless jewelry sitting in the dead center, overflowing with pieces adorned with emeralds and diamonds.

“This is *yours*, Mr. Draco?” Liam turned several times, lost in the grandeur of it all.

Draco’s chest puffed out and he grinned. “*Actually—*” He held his hand out to the goblin, never taking his eyes off their son and was handed a single key and a scroll of parchment. “It’s yours.”

The air was knocked from her lungs as though he’d just sucker-punched her in the sternum. “*Draco!*”

“This is the Malfoy heritage vault. We have vaults at Gringotts and this one was given to me when I was about eight. It’s your trust, essentially, and is fed by the others. Someday, when you have a child, it will be theirs.” The pride billowing off Draco was palpable but Hermione couldn’t *breathe*. “Everything in here is yours. You won’t want for anything the rest of your life.”

Liam blinked several times, his jaw slack as he stared at Draco. “It’s... *it’s mine?*”

“Every last galleon.”

A headache bloomed at her temples and Hermione stabbed her fingertips into the throbbing, her eyes clenching as Liam began shrieking, looking like he wanted to swan dive into a pool of galleons.

“Draco,” she bit out. “I need to speak to you.”

He ignored her, hands jammed in his trouser pockets and rocking on his heels.

“*Draco!*” Her shrill shout echoed throughout the vast room and the other three occupants reeled on her. “Now, please.” Turning on her heel, she stomped towards the vault door and

paused there, an accusation tumbling from her lips before he'd even joined her. "Have you lost your bleeding mind?"

Folding his lips into a tight line, he rolled his eyes and shook his head a few times, as though testing its weight. "Pretty sure it's still up there."

"You have absolutely no right—"

"Careful, Granger."

"You can't just hand a six-year-old a small fortune!"

"I assure you that isn't small." Condescension dripped from his tone. "You should be thrilled, you just became a very wealthy witch."

Acid shot through her veins, cooling her rage into something far more dangerous. "Let me make this *explicitly* clear, Malfoy. You aren't to give my son anything without my permission, certainly not a bloody vault!"

Draco ran his tongue along his teeth, chuckling to himself.

"Something funny, Malfoy?"

"Done?"

Oh. She'd expected a fight. "Um, yes."

"My turn." His grey eyes steeled, narrowing just enough to send a shiver chasing along her skin. "He's not just your son anymore. He never was actually— you just robbed me of my

parental rights for six years. If I want to give a small fraction of my money to *my* son, as it has been done for generations of Malfoys before me, I will. If I want to gift him a fucking unicorn, I will. You got six birthdays, six Christmases, six of everything. You won't be making unilateral decisions anymore."

"Excuse me?"

Draco ran a hand through his hair, some of his fury dissipating. "He's my son, Granger. There are certain things that are going to need to happen from here on out, it's how things are done in my family."

Her stomach flopped. "What *things* exactly?"

"He'll be named as the official heir to the Malfoy line and presented to the rest of proper society. He'll need to be integrated into the Black family tapestry and set up with his trusts on that side of the family as well. He'll be given property and—"

"Malfoy..." She hoped he could hear the sincerity in her voice when she said, "He's six. He's starting primary school in the fall and likes to eat donuts with chocolate sprinkles. This is too much."

Behind them, Liam's excited squeals broke through her concentration and when she turned, she found him counting a stack of shiny galleons. Hermione pinched the bridge of her nose and her shoulders sagged in relief. "Liam has been looking forward to this since he can remember. I don't want to ruin it with us fighting. The vault is... it's fine. But the rest will just have to wait."

"Fine."

"Fine."

“Mummy! Look it’s a tiara for you!” Lofted high over Liam’s head was a decadent tiara dripping with emeralds and a black gemstone snake.

Hermione groaned while Malfoy bit back his laughter, and they turned back to join Liam in his exploration of his new fortune.

xXx

After hours of wandering Diagon Alley, when Liam was sure he’d seen every nook and cranny it had to offer, he collapsed in exhaustion. Liam was far from topping the growth charts but he’d certainly put weight on the last few years and hauling him on her hip was proving far more tiring than she ever remembered.

When her arms finally felt like giving out, and she was about to wake him up to walk the rest of the way, Draco scooped him from her arms. Liam seemed unaware, throwing his arms around his father's neck and burying his face in his neck.

Even Hermione had to admit that— *somehow*— Draco Malfoy was good with kids. He had listened to every droll fact, had taken the time to peruse every shelf at Flourish and Botts, and purchased him every book he showed even in the slightest interest in. He was patient, at least with Liam, and seemed genuinely interested in getting to know him.

As they made their way towards the public Floo up the alley, Hermione mused if he would have been a good father from the beginning or maybe if it was just the newness that made him seem that way.

Of course, it would have been nice to have someone there from the start; someone to change the nappies or take shifts when he’d been cutting his molars.

Since leaving England, her life had changed in every way possible. Obviously in the big ways, like becoming a mother, but she also led a very solitary life. She didn’t have hardly any friends— none really if you didn’t count people she worked with. And don’t even get her

started on dating; Merlin, she could count the number of dates she'd had in the last six years on one hand.

But she had Liam, and they had created something that she wouldn't trade for any of it.

Now, her son and their life were securely in Draco Malfoy's arms, her adversary turned lover turned—Merlin, who even know what they were now. Friends seemed a stretch, enemy seemed extreme. But they had to figure this out because as much as Hermione had utterly mucked up the whole mess, Liam was at the center of it all. He was all that mattered.

Draco stood in the Floo, eyeing her with wide incredulous eyes until she realized he was waiting for her. Stepping in, she rolled her eyes and grabbed hold of his arm, and in a flash of green flames they had arrived in Draco's flat.

It was different than she'd have imagined, smaller, for one. It was modern though, with touches of elegance in the decor.

"I'll lay him down in the guest room so he can rest awhile?" Draco whispered.

Humming her agreement and poking at the crystal unicorn on his bookshelf, Hermione waved him off. Then her eyes caught on the massive pile of shopping bags next to the window and she choked just as Draco reentered the room.

"Honestly, Malfoy, what's the point of making him a millionaire if you're still going to buy him everything? He didn't spend a knut of the money he withdrew today!"

"Perks of being a Malfoy." That damned smirk returned as he approached a small bar tucked into the wall. "Drink?"

"White wine if you have it, please." Silently she counted the bags-- *twelve*. With a sigh, she resigned herself to shrinking them to get them in her luggage back to New York.

Malfoy approached, the knot of his tie loose and jacket now gone, holding a large glass of chilled wine in one hand and firewhisky in the other. She bit back a smile as she took the wine and eyed his tumbler. “I don’t think I’ve had firewhisky since the night you enlightened me on what that good stuff was.”

She could see the gears working in his head and finally, she sighed and said, “The gala for the Order of Merlin? Remember you said—”

“*Ah...* How could I forget?” Hiding a smile behind the rim of his glass, his lashes fluttered closed in a wink before he took a long swig. “I have to say, Granger, you have always been — and probably always will be— a pain my arse. But damn, if we don’t make brilliant offspring.”

They both took seats at opposite ends of the settee and Hermione’s lips twitched in a smile. “That we do, Malfoy. Who’d’ve thought?”

“As much it begrudges me to say this, you did a good job with him.”

“Thank you,” she said quietly, smiling to herself. “He comes by most of it naturally, although I did have to scare some of your most nasty qualities out early on.”

Malfoy laughed, one of those deep belly laughs she was sure she’d only seen a few rare occasions— usually at her expense.

When his guffaws quieted, they both shifted uncomfortably in their seats. “Should we talk, then?” she said finally, staring at her wine glass with great intent. From the corner of her vision, she saw Malfoy drain his drink and set it on the side table.

“I’ve spoken to the Malfoy attorney, and he’s drawing up a prenuptial agreement, as well as the change of inheritance. Thank Merlin. I would have rolled in my grave if my money went to my blasted third cousin, Ezra, he’s a right git.”

Hermione brows knit tight, her mouth running dry instantly. She gulped at her wine but nearly choked when he continued on.

“So, I’ll talk to my parents tomorrow and then we will throw an official event. He’ll be introduced to others as my son, we can announce our engagement—”

“*What?* Malfoy... you can’t be serious. Am I dreaming?”

Draco laughed at that, and with a snap of his fingers, a bottle of whisky came floating to his fingertips. He poured another healthy glass. “I’m not surprised in the slightest it was your dream to be Mrs. Malfoy— many shared the aspiration. But, of course, I’ll marry you; you’re the mother of my child, you didn’t think I’d leave you out like some common witch? The prenuptial agreement is very reasonable, just don’t stray from the marital bed or attempt to kill me, and you’ll be set for life. Did you want the Malfoy ring? Or would you prefer to choose one of your own taste? I don’t care either way...”

Malfoy kept on, talking as though he were discussing a business transaction as if this were a conversation he had every day.

She paled, not wanting to even breath the next thought into existence. “Are you proposing?”

“Well, I wouldn’t say it was all as romantic as *proposing* ... but sure, if that’s what you want to call it.”

“Right,” she huffed, “because who on earth would want something as silly as a romantic proposal. You’re freaking barmy, Malfoy. *Truly* .”

Draco looked around awkwardly, his palms rising in the air for a moment as he pulled a face and sank to his knee. “Uh, Granger—”

“Stand up, you idiot! *Obviously*, I’m not going to marry you. I don’t even know you; I’m not even sure I like you.”

A withering stare twisted his handsome features as he moved back to the couch and began removing his cufflinks, letting them fall on the end table as he began rolling his sleeves up roughly. “My parents can hardly stand each other, and they’ve been together for over thirty years, it’s fine.”

“It’s *not* fine. I have a life, a job, a home, *a cat* ! I’m not moving here; I’m *definitely* not marrying you. The fact that you would even consider something so ridiculous shows how delusional you are about the whole thing.”

“So what? We live together, and just have completely separate lives?”

“Why would you even— *for one moment* — think that I would be living with you. I told you, I’m going back to New York! We are only here a few weeks. Now, if you’re quite done, we can discuss visitation.”

“Granger.” His voice had quickly turned acerbic. “You aren’t taking him back to America. Not. Fucking. Happening. You have stolen six years from me, and so help me I will hire every solicitor I can get my hands on and pay off every magistrate between here and China, but you aren’t taking him out of this country.”

Hermione balked, her features twisting in her rage. “Are you— are you threatening me?”

“I’m telling you. I want my son in my life. End of.” The air between them was too charged; they both sucked in a shuddered breath. When he spoke again his voice was softer. “Please, Granger. You aren’t even trying to see this from my point of view. Imagine, for a second, that you met Liam for the first time and then I tried to immediately take him away. I need you to be reasonable.”

The very idea twisted her heart into something so ugly it would hardly be recognized. There was a part of him that was right— of course. But London?

“Why can’t you come to New York?” she attempted, wincing as the words came from her mouth because even she knew that didn’t make sense.

“Be serious, Hermione. I know you have your cat but what else does New York have that London doesn’t. You belong here.”

Hermione massaged her temples. “I need some time to think about all this.” Standing, she deposited her wine glass, pausing only to wave her hand in his direction. “To be clear, not the marriage part. That’s ridiculous. I wasn’t even expecting to see you this trip. I’m just trying to sell my bloody house and now twenty-four hours later, I’m being asked to move back to England.”

“One more matter to discuss then before you leave.” Hermione eyed him warily. “I’d like you and Liam to stay at the Manor. There is more than enough room; my parents no longer live there. You’d have your own space, and I won’t intrude on your privacy. I’d like to see him, I’d like this to work out for all of us.”

“If you don’t even live at Malfoy Manor, why would we?”

“Obviously, I would stay there as well until something more permanent is sorted. I just want access to him so we can get to know each other.”

He really wasn’t making a ridiculous request, and it’d be similar to staying in a hotel suite for two weeks. Liam would be happy, and she’d be able to keep him close while still allowing them to get to know each other. Her parents' house wasn’t fit to stay in and, sooner than not, would be shown to potential buyers. It seemed to be a small way of showing her ability to compromise.

She sighed. “Alright; I will concede to that end. We will stay with you while we are in London, but I’d like Liam and I to have rooms next to each other. We will get lost in that place for sure, and maybe no overnight guests while we are there?”

Lips curling in a crooked smile, he also rose to his feet, taking a step into her space. “Jealous, Granger?”

“Please, Malfoy. He has never in his life had a father figure, never had a man he could look up to. He’s already started to idolize you, and I don’t want him getting the idea that having casual sex with promiscuous witches is something to be sought after. I’m not trying to criticize the way you live your life, but I’ve tried to raise Liam to value things other than money, power, and sex. I’d like you to respect that as you get to know him.”

Something unreadable flickered over his features. “You think you know so much, don’t you, Granger. Brightest witch of your age, and all that? You are describing someone very different than who I am, than who I ever was. I’m not sure where you get your information, but this weekend I do have a date. And that date is playing Quidditch at the Potters and then having dinner with them. Don’t presume to know anything about me.”

Shit. Hermione could do little more than nod and with trembling knees stepped around him and towards the guest room where Liam was resting. Curled on his side, lips barely parted and curls wild, was her son. Her entire reason for surviving the better part of the last decade.

She ticked through the reasons for going back to New York and they all failed in comparison to her reasons to stay. One shouting louder than the rest.

She wouldn’t be alone anymore.

So she made the decision the only way she knew how. Logically.

It was time to return home. Time to return to London.

xXx

A/N: Guyssss we're meant to be a team remember?! Someone here slipped and forgot to tell me to update lol okay fine I forgot. I've had a rough few days in RL with bad news left and right and my mind got all mushy. Forgive me, please!

I remember when I first posted this a few years ago and people were so severely divided by Pro-Draco or Pro-Hermione. They both have a little growing pains to work through; be patient with them.

Someone reviewed and asked if Liam might be on the Autism spectrum, albeit high functioning. Liam is a genius in the literal sense of the word and I would also say that if he were evaluated he would land himself on the Autism spectrum in some form. I don't pretend to be an expert but I do know a young boy with Aspergers and have read on it both fictional and non-fictionally and that is probably where I think he'd be.

Thanks to MCal for reading this before it went up! All errors are well and surely mine.

Be back soon! Unless SOMEONE forgets to tell me to update again haha

Chapter 5

Hermione exited the Floo at Number Twelve, Grimmauld Place around ten o'clock the next morning.

Her ears were quickly assaulted by a loud wailing noise that made Liam froze, his eyes cutting into narrow slivers as he glared up at her. "You *aren't* leaving me here," he said flatly.

"It's going to be fun!"

"You aren't supposed to lie..." Pulling a face, he clutched his book and sat on the couch, ignoring the screeching coming from the kitchen.

"Harry?" she called, walking towards the awful sound,

"*Help!*" Hermione's heart ceased to beat for two breaths and then picked up in a wild gallop. Even after all these years her fight or flight response was still at the ready, and she pulled her wand free, gripping it until she was white knuckled.

She entered the kitchen, ready to cast a Stupefy or worse, but she instead was met with James pinning Albus down on the floor and dangling a drop of spit over Albus' face.

"*James Sirius Potter!*"

James startled and the spit fell from his mouth, right into the open, wailing mouth of Albus.

The room erupted; Hermione gagged as Albus started choking and coughing, thrashing to throw off James, who upon realizing he had been caught scurried off of his own volition.

With tears streaming down his face, Albus ran off wailing. “What in the world is going on? Why did you just spit in your brother's mouth?”

“Would you, by chance, believe me if I told you he definitely deserved it?” In that moment all she could see was a very sassy Harry Potter, pretending to be abashed.

“Where is your father?” she sighed, stowing her wand.

“He had to pop into work, he should be back here soon.”

Her jaw fell open and she couldn't but gape at him. “Who's in charge then?”

“Uhm, well I am.”

“So you spit in your brother's mouth? James Potter! Honestly!”

Hermione stomped into the sitting room where Liam was sitting there with his hands over his ears, book propped on his knees.

“Oh good, mum, can you please cast a silencing charm. That small Potter is crying on and on; I think I'm getting a migraine.”

“Do you even know what a migraine is?”

Liam mashed his lips together, canting his small face back and forth a few times in thought. “I've deduced that it's a bad headache.”

“Perfect. I think I'm getting one as well.” She rubbed her temples in small circles. “Uncle Harry isn't here, so, I guess maybe you'll have to come with me to London?” She was

racking her brain trying to figure out a solution, yes, he'd just have to come along. He had his book.

Just then, the Floo roared to life and she turned happily, expecting to see Harry. She was immediately disappointed as Draco Malfoy came striding in.

"Liam?" Surprise chased by excitement etched into his features. "I didn't know you'd be here."

"Mr. Draco, do you know silencing charms?"

"Of course," he laughed.

"Could you cast one on the small one with the funny name? He's giving us migraines." Liam pointed an exaggerated finger at the staircase.

Draco laughed again. "Sure, bud."

As he walked by, he tousled his hair the same way he had done to James the other night, and Liam stilled.

The boy was abhorrently vain about his hair; she firmly put the blame on Draco Malfoy. Hermione didn't have a conceited bone in her body.

"*Silencio.*" Draco waved his wand at the ceiling and the noise abruptly ceased.

"Did someone check on the small one with the funny name?" Draco asked Hermione with a smirk.

Hermione winced. "James spit in his mouth. Are you here to handle this situation?"

“I am; I was at the Ministry working on something when the Aurors got called away suddenly. Harry came rushing in, and asked if I might pop by until Ginny got home from practice. What are you guys doing here?”

“Harry was *supposed* to have the day off. I have some meetings in Muggle London, so he was going to watch Liam. But of course, this happens. It’s fine, we’ll make do. We do need to talk though. I’ll owl you later. Liam, are you ready? We’ll have to Floo and then get a cab.” She’d planned on Apparating and this little wrinkle was going to cost her precious time.

Liam’s features withered and he snapped his book shut. “Mum, I’ve been here for four minutes. I’ve not moved. How could I *not* be ready?”

Groaning, Hermione gestured for him to get up. “Of course, let’s go.”

Liam made to stand but his jaw tightened and he shook his head. “No, I don’t want to! Why can’t I stay!”

“*What?* You were complaining not four minutes ago, as you so aptly put it, that you wanted to come and *not* be left. Besides, Uncle Harry is at work. We’ll come back later, alright? You can play with Albus then.”

“*I don’t want to play with Albus!*” Liam cried indignantly at the exact same moment that Draco cut in, “Um, aren’t you forgetting someone, Granger?”

Her brows pitched and she reeled on him. “What?”

“I can watch him, of course.”

“Oh, I don’t know love. Maybe another time? It seems a bit... soon.”

An indignant wail from her son sounded from behind her but she paid him no mind.

Draco scoffed, head falling back in disbelief before glaring at her. “He’s known Harry even less time, considering we spent all day together yesterday. They met an hour before we did, for crying out loud.”

“Yes, well *I* know Harry very well. And, he has children.”

“I have children!” he argued and they both grimaced at the severe stretch of the truth. “Well... child. Listen, you can trust me! Ginny is going to be home in like 3 hours, Liam will sit and read, and I’ll sit next to him and make sure the Potters don’t spit in his mouth or anything.”

“I don’t know, Malfoy... Didn’t we say walk before we run?”

“*Actually*, mum, you said that.”

Hermione’s eyes fluttered shut and she counted exactly three breaths before forcing a tight smile on her face. She’d left her son with a nineteen year old who hadn’t been able to speak proper English— she could do this. “Fine. Alright? Fine. Are you happy?”

“Yes,” they said in tandem and Hermione growled once and threw her hands in the air.

“Brilliant! The wicked witch agrees! I’ll be back after lunch. Be good and listen to your father.” The word had just slipped over her lips without forethought and all three of them froze. Hermione gulped once. “Mr. Draco— listen to Mr. Draco.”

“Yes, mum.”

She looked longingly at her son, a wistful smile on her lips. She kissed him once on the top of the head and then made for the door. But she paused before she left, turning to see Draco

sitting in the spot next to Liam with a nervous smile.

It would be fine. Everything would be fine.

xXx

Everything was not fine.

Hermione's afternoon was hell. The realtor wanted the house in perfect condition for showings and preferably empty. It meant more work for her and part of her wondered if she shouldn't just keep the old thing if she were staying in London.

But then, there were ghosts in that house. Not the ones that roamed the corridors of Hogwarts, but nonetheless very real ones. At some point the good memories of home had turned painful, and it was easier for Hermione to simply separate her life. B.O. and A.O. — Before Obliviation and After.

By the time she had Apparated back to the steps of Grimmauld place she was depleted of energy. Her feet were aching, her hair had returned to its childlike bushiness in the misty rain of London, and she was pretty sure she had mascara smudged on her cheek.

As soon as bleeding possible she would be in a giant bath with a big glass of wine. Fixing a smile on her face, she took a deep breath and opened the door. Liam was sitting exactly where she left him, a new book in his lap.

"Hi, love." Liam's face snapped towards the door and in an unexpected move he ran towards her and wrapped his arms around her legs. "Liam? Is everything alright?" When he'd loosened his hold, she knelt down and cradled his still round cheeks in her hands.

"Can we leave? Now?" he said quietly, unable to look at his mother.

“Of course. Let me go talk to Draco, or is Aunt Ginny back?”

He shook his head, his blond curls falling into his eyes. “Can we just leave? *Please?*” There was a slight shiver to his tiny jaw, and Hermione felt a volatile crash of sadness and rage.

Steeling her jaw, she placed a kiss on his forehead and stood. “I promise, one minute. You can stay here.”

“I don’t want to see him...”

“Of course.” Hermione’s heart hammered against her sternum. She was going to fucking *flay* Draco Malfoy.

The house was empty as she moved through it, voices sounding from the backyard. Fury raced through her veins and she tried with all might to keep it in check. Their yard had been charmed, extended far past what a townhouse would boast and with nothing but privacy on all sides. Ginny and Draco stood side by side, watching the Potter boys out in the lawn.

“Brilliant, you’re both here while my son sits inside alone upset.” So much for not letting her temper get the best of her. “Just wanted to let you know I’m taking him home. Thanks for nothing, Malfoy.”

They turned at the sound of her voice but she only saw Draco. There was something there in his features, contrition maybe, but she couldn’t bring herself to care. She’d known better. He wasn’t ready and he might never be— this is why she’d done what she’d done.

Turning on her heel, she marched through the house, ignoring the gentle pleas for her to wait a moment. Once next to Liam, she reached down and lofted him on her hip. She was through the Floo a moment later.

xXx

When they stepped out into their suite, she didn't set him down; it felt better to feel him close and know that he was safe as long as they were together. Hermione marched right into the bedroom and kicked off her shoes then laid on the bed with him curled in the space she made for him.

Hermione Granger was protective by nature but that had reached new— *dangerous* — levels when she'd had Liam. Hell, from the first time she felt him kick, she knew it was them against the world. His safety and well-being had kept her from London, from her friends, and the world she'd nearly died trying to protect.

It took quite a bit to upset Liam Granger; he was born cautious. His means of self preservation for a child were unmatched. He didn't have friends, he clung to adults when forced to socialize at all, and he *never* put himself in a situation where he may get hurt. Still, this wasn't the first time she'd seen her son in this state and so, like most mothers, she knew what he needed most.

And that was silence.

He'd speak when he wanted, when he was able. Until then he needed the safety of her arms just to cry a bit and collect his thoughts. How on earth she had given birth to a baby that was born an emotionally mature adult was beyond her.

The first few haggard breaths wracked through his body, followed by a snuffle and then a sob. She stroked his curls and kissed his forehead, tracing circles on his back as he worked through it all. And finally— *finally* — the dam he'd constructed for himself broke and the words came tumbling free.

"H-he doesn't want me, mum. He doesn't. I thought he did but he— " His words were cut short by another sob and it hurt her just as much as it hurt him. There was nothing in the world she wanted so much as to shoulder this and any pain for her son.

"Darling, no. What on earth would make you think that?"

He sniffed and buried deeper into her chest. “He has the Potters...”

Hermione paused, knowing that in times such as these he was easily spooked and would flip to the offensive. “Do you want to talk about it?”

He shook his head and held on tighter.

“You know I love you?” she asked, her voice quiet and careful.

“I love you too, mummy. I just thought... I thought maybe we might learn how to love him, too.”

That gut wrenching pain returned and she grimaced as she pulled on one of his buoyant curls. “I think Dra— I think your *dad*— is figuring this all out the best he can. I think he wanted you before he knew you existed, and that’s why he’s so close with the Potters. Will you do me a favor?” Liam nodded. “Don’t write him off, not yet, at least. It’s...it’s my fault this is all so new, let’s give him a chance. Okay?”

“I’ll think about it.” She stayed with him awhile, until his breathing evened and his hold lightened. Carefully, she pulled away to check and sure enough, he’d fallen asleep in her arms. With a half-smile she slid from the bed and replaced the space with a pillow that he could hold onto.

As quietly as possible Hermione stripped off her damp clothes. Godric, today sucked. She still had her mind set on a bath and a glass of wine so she shrugged the on robe that was hanging on the back of the door and made for the main room.

From the corner of her vision a shadow caught her eye and she flailed widely, shrieking and reaching for her wand though it was nowhere near. As her heart and head quieted she noticed it was Malfoy— *sulking*.

“Malfoy! What in Godric’s name are you doing here?”

He covered his mouth with his palm for a moment and when it fell away he lifted both hands to the ceiling. "What did I do, Hermione? I thought it was going well and then just... I don't even know what the hell happened."

Something about the pathetic little pout he was sporting softened her previously jagged edges and she sighed. "Do you want a drink?"

"It's two o'clock in the afternoon." She responded with a single raised eyebrow and he waved her off. "Yeah sure, whatever is fine."

She worked in silence, opening a bottle of Pinot Noir and pouring two glasses. Wandlessly, she lit the fire and handed him a glass. Curling up in the armchair, she covered her naked legs with the robe.

"*Muffliato*." She took a long drink and made a quiet contented sound as the wine worked its way to her belly. Then with a long suffering sigh, she turned to Malfoy. "He wouldn't really tell me what happened. Do you want to?"

His grey eyes widened almost comically and he began sputtering. "How on earth could I tell you what happened? I don't bloody know or I'd have fixed it already! It was fine; I went to check on the boys, Liam snuck up and saw me talking to Albus, and then everything went to shite. He wouldn't even look at me for hours. I had to sit there in gods-awful silence while he read until Ginny got home. I was out there with Ginny for minutes, trying to figure out what happened what you arrived."

Hermione grimaced and tilted her head back and forth a few times. "I bet I know what happened. Were you being... *close* with Albus?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean were you acting fatherly to him?" Malfoy looked as though she'd slapped him all over again, and his lips began forming odd shapes as he attempted to think of actual words.

“He’s sensitive about being wanted. And it’s— it’s not the first time this topic has come up, unfortunately.”

“What topic?”

Hermione bit down on her lip until it was edging on pain and thought on how best to phrase it.

“Granger? Hello?”

“Abandonment, I guess? That might be the best way—”

“Are you fucking kidding me?”

“Can you just settle down? You being combative is not going to make this easier, okay? What’s done is done and I’m sorry for the part I played in that.” Her breath hitched and she realized for the first time just how very much she meant that. A single tear worked its way free from her lashes and she quickly banished it. “He was pushed at daycare last year. Liam has always been so wonderfully and brilliantly different.” She smiled wistfully at her wine glass, unable to look at Malfoy. “But kids don’t think like that.”

“What happened?”

“He wouldn’t tell me about it for a while; he’s like that. But he had a bruised cheekbone and the teachers said he was pushed. I guess he lied about having a dad and they found out. He had a fit of accidental magic, they called him a freak and pushed him off a playset.”

“Why would he lie?”

“I don’t know,” she confessed. “It’d always just been us and he hadn’t really ever asked about you; we just *were* . That was when I told him that you couldn’t be in his life right now but

maybe someday. And I know it was a mistake, I should have portkey'd us here right then, but you have to understand that keeping him safe has been my entire life since I learned I was pregnant."

When she finally found the courage to look up, she immediately wished she hadn't. His jaw was steeled, eyes rimmed with unshed tears. "What do I do? Ignore James and Al? I've known them their whole lives."

"No, of course not." She shook her head sadly and folded her lips in for a moment in thought. "I don't know what you do— what *we* do." Silence stretched on and Draco looked on the verge of breaking. "Do you have dinner plans?"

Draco's watery gaze shot to hers and he shook his head.

"He likes cheeseburgers and vanilla shakes with chocolate syrup on top— *not* chocolate shakes. Why don't you come back around five with those? That'd be a good start."

He offered a weak smile and shook his head. "He's never going to like me."

A memory burst forward and the pressure behind her eyes increased. "Liam came into the world early— five weeks early." Hermione paused to take a long drink of wine. "I was so frightened; the contractions started, I was home alone and had no one to call. I knew it was too soon, but by the time I got to the hospital, there was nothing they could do. I still remember when the nurse reached out for my hand and looked me straight on and told me it was time to meet my son."

Draco sat in silence and after taking a moment for herself, she continued. "Labor was horrible, even if he was so small. I cried for my mom, who doesn't even know I exist. I cursed your existence," she said with a laugh. "Many, *many* times. They said he would most likely need to go to the NICU, which is part of the No-maj hospital for early or sick babies. They rattled off complications he may have: lungs that wouldn't work, unable to nurse... Waiting for him to cry was the most terrifying moment of my life."

Hermione was lost in her own memory as she continued, “I imagined him being so small and blue, or what if he didn’t cry— I couldn’t...” The words caught in her throat and a smile broke free on her lips. “He was perfect. He was small but so strong with these bright grey-blue eyes that seemed to just *know* me as soon as he looked at me. He had the finest sugar white hair, not a curl to be seen. He looked just like you, pointy nose and all. He latched as soon as they handed to me and ate non-stop for months until he was the size of a small bowling ball. We went home two days later.”

The man across from her was stunned silent, letting each word sink into him.

Wiping a tear from her cheek, she gathered her senses. “I just mean to say... Liam has, since the day he was born, surprised me. You and I are two horribly imperfect people, but that boy has the very best of us. He’s quick witted and sharp tongued, he’s snarky and brilliant, but kind if he cares about you, a champion of underdogs. He’s smarter than I ever was at twice his age. There is a lot for you to learn about Liam, and I’m okay with you learning those things yourself but the one I’ll give you for free is: don’t assume anything about him; more often than not, he’s going to surprise you.”

The muscles of his throat worked in slow movements as he swallowed and nodded once. “I’m sorry I wasn’t there, Hermione.”

“I’m sorry, too, for what it’s worth. I should have given you the chance to be. I promised myself after the war I wouldn’t take unnecessary risks— I thought that’s what you were. I was wrong.”

Draco’s eyes were trained on the ground between his feet but something flickered over his features and she saw his lips pull into a smile. “Do you know I tried to get ahold of you— *after*, that is.”

“After?”

“After the night we... you know. It wasn’t right away; I didn’t want to look desperate. But I started at the ministry just a few weeks later. I had looked for you all over and couldn’t find you, so finally, I asked if Potter knew where I could send you an owl. He told me you’d just moved; he couldn’t believe it himself. He was sure you’d come back, and I told myself I’d find you then and put myself in your path.”

Hermione let loose a bright peal of laughter and shook her head. "I'd just found out and I left two days later. I didn't want anyone to know but mostly I didn't want Ron thinking the baby was *his*." She rolled her eyes.

"I am thoroughly disgusted that the Weasel would ever think Liam might be his child. Does he even know he exists?"

Sucking in a sharp breath, Hermione vehemently shook her head. "Merlin, no. That will be an interesting day. I haven't seen him since the gala."

"Right, well... thank you for," he paused and made a face, gesturing to the space between them, "for all this. I'll be back with food at five. See you."

Cradling her wine glass to her chest she nodded and watched him leave, whispering, "See you," once the flames had taken him away.

xXx

A/N: Look at y'all! Keeping me honest ;) Alas, the next update will not be until Sunday at the earliest but I do hope you enjoy this update! Thanks to Mcal for pre-reading this bad-jackson and yeah! Thank you for reading! XOXO!

Chapter 6

Draco returned at five o'clock on the button, arms full of bags of food and milkshakes. He'd brought enough food to feed a small army and while Liam remained aloof for awhile, the sugar eventually broke through his icy exterior.

They put on the tele in the hotel and Draco, who swore he'd seen one before, stared on in wonder at the animations on the screen. Hermione let Liam stay up far too late and by the time the final credits rolled, his head was in Hermione's lap and his feet propped up in Draco's.

She allowed the surrealness of the moment to settle in. How many times had she thought what their lives would have looked like if she hadn't run but... *she had*. After smoothing Liam's curls, she peeked up at Draco who was staring at their son, unreadable emotion in his features.

"Let's go to the balcony," Hermione whispered. She'd planned on simply rearranging him on the settee but Draco reached down and easily lofted Liam into his arms.

"I'll put him in the bed and meet you out there."

Something twisted in Hermione's belly and she nodded, thick emotion washing over her that she couldn't explain. While Draco disappeared with Liam in tow into the adjacent bedroom, Hermione made her way outside, snagging her glass of wine on the way. The view of London was lovely and although she despised that he'd upgraded the room without her permission, she couldn't deny that it had reminded her of the beauty of the city she grew up in.

A few moments later, Draco appeared, leaning over the railing without a word spoken.

They stayed like that for awhile, staring at the misty London skyline until she finally broke the silence. "I've thought about it, and I want you to know that it is not because of you alone, but Liam and I are going to be moving back to England."

He exhaled audibly, as if he'd been holding a breath in and unaware of it until now. "Thank fucking Merlin. What needs to happen next?"

"Well, I'll be here for a few weeks still. I need to find a place to let— don't give me that look, we aren't *living* with you long term— I'll also need a job. I'll have to head back to NY to pack what we need and get rid of what we don't. But what we really need to determine is what our lives look like with you in it. I know you and Liam are keen on running but I need time to let this be our new reality with you in it. You'll have access to our home via Floo and Apparition, and who knows, we can work up to over nights and weekends. I know nothing is going to make up for the last six years but... I'm willing to try."

"Okay."

Hermione's nose wrinkled and she turned to him with a cautious glare. His response was certainly anticlimactic. "*Okay? That's it?*"

"Granger, I thought I was going to have to drag you kicking and screaming across the Atlantic— I'm not pushing my luck. Will you still stay at the Manor while you look?" His eyes were rounded, wide and hopeful.

"We will stay with you while we look. Are you ready for us tomorrow?"

"Of course! I'll have the elves get your rooms ready immediately. What does Liam like to eat?"

A smile twitched on the corner of her lips and she shook her head. "I'm sure whatever the great Malfoy Manor has in way of food, Liam will devour. He's going to have a fit when he meets your elves."

"I have the Quidditch game with the Potters in the morning, why don't you guys pack up and meet us there. I'll escort you both there after the game."

“That’s fine. I’m knackered though; I’m going to head to bed. I’ll see you in the morning?” She turned, ready to leave but his long fingers snagged her by the elbow and before she knew what was happening, he closed her in a hug, his chin resting on the top of her head.

The embrace was foreign and she blinked a few times with her arms hanging lamely at her side. When it seemed he wasn’t going to release her without a proper hug, she returned it tentatively.

“Thank you,” he whispered. “For staying.”

Draco held her at arms length for a moment before gesturing that she should lead the way back into the room. She watched him leave, cloak draped over his arm and a smile bending his lips.

Almost seven years ago Draco Malfoy had irrevocably changed her life in the span of a handful of hours. Now, here he was, doing it all over again.

xXx

The Potter’s backyard wasn’t the small fenced-in backyard you’d expect behind the townhouse. When you exited the door, you were transported to a sprawling acreage with rolling hills.

Half a quidditch pitch now held a permanent residence for practice and play, and when Hermione stepped out into the warm morning sun, she found Harry was already circling the goals with Albus tucked in front of him on the broom.

“Hermione!” Ginny called from the edge of the pitch, jogging to her side. She crashed into her with a bit of force, squeezing her neck. “You’re here! Stupid Malfoy has been stealing all your time in London; I’ve barely seen you.”

“Mum, why can she can stupid? And *why* is she being mean to Mr. Draco?”

Ginny balked, blinking a few times down at the precocious child glaring up at her. “I didn’t mean he was really stupid.”

“So you lied?” The space between Ginny’s brow wrinkled and her mouth formed a small ‘ O ’ as she struggled to respond. Liam sighed. “I’m going to read.

“Damn, your son is tenacious.”

“I know. We’re working on it, but I fear it’s genetic.”

Laughing brightly, Ginny turned back towards the pitch and nudged her friend. “I’m glad you came; you can watch me kick Malfoy’s arse proper.”

“You know I play on your children’s team, right?” Draco’s voice sounded from behind them and the pair of witches jumped as they turned to him and Hermione’s mouth ran dry as she watched him approach. His shirt was white, shoved up around his forearms with a broom slung over his shoulder. All of his movements were effortless, even as he strode by Hermione and brushed his lips across Ginny’s cheekbone. “I mean, how, as a mother, can you relentlessly beat them?”

“It’s easy. It’s because I’m so much better than them...” She smirked and shrugged. “Besides I’m teaching them character. You’ll soon learn, Draco dear, that you can’t just give children what they want. You need to establish that you are the alpha.”

Draco laughed, his gaze briefly travelling over Hermione’s features. “Your husband’s not the Alpha?”

“Oh, Godric. *No*. I wouldn’t even call him the beta. How’s it going with Liam?”

“I have no idea,” Draco confessed, scratching the stubble on the side of his jaw. Suddenly, Hermione felt like an intruder, it was easy to see the repertoire that Ginny and Draco had somehow curated these past six years but it made her feel uneasy to bear witness to.

“Don’t worry about it,” Ginny said. “Well, I don’t mean that... *Do* worry about it. But you aren’t ever going to get it right all the time. Shite... you, in particular, will probably get it right hardly ever. If you’re worried about messing it up, you’re already doing a better job than you think.”

Hermione shifted— *squirmed* — and noticed Draco staring over at Liam tucked into a big armchair.

“I think I might fuck it up.”

“*Draco* .” Hermione ached, she wanted so badly to make it better but how could she; she’d caused it. Ginny interjected before she could say more and the frustration that it was Ginny lecturing her son’s father on parenthood was overwhelming.

“You’ll fuck it up. But that’s not because you’re new; everyone fucks up. It’s no easier to raise a shit head then it is to be handed one. My son told me yesterday, that he thought it was *nice* that I didn’t care what I looked like. What in the hell do I say to that?” Both Ginny and Draco laughed but Hermione could only gnaw on the side of her cheek. “Try not to get caught up on the details; you’re an amazing Uncle to our kids, and that takes a lot for me to say.”

“You know, Weaselette, you aren’t all bad, no matter what Potter says about you.”

“*Dick* .” Ginny snarled playfully and shoved his shoulder. All the while Hermione’s cheeks were burning from the uncomfortableness of the moment.

Quietly, she excused herself and made her way to Liam’s side, tucking herself into the space next to him. Her son seemed wholly invested in his book, but Hermione knew by the cut to his little jaw that he felt the same tension in the air that she did. They were outsiders— *again*.

James came barreling into the scene, crashing into Draco, who laughed and threw his arms around him. “Hey kid, ready to whoop your parents or what?”

“Of course, I’m just gonna warm up. And Mum?”

Ginny hummed, her brow lifting.

“I heard you call Uncle Draco a dick.” In a sheer show of maturity, James stuck his tongue out and tucked his broom between his legs, speeding off to join his father in the sky.

Growling, Ginny shook her head and turned to Hermione. “That kid is a pain in my ass. He’s all Potter.”

From her side, Draco boomed in loud guffaws. “Thank Godric. Sorry Gin; there are enough Weasels for my taste.”

Ginny rolled her eyes and summoned her broom, joining her family in the air as Draco walked over to where Hermione and Liam were sitting and sank to a crouch. “Hey, bud.”

Quietly, Liam closed his book and looked seriously at his father. “Mum says we are moving back to England.”

“I heard! I’m quite exc—”

“She says I need to return with her to America to pack but I’d like to stay here with you.”

“Liam!”

“It’s true, Mr. Draco. And I don’t want to portkey across the ocean just to come right back.”

Draco’s lips twitched in a smile and he reached out to pat Liam’s knee. “Don’t worry, bud. I’ll talk to her.”

“ *Draco!* ”

Lifting his hands in faux innocence, the prat lifted to his feet and retreated a step. “I only met we will discuss it when the time comes, Granger. Surely, you can be amenable to a bleeding conversation. Now, did you bring your broom, Liam?”

Hermione stilled. Liam on the other hand didn’t miss a beat, quickly shaking his head as he said, “I don’t own a broom.

Realisation seemed to drip over Draco’s features and his jaw went slack. “Have you ever been on a broom?”

“No, but that’s alright. Do you know that one in every four people will be in a broom accident in their lives?”

Sucking a breath through his teeth, Draco’s indignant gaze shot from Hermione to Liam then back to Hermione. “I didn’t know that. *But* I can guarantee that one hundred percent of people will be in some sort of accident in their life. So, if you think about it, the chances aren’t all that bad for a broom.”

As the Potters touched down on the grass over Draco’s shoulder, visions of her son being tossed from a broom handle as Draco cut through the air in search of a bloody snitch filled her mind and she flinched away from the thought. “Draco, I’m not so sure it’s a good idea.”

“Well, if you change your mind.” Draco nodded once and then turned, sights catching on little Albus. “Let’s get this game going. Albus, whose team are you on today?”

“Yours, Uncle Draco!”

“Brilliant!” But as Albus jumped into Draco’s arms, something about him shifted and he turned to regard Liam, who in turn looked like he was flattening his teeth with the power of his clenched jaw. “Are you sure you don’t want to play, Liam?”

“Yes.”

“Right.” Even his shoulders seemed to sag and he trudged towards the lawn and set Albus down. A moment later his broom was tucked between his legs and he helped adjust Liam in front of him as he kicked off and towards the hoops. Hop on then.”

Using all his very best effort, Liam seemed intent to ignore the situation but when a tiny voice screeched, “*Do the big dive! Do the big dive!*” , his eyes snapped up.

Draco tilted his broom at a terrifying angle towards the earth and the pair of them rocketed towards certain death. Ginny was incensed, screaming at him just as the broom leveled and laughter filled the air.

“Do it again, Ferret, and I swear I’ll ban from you this house!” Ginny shouted from high above their heads.

They adjusted the positions and rules a bit for a smaller game, but mostly James and Ginny fought over a Quaffle while Draco and Potter fought for a snitch. The game trudged on for about forty minutes and while usually Hermione herself might normally be lost in a book during a match, she found herself actually interested.

She even felt bad for Draco who was playing with a six-year-old in tow and James, who seemed most interested in racing his mother. Ginny was a professional quidditch player—and a damn good one. With little effort she tossed the quaffle past Draco time and again, smirking and goating him.

Hermione was more impressed with how well Draco handled losing. He laughed and moved in the air like he was born on a broomstick, making Albus shriek and clap with each move.

Finally, Ginny called a timeout and all the brooms lowered for a quick intermission. Wiping his brow, Draco walked over to where her and Liam were still sitting.

Liam sniffed and didn't look up at his father. "You aren't even playing properly. I've read a book on Quidditch, you know. There aren't enough players for a proper game."

Draco took a big slug of water from a cup Ginny had handed him and massaged the back of his neck.. "I know, bud. We kind of improvised in order to— "

The slight *thump* of a book closing made Hermione jump. "I'd like to play now."

"*What?*" Hermione and Draco said in unison, one horrified, the other gawking in excitement.

"I'd like to play now," Liam repeated and hopped from his seat, smoothing his clothing as though it weren't a pair of jeans and a t-shirt.

"That's brilliant!" Draco clapped his hands and began searching the lawn. "I'll let Albus know and he can sit in with—"

"No, I'd like to play with Uncle Harry."

Tension settled thick in the air and Hermione's lips pulled into a grimace. She knew too well what was coming.

"They're going to win. That's obvious. I want to be on their team, so I win as well."

Sputtering, Draco grappled for *something* to say. “You can’t be on Potter’s team!”

“Why!” It wasn’t a question, just a very loud accusation. “Albus is on your team and he’s a Potter. *Uncle Harry!*”

Draco’s jaw fell open and he reeled on Hermione, hissing, “He’s trying to make me jealous!”

Biting back a smile, she stood and nudged him in the side. “Close your mouth, Malfoy. He’s winning.”

Harry rounded the corner, a dopey smile in tow, completely unaware of the land mine he was running into. “Alright, Liam?”

“May I please play Quidditch with you? I’d like to win.”

A cheshire grin tugged on the corners of Harry’s lips and he sank to a knee in front of Liam. “*Well, well, well!* You know, your mother was often called the Brightest Witch of Her Age; I am so pleased to see that you are following in her footsteps. It’s the right call to be on my team. I beat your father in Quidditch more times than I can—”

“Another word, Potter, and I’ll castrate you.”

Lifting his hands in the air, Harry rose to stand. “These are facts, Malfoy. It can’t be contested.”

“I’ve never been on a broom, so I don’t know what to do.” Liam stood tall, his back straight and chin lifted in that way that had the uncanny ability to remind Hermione that he was half Malfoy.

Realisation seemed to crash over Harry and he looked at Draco. “Tell you what, Liam, I need to run and help Albus. Your dad is going to take you up and show you the basics, and then when we resume, you can be on my team if you want. Alright?”

For a long moment Liam considered Harry’s proposal before nodding once. “I guess that’s alright.”

Hermione watched as Draco’s lashes fluttered closed, relief seeming to course through his body. He mouthed a silent, “*Thank you*, at Harry, who merely smirked and nodded.

“Mum, I’m going now.”

The reality that her son was about to climb on a broom and soar through the sky with her old nemesis was overwhelming and she opened her mouth to object. Draco’s fingers brushed her elbow and he stepped into her side, the scent of his cologne distracting her for a moment.

“I’ve got him, Hermione. Promise.” *Hermione* . For being as handsome as he was, he was far too close, and his normally steeled eyes were liquid silver.

“I know. I didn’t say anything.” She wanted to appear aloof and nonchalant but inside her heart was racketing. Hiding the trembling of her lips with her fingers, she watched in horror as Draco mounted his broom and then tucked Liam into position.

“Alright, so just grasp here. Perfect. And when I lean, you lean with me, but don’t over lean, just enough. I’ll do the rest. Yes?”

Liam’s rounded eyes shot to hers and she could see the fear etched into his small features. “I’m nervous.”

At his confession, Hermione took a sharp step forward, ready to pluck him from the handle—and maybe from England—but Draco was faster. His hand splayed over Liam’s belly and he

whispered something in Liam's ear that she couldn't make out. With a firm nod, Liam reached down to grip the broom and looked more ready than ever.

Draco grinned and counted down from three before gently kicking off the ground, hovering just over her head.

"Whoa!" Liam's jaw had fallen open and he kicked his feet a few times. "Mum! I'm flying!"

"Ready for more?"

Liam was vibrating with the same excitement he had when he saw Diagon Alley for the first time as he nodded and while it did absolutely nothing to quell the mess in Hermione's belly, she smiled. Draco had missed hundreds of firsts, moments that no matter how many pictures she showed him or stories she regaled he would ever get back. But this he could have as his own and the joy on their faces was enough that Hermione felt herself let go just a little.

Hermione never took her eyes off the pair of blond boys in the sky, fingers tracing the curve of her lip as she stared. Draco did some quick drills, dipping quickly before raising up again and again. When Liam appeared to be more confident, Draco draped his arm around his small body and then tilted far to the side, curling the broom through the air, and shot forward.

"*Malfoy!*" Hermione shouted just as Ginny's voice pierced through the air. "It's his first time, Ferret! Stop being a show off!"

But as the broom righted and Liam came into proper view, grinning and panting, she could hear him ask to do it again. Draco ignored the witches on the ground and obliged his son, pulling into another tight spiral before finally guiding the broom towards the earth.

Before they'd even touched down, Liam was kicking his feet and staring at Hermione. "Did you see us, Mum? Did you?"

Laughing, Hermione nodded and reached for him. "I did, darling, and you were brilliant."

In a rare moment of affection, Liam squeezed Hermione's neck as she helped him from the broom and her heart stuttered, her fingers cradling the back of his skull. Too soon he began squirming and she released him just as Draco came to stand by her side.

"Are you happy?" she asked, eying him curiously.

"Best moment of my bloody life, Granger. Thank you."

She hummed and turned to the Potters now gathered on the edge of the pitch. Liam's little chest was puffed out as he approached Albus. "Albus, I'd like to play with my Dad now. Is that okay?"

There it was, that little word on his tiny lips and she swore she felt her ovaries bulge and burst inside her. Draco stilled.

"Sure, I don't care." Albus skipped over to Harry and Liam turned and made his way back to where his parents stood.

"Are you ready, Dad?"

Gulping, Draco nodded and when Hermione tore her gaze from their son and up to his, she saw him misty eyed. "You know, Liam. I think you might just be our good luck charm."

xXx

Post-game, Draco followed Liam and James into the kitchen, the latter with his fists in the air and a swagger to his step.

“Oh, how the mighty have fallen!” James thundered loudly. “Guess you weren’t the Chosen One for this game, eh, Dad?”

Harry scoffed. “You’ve won a single game out of dozens and suddenly you’re the king of the pitch?”

Hanging back, Hermione leaned against the door frame and studied them as they interacted. How it would have always been if she hadn’t run. Draco picked Liam up and set him on the edge of the corner, handing over the snitch. Liam inspected it furiously, twisting it back and forth. Draco laughed and handed the snitch to Liam who inspected it furiously.

“Mr. Draco?”

“Yeah, bud?”

“Can I call you dad?”

Everyone went quiet for a moment before Ginny realised the significance of the moment and herded her crew towards the ice box.

“I’d really like that,” Draco said with a grin, tousling Liam’s hair.

With a small scowl, Liam replaced his curls to their rightful state. “And Dad?”

Draco hummed and leaned his hip against the counter.

“Will you not call anyone else ‘Bud’?”

The corner of Draco's lip twitched and Hermione felt something warm bloom in her chest as she watched. "You got it, Bud. Just you."

xXx

A/N: Hope you enjoyed this chapter and thank you for the gentle nudges! I have the next chapter about half way done so I'll work on getting it polished up for you!

The original story was written half in Draco's POV but it wasn't really half and was randomly interspersed lol so I'm making it all Hermoine's for this rewrite. But there were some cute scenes I took out and will share on my Tumblr if you want to search my name for Aparecium you'll be able to find them!

Also, originally Liam was 4 almost 5 but now that I have a 4 year old, I knew developmentally it was a bit off. So when I did the rewrite I made him 6. So, mostly this is a note to say that the birth of James no longer aligns with canon. Lol I can't go back and rewrite against so please allow me this little wiggle room. James is 9, Albus and Liam are 6

Finally, Ectoheart shared the most adorable illustration of Draco and Liam in Diagon and it's so fucking cute. Visit her Tumblr and give her a share and a follow please! Mwah!

Chapter 7

Hermione had only ever visited Malfoy Manor on one occasion. Quite clearly, that occasion had been under duress.

On her second visit, she was bringing the heir to the Malfoy fortune and dragging her luggage through the Floo. Liam was star struck as soon as he stepped from the grate, eyes wide as he took in the vaulted ceilings and lavish furnishings.

“Right,” Malfoy said from the corner of his mouth, stepping past them and into the center of the room. “This is home, then. Should we... Do you want a tour?”

Hermione scoffed. “Do we have enough time? It would take at least a full day to tour this place. I suppose maybe we could skip the torture rooms in the dungeon, that should shave off a few hours?”

“*Hilarious*, Granger. I would have thought your skull was full of all that knowledge you were supposed to possess, who knew you had space for mockery.” That damned smirk returned as he stepped closer to her.

A smile tugged on her cheek. “For you, I always make allowances, it seems.”

Draco lifted an eyebrow and a blush blossomed on her cheekbones as she bit into her lip and looked away. Flirting with Draco Malfoy? *The horror.*

For the first time— maybe ever— she forgot that Liam was there and jumped as he stamped his foot. “What are you talking about?”

“Nothing,” they said at the same time.

“You’re lying. You’re *not* supposed to lie,” Liam deadpanned before deciding it to be not worth his time and turning back to the grandeur of the room. “Your house is *ginormous*. You must do a lot of chores.”

Draco laughed. “I do not, nor have I ever, done *chores* . The Manor employs two house elves: Piper and Poppy.” No sooner had the names left his lips than a loud crack filled the space and two house elves were standing next to Draco.

“Master?”

Hermione ground her teeth as the little beings looked lovingly up at the man they called Master, hands folded and ears tucked back.

“I was just telling Liam about you.” Draco’s hand fell on the small elf’s shoulder.

The two elves turned, both with wide, rounded eyes and small smiles. “Master Liam, Hello.”

Hermione turned to her son, who’s jaw had fallen open. He was staring, struck in complete and utter shock, at the two elves. “*Mum* , elves.”

“I see that.” Hermione eyes cut at Draco, her teeth grinding.

“Don’t start, Granger.”

She offered him a withering sneer. “Oh, wouldn’t dream of it, *Malfoy*.”

The smaller, and seemingly older, elf stepped forward. ‘Would you like tea?’

Hermione’s glacial exterior melted and she smiled. “I’m quite alright, thank you so much.”

The elves seemed to shrink, disappointed that they couldn't be of help as Draco clapped his hands and rubbed them together. "So, we'll do the tour another day when we don't have to skip the dungeons and torture rooms. I'll show you to your rooms."

Draco gestured towards a set of grand double doors and then his hand fell to the curve of her lower back, guiding her forward. It was the smallest of touches, barely there and completely innocent, but it set her skin on fire.

xXx

That night the three of them shared dinner outside. Twinkling fairy lights lit over the garden as the sun dipped below the horizon and Hermione curled into her seat, tucking her legs under as she cradled a cocktail to her chest. Liam was sitting on the steps of the veranda with Piper and Poppy, talking animatedly about his life in New York and theirs here at the Manor.

"I should get Liam to bed," she said dejectedly.

Draco was staring down at his hands with great interest. "Do you think I might be able to put Liam to sleep tonight?"

He was nervous, and she couldn't help but smile. Merlin, what she'd have done to share bedtime routines a few years back. "That's fine. Liam, come and give me a kiss! Your dad," she paused to look at Draco, both of them wearing matching smiles, "is going to take you to bed tonight."

Liam groaned, as per usual, but trudged to his mother's side and presented his kiss for a cheek.

"Come on, bud." Draco plucked Liam from where he stood, perching him on his hip as he entered the house.

Piper and Poppy paused on their way back into the house, asking if she needed anything. She politely declined and turned to stare out the massive lawns. The home felt decidedly different then it had when she'd been here in the Spring of 1998.

Visceral and painful memories flooded her mind, pressure prickling at her sinuses as she swiftly finished her drink. Without thought, she rose, her feet carrying her absentmindedly through the house until she stopped at a set of grand doors.

Around her all the portraits had been either removed or covered with thick black drapings, and she'd never felt so woefully alone. She lifted her hand, fingers splaying on the thick wood door and sucked in a shuddered breath.

Beyond these doors was where her nightmares lived, they haunted her still. It almost always happened when she felt safe; as if Bellatrix LeStrange's long spiny fingers could reach from beyond the veil and grip her still.

"When I returned to the Manor—" Draco's voice pierced the air and her hand fell lamely to her side. "After the battle, that is, I lit it on fire. Father had to charm the fiendfyre before it took over the house. I've never been in there again."

Hermione swallowed, unable to speak. She could feel his presence at her side, and she wanted to leech the warmth from his body.

"Have I ever properly apologized?"

She sighed and shook her head. "I don't think so, but it's unnecessary."

Over the last decade she'd dealt with her feelings regarding that night and the rippling effect it'd had on her. The fire still licked at her veins and at times it was like she could *feel* the curse like another limb. Knowing that the father of her child had seen her tortured and carved, covered in blood and piss and Merlin knows what else, had sat on her chest like a boulder.

In the end, it was never his fault. He was as helpless as she'd been on that floor. She only wished the knowledge had made it easier to carry.

Draco turned to her, fingers curling around her shoulders. "Hermione... I'm so sorry." The contrition in his voice and etched onto his features were palpable and she felt, if only infinitesimally, that weight on her chest lessen.

"It's alright."

"No, it's not."

Her lips quirked in a sad smile and she reached up to wipe a stray tear from her cheek. "No... it's not. But hating you wouldn't change anything, and it wasn't your fault. For what it's worth, I forgive you. Not that you *need* my forgiveness—"

"I do." The thick muscles of his neck moved as he swallowed. "I do need your forgiveness."

The space between them stilled and her gaze travelled the sharp planes of his jaw, landing a moment on his lips. All these years later and she still remembered the way they'd felt against hers.

As quickly as the moment descended, it lifted and Hermione blinked until she was firmly back in reality.

"So," he said, his hands falling away from her shoulders as he took a step back. Draco retreated backwards, a smile breaking free on his lips. "This room is awful; that's obvious. But *this* room...I think you and Liam might appreciate it."

Curiosity twisted in her belly and she followed slowly, her breath hitching as he pushed the doors open. It was, bar none, the most beautiful room she had ever seen. It existed on a scale

of grandeur that she could hardly comprehend. In the center was a lovely sitting area with two matching settees and a pair of high back armchairs. Hugging the walls were rows upon rows of books; a grand staircase led to a second tier just as expansive as the first.

She'd expect something dark and macabre, silver snakes and upholstery the shade of emerald and ebony. But she was mistaken; the furnishings were pale wood, covered in champagne and ivory fabrics.

Rendered speechless, she approached the first shelf and trailed her finger along their spines before turning back to where Draco stood, watching her. "Liam is going to faint."

Draco smiled, and walked over to the drink cart, pouring a couple drinks for them. He sat down in one of the oversized arm chairs and Hermione continued to inspect the beautiful shelves. Idly, she plucked one from the wall and flipped it open.

Draco cleared his throat and called out, "Did you have a boyfriend? Or do you, I guess."

It was a simple question, in no way inappropriate or scandalous, but her lips pulled into a private smile as her stomach fluttered. She slotted the book back where it was and crossed the room, leaning over the back of the arm chair. "No, I don't. Didn't have much time for dates. You?"

"I would have thought that it was obvious, Granger, but I prefer the company of witches." He smiled into his glass and she rolled her eyes.

"You know what I mean." Rounding the chair, she picked up the drink he'd brought for her and thanked him.

He shook his head. "No one serious."

"I'm surprised; I would have thought you and Pansy would end up together."

Draco barked out a laugh, his nose wrinkling. “Why on earth would you think that?”

“I think everyone thought that.”

“Pansy and I are far too much alike. For the longest time I was sure you’d be a Weasley by now.”

A shiver shook her body and she violently shook her head. “That was such a strange part of my life,” she said with a laugh. “I mean, I think we were just so stubborn that we *had* to work that we never stopped to really ask ourselves if we should work. Harry and Ginny were really the only ones who even knew about Liam, and I swore them to secrecy.”

A strange nostalgia washed over her and she stared at a spot on the wall until her vision blurred. “I do think about him though,” she continued. “I wonder what would have happened if I hadn’t caught him with Lavender. Him cheating on me was the best thing that could have happened, in a twisted way it led to Liam.”

“And to the best sex of your life.” Draco grinned and tipped the rim of his glass in her direction.

Surprising herself, she broke out in a fit of laughter, choking on her spit as she wiped tears from her lashes. When her laughter died away, her head tipped back as she studied the chandelier, she said, “It’s so sad but that might actually be true. Ron wasn’t exactly... Well, needless to say, you might be right.”

A seriousness settled over Draco’s features. “Are you going to miss America?”

“Oh, I don’t think so. I think it served its purpose, and even if I was set on going back, Liam seems keen on you.”

“ You did a wonderful job raising him so far. Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For... I don’t know, all of it? Sleeping with me all those years ago and giving me a kid?”

Her blush deepened and she blamed it entirely on the alcohol and nothing else at all. “Well, I didn’t stand much of a chance once I saw you in your trunks, did I? All abs and biceps.”

Draco snorted. “I was flexing. Had to make a lasting impression, didn’t I?”

“It worked,” she said, biting into her lip and, curse it all, she was flirting again.

They sat in silence for a while after that, the only noise in the room the soft cackle from the fireplace. She felt comfortable here, far more comfortable than she had envisioned.

She also decided to amend her previous thought.

She *at least* liked Draco as a person. Anything past that?

Well, that was still up for debate.

xXx

Their first week went by smoothly for the new inhabitants of Malfoy Manor.

Draco still worked as a consultant for the DLME but that left his schedule rather flexible. So they settled into a strange relationship that felt vaguely reminiscent of playing house.

At night, they would eat dinner together as a quasi-family; Draco would tuck in Liam for bed, and then they would retreat to the library together where she would read and he would work.

Draco didn't waste a single opportunity to make it clear that they could stay as long as wanted— it seemed he'd prefer they just moved in— but she had vehemently declined. He at least told her to focus on the sale of her parents' home and getting that squared away, and then she could look for her and Liam.

There had also been a shift in the dynamic between them. The problem was that they kept flirting. It would have been easier if it was one sided, weighted in one direction or the other, but the more he smirked and she blushed, the more tension settled between them.

When he was around he found excuses to touch her whenever he could, a hand on her elbow or lower back, a single awkward hug one morning before he left for the Ministry. But other than those innocent little brushes, he made no other declaration that he might be interested.

Which was good.

Of course.

That would be a whole mess of complicated and right now complicated was dangerous. But when he was gone, she missed him, strange as it was. The Manor was massive and while the books alone could occupy her for a lifetime, Draco Malfoy brought a sense of ease to the estate.

The elves were besotted with Liam. They were so utterly enthralled with having a new young Master that Hermione rarely saw him. Liam was over the moon; he adored watching their magic and learning from them.

In the absence of both of the blond boys, Hermione began to prepare her resume and search for homes to let. The issue at hand was that she had no idea what she wanted to do with her life. New York had been out of necessity and while she enjoyed working in the history department at MUNY, she wouldn't say it filled her with purpose and drive.

Everything in New York had been simply a means to an end, an end that was now rapidly approaching.

That Friday, as she flipped through the various newspapers, circling promising flats in London proper with her Muggle pen, Draco stormed into the library with a frantic set to his features and a piece of crumpled parchment in his grip.

“Malfoy? Everything alr—”

“Did you see this?” He thrust the parchment between them and when she took it he yanked at the knot of his tie.

Smoothing the thick parchment, Hermione's eyes traced the neat scrawl.

Son,

We've had word from your Great-Great Grandfather's portrait that you're back at the Manor. He's also mentioned you'd covered his frame and is irate. We, however, couldn't be more pleased. Your father needs to pick up some pieces from his study so we will be coming by this evening for dinner. I've informed the elves and they will have dinner prepared for everyone, including your house guests.

We look forward to seeing you, darling. Expect us when you arrive home from work.

Mother

Hermione's jaw fell open just as the door to the library banged open and a small mop of curly hair came rushing in. "Dad! You're home. Did you know Channing Thompson is the only person to have three Quidditch world cups? Which is remarkable because the cup is only played every four years. I think I'll play Quidditch, too. Can we go to a game?"

Liam's rambling didn't cease even as Draco reached down to pat his curls only to be swatted away as he scowled and fluffed them back to normal. "That's amazing, bud. But I need to talk to your—"

"Here? They're coming here? When?"

"Tonight, it seems." Draco's jaw was set tight and they both were only idly aware of the small boy prattling on about Quidditch from his knees.

"Yes, but when, Draco? I'm in my sweats for crying out—"

"I don't know, Granger! I just got here! I've the same information as you!"

"Don't take that tone with me, Mal—"

They both froze at the sound of the Floo roaring to life in the foyer and if it were possible Hermione would have sank into the floorboards.

"Son?" Lucius' voice was crisp and clear as it echoed in the hall and Hermione darted for Liam, tugging him swiftly to her side.

With a slow, purposeful look at Hermione, Draco turned and braced himself in front of them.

Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy had not aged a day since she'd seen them last, though to be fair, they did look far more healthy now far from the Dark Lord's grasp. Their chins were tilted as they entered the library, as if they were intent to stare down the bridge of their noses at the rest of the world.

However, at the sight of Hermione dressed in her pyjamas and Liam, looking as much like a Malfoy as humanly possible, they both stilled, Lucius' eyes widening and nearly falling from his skull.

Narcissa had been in the act of pulling her glove finger by finger and she stilled when her gaze fell on the small child, then darted quickly to her son. "Draco?"

Draco's lungs filled with a fortifying breath and he pulled his shoulders back. "Mother, Father. I'm sure you remember Hermione Granger from Hogwarts. This is Liam Granger."

"Granger?" Narcissa raised an eyebrow, still staring at Liam.

"Our son." The two words echoed through the ages, coming back like a boomerang and slamming into the two elder Malfoys.

"Son?" Narcissa repeated while Lucius looked as though a slight breeze may knock him on his arse.

"Liam," Draco turned and picked Liam up, resting him on his hip with a proud smile, "Meet your Grandparents."

"Explain yourself this instant," Lucius hissed.

Hermione couldn't *breathe*. A layer of sweat spread over her entire body and she felt like she might lose her lunch at any minute.

“It’s a long story, one maybe more well suited for another time, but I’ve recently found out I have a son, and that would be Liam.”

Narcissa’s eyes were still floating between Draco and Liam, disbelief heavy on her features which quickly softened and turned to awe. With both gloves removed she took a tentative step forward. “How old are you, dear?”

Liam sniffed, tilting his chin in the air much in the way the Malfoys had just entered. “I’m six and a half.”

Despite the joy now transforming Narcissa’s features, Lucius was not quite so enamored. “Draco, how could you be so foolish?”

Hermione’s jaw fell open, indignant that they would speak like that in front of her son but Draco was faster. “Don’t speak like that to me; I’m not a child.”

“Then stop acting childishly. I should never have let your mother coddle you so. What are we to do with him?” Lucius inspected Liam like he was a problem that needed to be solved, and quietly.

“Dad?” Liam squeaked, his small arms closing around Draco’s neck.

“Ignore him, Liam. They were just leaving.” Turning, Draco offered Liam to Hermione who took him with a soft grunt and rubbed his back.

Draco turned and gestured the way the Malfoys had entered, ready to see them out but Narcissa stomped her foot and reeled and her husband. “Lucius Abraxas Malfoy! Apologize this instant.”

“Cissa,” Lucius’ lip curled as he turned to his wife, “you are coddling him. *Again*. The boy has no sense of responsibility. Merlin, that school taught all that useless rubbish and couldn’t spend the time on a simple contraceptive charm.”

“Father, please remember you are wandless because you’re in dangerous fucking—”

“ How dare you speak to me like that? ”

“Lucius!” Narcissa rounded on her husband, fury dancing like flames in her eyes. “You will *not* ruin this for me, do you understand?”

Clutching Liam closer, Hermione swore she could hear the clattering of his little teeth and every maternal instinct in her flared to life. Idly she thought to how quickly she could hex the bastard when Narcissa continued, taking a step towards her son.

“Draco, darling, please don’t listen to a word your father says. You know he’s been Crucio’d one too many times.” She waved her husband off dismissively. “And if he doesn’t watch it, he might make it one more. I personally can’t wait to meet the little gentleman.”

Narcissa continued forward, tentative like she was approaching a wounded animal and while her attention was firmly on Liam, she smiled fondly at Hermione as well. “Hello, Miss Granger. You look well.”

Hitching Liam higher on her hip, Hermione offered her a small tight smile. “Thank you. Liam, would you...” Her gaze snapped to Narcissa. The woman who’d watched a young teenage girl tortured by the hands of her sister. “Would you like to meet your grandmother?”

Liam peeked out from where his face was now buried in his mother’s shoulder, his features pinched as he looked at the beautiful witch. “She’s nicer than the other one.”

Both witches teetered in quiet laughter and Narcissa stood to her full height. “That is true, I’m afraid. The *other* one is very disagreeable on his best day but we keep him around anyway. Now tell me Liam, where is that lovely accent from?”

“I grew up in America, but I’m moving to London with my mum in a few weeks so I can be closer to my dad, Draco Malfoy.” Narcissa folded her hands over her heart, melting as she listened intently to her only grandson. In an instant, she turned on her heel and crashed into Draco, hugging him and then taking his face in her hands as tears slipped free over her cheeks.

“Oh, Draco...”

“And pray tell,” Lucius snorted from near the door, “but *why* are we just learning of little Liam and his mother’s existence? Seems convenient, isn’t it?”

“Excuse me?” Hermione stepped forward, the hum of her wand flaring in her pocket.

“Father, that’s enough.”

“*Hermione* Granger, was it?”

“One and the same, I’m afraid.”

“Mum, did you see? His hair? It’s just like my dad’s and me, but longer... like a girl.”

Hermione folded her lips in to keep the laughter from pilling free as Lucius sneered at the two of them.

“Well, they certainly seem at home...” Lucius said coldly.

Draco stepped away from his mother and came up to Hermione’s side. “I should hope so; I’ve tried very much to make it feel that way for them.”

Turning his aristocratic nose towards the ceiling, Lucius began mumbling intelligibly and from beside her, Draco sucked in a harsh breath.

“Please stop embarrassing yourself, Father. You may keep your opinions to yourself and sit through dinner, or you may go home. Those are your options. Although, considering you are running out of family to disown, I’d consider your choice carefully and how you choose to speak to him or Hermione in this home.”

“This is my home!”

“Liam and I should go...” Hermione set her son down and gripped his hand but Draco’s arm shot out to stay them.

“Not anymore. If you remember. Your estates and wand were forfeited after the war tribunals if you remember correctly. Leaving them to me, and ultimately to Liam. Mother?” Draco asked from the corner of his mouth, his gaze never leaving his father. “Are you staying for dinner?”

“Yes, darling. Lucius?”

The patriarch stood there alone, staring at his newly expanded family and grimaced but otherwise remained silent.

xXx

Thankfully, Hermione had been allowed to change. She’d dressed in her best cocktail dress, black and fitted with capped sleeves. Then she’d twisted her curls into her a low bun and even applied some makeup. It was excessive for dinner but had plans later and needed the confidence that a well-fitted dress allowed; she’d been siphoned of any courage when presented with two Malfoys in her pyjamas.

Liam dressed in his khakis and suspenders, a small crooked bowtie again in place and he'd actually combed his curls and when they exited their joined rooms, they found Draco there. He'd changed into something more formal as well and looked thoroughly abashed, hands jammed in his trouser pockets and chin tucked.

"I'm so sorry," he said breathlessly as soon as Hermione and Liam were in front of him. "I had no idea and I was going to tell them, of course, but I just bloody *hate* talking to that insufferable excuse for a father."

Hermione reached for his elbow and squeezed gently. "It's okay; it's not your fault."

With a crooked smile, he offered his elbow and with Liam in tow, they made their way to the dining room.

Draco was a lovely host, kissing his mother on the cheek and then pulling out Hermione's chair for dinner. Lucius took the seat at the head of the table which caused his son to drag his tongue along his teeth and chuckle mirthlessly as he took the seat to the left. Liam was between them and Narcissa smiling brightly from Lucius' right.

The atmosphere around the dinner table was tense, to say the very least. The only noises that could be heard were the scraping of metal utensils on expensive china, Liam rattling off facts to the table about Quidditch, completely ignorant to the unrest in the air.

When there was a brief lull in the conversation, Narcissa demurely sliced off a piece of her chicken and spoke to Draco. "You need to finish the formal dining, darling. This isn't appropriate to receive guests in this dining room. I told you I can help; it'll give me something to do other than putter around the country house. Maybe I could come and stay, get to know Liam and Miss Granger a little better."

"I don't receive many guests, Mother. I don't even live here."

Narcissa's laughter tinkled through the room. "Well, now you don't but once you and Miss Granger make things official, I'm sure she won't want to be holed up in that gods awful flat. Have you discussed that yet? Oh, I do love a late summer wedding."

Wine caught in the back of Hermione's throat and she sputtered and coughed, catching Lucius' sharp glare as she dabbed at the corner of her mouth.

"Dad, what should I call them?" Liam attempted to whisper but he was rotten at it.

"Oh, please call me Grandmother!" Narcissa cooed, starry-eyed and leaning excitedly across the table.

Then, as if they were a single unit, the rest of the table turned to the man at the head of the table. "You may call me Lucius."

"*Lucius!*" Narcissa hissed. He looked at her with fake bewilderment.

With a snort, he pushed his peas to the side. "That's far more casual than I allow most people to address me, especially having known me for an hour."

"*Loo-shush,*" Liam sounded it out. "Reminds me of Lucifer." Hermione again started choking on her wine and batting at her chest, attempting to hide her laughter in vain.

"Tell me, Miss Granger, what do you *do* for a living? I assume you work?" Lucius Malfoy had an inane ability to make something as innocuous as work sound so contemptible.

Hermione swallowed and sat tall in her chair. "I worked in the Magical History Department at MUNY in New York. I've notified them of my resignation and will find something here.

"That's... *convenient.*"

Her eyelid twitched and she carefully set down her cutlery. "Is it? I find it rather inconvenient actually."

“Well, my son has insurmountable wealth and a vast estate; you have nothing. I just find it interesting that after all these years you are now interested in moving back to London when you have no means of providing for yourself or your *son* .”

Both Narcissa and Draco’s silverware clanged against their plates as their indignation rose, vitriol already beginning to spill from their mouths as Hermione cut them short.

“Mr. Malfoy, I assure you I have no intention of coming for your money. I’ve managed just fine the last six and a half years; I’ll manage just fine in the future, London or elsewhere.”

“Yes, mummy doesn’t need money. I have so much money, I will share it with her.”

Lucius narrowed his eyes. “You have a lot of money?”

“I’m a Malfoy,” Liam stated proudly.

At that Narcissa started laughing quietly. “That you are; he certainly has the right temperament.”

“Mr. Lucifer,” Liam started.

“*Lucius.*”

“Oh, Mr. Lucius, you’re the dad to my dad?”

“Indeed.”

“Was my dad like me, when he was little?”

“Oh.” Lucius squirmed. “Well, you both certainly look a lot alike. Draco was very into Quidditch, and if my memory serves me, he also rather liked to chase skirts, which I’m sure you are too young for. I’d advise you *not* to follow his footsteps in that regard unless you’d rather have an illegitimate heir as well.”

“*Excuse me!*” Hermione exclaimed at the precise moment Liam looked at Draco and asked, “What’s chasing skirts?”

Draco groaned, burying his face in his palms for a moment before cursing the heavens. “Piper?”

With a soft *pop*, the house elf appeared at his side. “Yes, Master Draco?”

“Can you help Liam to his room? I’ll be in shortly.”

“But dessert, Mum! You said if I behaved...”

“Piper is going to take you by the kitchens, you can get whatever you want, then head to your room. Alright?” he smiled softly at him and ruffled his hair.

Liam glared at his father before fixing his curls and hopped off his chair. Holding Piper’s hand, Liam left quietly, whispering something about cake *and* cookies because Dad said he could have whatever he wanted.

When the door was securely closed, Draco turned to face his father.

“Have you lost your mind? What in the world would tempt you to say anything about Liam’s legitimacy— not only in general— but especially in front of him?”

“Watch your tongue, boy. I’m still your father. Now, of course, we will financially take care of the child, but surely you aren’t considering naming him as your heir.”

“Firstly, it’s *my* money. All of it. You live comfortably because *I* allow it, part of your banishment from London if you remember. Secondly, I absolutely intend to name Liam as my heir, and you don’t get a vote. He’s already been given the heritage account and Mother, he’ll need to be added to the Black family tapestry and trusts.”

“Of course, darling—”

“Draco, stop this nonsense! You are spitting on generations of tradition. Now, you aren’t the first one in the Malfoy line to make such a mistake, but you’ll handle this situation like a Malfoy.”

With an exaggerated snort, Draco threw his napkin at his table with too much force. “If you are the gleaming example of what a Malfoy ought to be, I will tell you right now, I’ve every intention of not becoming one.”

“Mr. Malfoy,” Hermione interrupted delicately. “I’m not sure if you’ve somehow misunderstood this situation, but I’d love the opportunity to clear it up. Draco and I will be making all the decisions regarding Liam’s care, together. I don’t give a knut about your money or your trusts, titles, and estates. I certainly won’t be bothered with your traditions unless they matter to Liam’s father. If Draco wants us here, we’re here. I’ve taken years from him that he can’t have back, and I have no intention of doing that again.”

“You and Mrs. Malfoy— who has been lovely, by the way,” she paused so smile at Narcissa, “Are allowed in our son’s life, if and only if, you can keep these extreme prejudices to yourself. If you can’t, then you will lose that relationship. Though, I’m sure it would be of no consequence to you.”

From across the table, Draco stared at Hermione, something like awe and pride evident in the sparkle in his eye.

Narcissa broke the silence with a resigned sigh. “Lucius, it’s enough. If you think for one second I’m not going to get to know my grandson, you’re madder than I thought you were. Can you behave yourself, or should I ask my son if he has a room prepared for me to stay in while I look for other accommodations?”

Anger billowed from the head of the table but finally, when Narcissa refused to relent, he bit out, “Of course, my dear.”

“Lovely,” Narcissa cooed and dabbed at her lips with her napkin. “Dinner has been stimulating, but I think we are going to have to retreat for the evening. Can we make plans to see you again?”

“Of course, Mother.”

“Soon?” she pressed and Hermione stifled her laughter.

“Yes, Mother. Soon.”

The Malfoys swiftly departed, Narcissa kissing at her son’s cheek and shaking Hermione’s hand. Lucius did neither.

As soon as the grate of the Floo was cleared both Draco and Hermione let out a long-suffering sigh and turned to each other.

“Have I apologized yet?”

Hermione laughed and nodded. “I’ve handled worse, and your mother seems lovely.

“She could be a bloody saint and wouldn’t make up for my father. I know he’s really shown his arse tonight, but I swear he’s not always so bad. The war changed him... I think.”

“We’ll figure it out. He can be as rude to me as he wants, I just don’t want Liam to develop anymore issues with feeling unwanted.”

Draco agreed, pushing his hands into his trouser pockets. “I’ll make sure of it; I don’t want that either.”

“I was actually wondering— I know it’s a bit sudden— but would you mind staying with Liam tonight?”

“Hmm?”

“I received an owl earlier and Luna’s returned from her trip to South America. Seamus— do you remember him? — he’s offered to throw a little reunion tonight at his pub. I thought maybe I might attend after Liam is down for bed.”

“Oh!” Draco’s was too bright... too cheerful.

Maybe she’d misread the situation or perhaps springing this on him wasn’t the prudent thing to do. “Nevermind. It was a last-minute thing and I hadn’t even thought to run it by you—”

Draco blinked. “No, no of course that’s fine. When?”

“Now, if that’s alright? I’ll just go run and say goodnight to Liam.”

“Right, yes. Brilliant.”

Wrinkling her nose in amusement, she shook her head and retreated towards Liam’s room, feeling Draco’s eyes on her with every step. After she’d said her goodnights, she returned to the Floo to find Draco in the exact spot he’d just been, staring at nothing at all.

Guilt lay over her like a heavy shroud and she pulled at her fingers as she approached him.
“Are you sure it’s okay?”

He turned and she could see the taut muscles of his throat clenching as he swallowed. “Of course, Granger. Have fun, yeah?”

Tucking a chin behind her ear she smiled and walked towards the Floo.

“You look beautiful, by the way.”

She paused, her breath hitching almost painfully in her throat and turned to regard him once more. There was something in the way he was looking at her, something she barely recognized, because it’d been so bloody long that anyone had looked at her like that all.

He said nothing more, dipping his chin once and then turning for the hall.

A/N: Hope this update finds you well and I apologize that it’s been a few days! I need to focus on a few fest pieces and crank out a chapter of my WIP so it may be a few days before you see me again here! I appreciate all your kind thoughts and that you’ve been following along!

Thanks to MCal for her reading this and fixing all those typos! Any remaining errors are well and truly mine alone.

See you soon my friends!

Chapter 8

Two weeks had passed since the dinner with the Malfoys and Hermione's first night out following the great exodus of London. It was only after two pints and a Jameson that Hermione divulged that she'd had a son— and with Draco Malfoy.

The resulting silence was deafening. Seamus, Dean, and Neville were dumbstruck and a slow smile spread over Luna's lips.

While the night in and of itself was lovely, it was the first time she realized that she might have enjoyed Draco's company alongside her. Someone to help soften the blow from springing their prodigy into their lives.

And for the following two weeks, they continued to settle into a strange new reality. Hermione was certain that there was *something* sparking between them, but she couldn't act on it. Some Gryffindor she turned out to be. In reality, it'd just been so very long since she'd held the attention of a man and this wasn't some colleague who could easily be placed back into a non-romantic circle.

For the rest of their lives Draco and Hermione would be in each other's orbits and with that came responsibility not only to each other but to their son and his future.

Shrugging from her shirt, Hermione paused to study herself in the floor length mirror. She looked different than she had in her youth, softer curves and a little more thickness around her hips, not to mention the silvery lines around her belly button, proof of Liam's existence plain as day on her body. But as she quickly approached her 32nd birthday, she found that she was pleased with the way she looked.

A few more wrinkles were worth the life she'd built with Liam and youth, while tempting, was not enough to make her wish it all away.

With a long sigh, she slipped her pale blue cotton sundress over her shoulders and slid the zipper up. Albus' birthday had been just earlier in the week and the Potter's were throwing a

small get together at their house this afternoon. They'd offered her the same for her upcoming birthday in a fortnight, but she'd vehemently declined.

Securing her hair up with a few strong pins, she summoned her pocketbook and made her way to the Floo. Draco had been gracious enough to steal Liam away to Diagon to pick out a gift for Albus and she was meant to be meeting them at Grimmauld Place shortly.

She'd no sooner stepped through the grate at the Potters than she was assaulted by a deafening “*Surprise!*”

“Mother fuc—” Thankfully the wild cheers drowned out the second half of her expletive as she choked and clutched at her chest.

Begrudgingly, she forced a tight, fake smile on her face as her focus settled on two grinning Potters and a Malfoy at their back. A genuine smile quickly replaced it when familiar tiny arms wrapped around her legs in a tight, albeit quick, hug.

“It’s a surprise party for your birthday! I’m so happy, Mum, because I didn’t want to go to the tiny Potter’s party at all.”

Biting back a laugh, Hermione sank to her knees and shook her head. “Shh, shh! You shouldn’t say such things.”

“But it’s true.”

Hermione kissed her son’s cheek. “Even so.” As she rose to stand, Liam slid his hand in hers; he always got a little nervous around big groups.

Ginny grabbed her first, wrapping her in a hug and muttering her apologies as Harry snatched her next. One by one her old classmates wished her happy birthday and with a half hug and a polite smile, she greeted each and every one.

When Seamus stepped aside, revealing Molly and Arthur Weasley, Hermione's body froze with fear. She may have been somehow more nervous to see them than she was to meet the Malfoy's.

"H-hi, Molly."

The Weasley matriarch clucked her tongue and rolled her eyes, her palms lifting to the heavens once before wrenching Hermione in for a bone crushing hug. "Six years and no owl; I should have your skin, girl. But," she said as she held her at arms length, inspecting her closely, "it appears you're nothing but skin and bone already. You need to be fed."

There was something comforting about Molly admonishing her for something so ridiculous. "I'll make sure someone does so at least twice a day. Have you met Liam?"

Molly's gaze drifted down to the small boy and Hermione's heart raked wildly against her sternum as she tried in vain to quiet the blood whooshing in her ears.

"Briefly," Molly said, locking her hands together in front of her. "He's a charming young man. You and Draco must be very proud."

A strange tension settled in the air but when she finally looked up at the woman she assumed she'd some day call family, she saw nothing but happiness. "Thank you. We are."

Nodding once, Molly excused herself and Arthur gave her an awkward hug before shuffling away.

"So," Ginny said, snagging her elbow. "Are you horribly mad?"

Hermione lifted onto her toes, craning her neck around the crowd; she still hadn't seen Malfoy except for the brief moment when she'd stepped through the Floo. "Mad at myself,

maybe. I should have known better. And what about Albus' birthday? I hate to steal his big weekend."

"Ah, well you are due at the Burrow tomorrow for Albus' birthday. Don't forget your Sobering Potion. Excuse me." Ginny darted away with a frantic edge to her eye as she intercepted James before George could hand over whatever trinket he was attempting to pass him.

The crowds parted and Draco appeared, his lips folded into an awkward smile. He waved and a smile twitched on her lips as she made a step towards him. Before she'd made the second step, Professor McGonagall, of all bleeding people, stopped her to inquire about her work in New York and her life after the war.

With a placating smile, Hermione turned from Draco, giving her old professor all her attention.

xXx

"Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday to you..."

This had to be the most uncomfortable part of a birthday party, both for the recipient and the guests. Hermione smiled, although it was really more a grimace, at her friends who were circled around where she sat. Liam was just next to her, grinning both at her and the humble, lopsided, homemade cake on the table, buckling from the weight of thirty-two candles.

Her son was absolutely beside himself. He'd never attended— or really had— a proper birthday party with other guests involved and for a child who abhorred attention, he was completely in his element.

"Make your wish, Mum. Make it a good one," he whispered and without thought her gaze flickered to where Draco stood near the back of the crowd, resting his hip on the counter. She didn't really have a wish, but she had a feeling. And as she focused on that flutter in her belly, she blew out her candles.

The cake was divided and served. The party guests milled about, sharing in quiet, polite conversation while Hermione sat poking at her cake and listening to Liam and Luna in a heated discussion regarding the existence of a Nargle.

“I can see them quite clearly; I don’t know why you can’t.” Luna’s voice carried that same wistfulness it had in their youth, present now even as she was an educated and decorated scholar in the field of magical creatures.

Liam scowled, a pink pair of glasses with hand shaped frames on the bridge of his nose.

“I don’t see anything at all. If they were real I could see them.”

“What a preposterous thing to think!” Luna leaned towards him, eyes wide and excited. “I see things that aren’t there all the time.”

Hermione bit out a laugh, disguising it as a cough as she hacked and sputtered. If that was Luna’s attempt to sway Liam, she had vastly misshot her target.

Liam ripped the glasses off and handed them back to Luna. “My mom makes me say thank you when something like this happens,” he deadpanned.

“Feeling up for some air?” Draco’s voice sounded in her ear and she jolted in her seat, gasping for breath at the sudden proximity on him.

“Yes.” She swallowed. “Quite.”

As Hermione stood, she watched Liam’s expression transform into another mask of indignation as he turned back towards Luna. “And another thing—”

She really ought to warn them both about the unwinnable war of Luna versus Logic.

They stepped out into the cool September evening, a chill wrapping its way around them and Hermione rubbed her upper arms. A moment later and Draco's jacket was draped over her shoulders and she smiled and thanked him quietly.

"I wanted to give you your birthday present but you're a popular witch, haven't caught a moment of your time all night."

"A gift?" She blinked, an awkward laugh bubbling forward. "Is it a cane?"

He shook his head, pulling out a long black velvet box. "Maybe for Christmas," he said with a smirk. "This felt more appropriate for a birthday."

"Draco, you really shouldn't have..." She touched the top of the box softly.

"Just open it, Granger."

She took the box from his hands and the lid. Inside the box, was a dainty silver chain with an oval pendant encrusted with red gemstones and she gasped as it glittered even in the dim light of the moon. "It's absolutely stunning... thank you." As much as she wanted to turn and look at him properly, she couldn't find the strength. If she looked at him, she was fairly certain she'd want to kiss him. Which seemed a properly poor idea under the lamentation of another year older and three glasses of wine.

"It's a locket," he explained, pressing a small clasp on the side. Inside was a picture of Liam, a rare one of him actually laughing. She felt tears form at the corner of her eyes and finally her gaze lifted to his.

Merlin, he was handsome. He always had been, even when he was a precocious git at eleven.

“Draco...” Her lips were parted but no other words came.

He smirked, eyes sparkling. “It’s nothing... you should see what your six year old with a limitless budget purchased for you.”

With a groan, she rolled her eyes and returned her attention to the locket in her hands. “I’ll never forgive you for that vault, seriously,”

“Could I make it up to you somehow?” There was weight in his words, emotion that she couldn’t name or recognize because she wasn’t sure anyone had ever spoken to her with such intensity before.

When she looked at him again, his gaze was locked on her lips and she knew it was inevitably one of those moments that would irrevocably change everything. Quickly, she ticked through her very long list of *Reasons Not to Kiss Draco Malfoy* but the wine and the complicated situation and the history all seemed to pale in comparison to the gentle bow of his lower lip.

“Yes,” she breathed and with that single word the edge of lips twitched and he took a tentative step towards her. His fingers closed around the slope of her waist and pulled her in the rest of the way, and as cliché as it was, she swooned, melting into his touch.

Their lips brushed gently, a spark of electricity jolting right against her mouth. He kissed her cautiously, as if she were expensive china he was scared to break and the softness of it made her heart leap into a wild gallop.

Her fingers splayed over his heart and she pressed her body against his as his kiss turned more insistent and his free hand curled around the back of her neck.

Just as their lips parted, they were flooded with bright light from the inside and they jumped away from each other as though they were seventeen again and caught in a broom cupboard. Harry stood there, wide eyed and alarmed and all three of them shared in panted breath.

When Harry didn't apologize or retreat, Draco gesticulated wildly and turned on him. "Read the room, Potter. Piss off."

Hermione brought her fingers up to brush her lips, the ghost of a kiss dancing on them.

Harry's green eyes widened but before he could say a single word, another voice filtered from outside. One that she would know absolutely anywhere despite the years it'd been since she'd heard it last.

Hermione whimpered. Draco cursed.

"Oi! Where's the birthday girl? Piss off, George, I don't care I wasn't invited. It's my sister's bloody house and I'll show up when I want to!"

"I'm so sorry," Harry whispered.

Happy fucking birthday to me, she thought and snapped the lid of her gift closed.

A/N: So sorry for the epic delay there friends! I had to force my way through a difficult chapter of my Jamione WIP before I allowed myself to work on other projects and it was a real doozy. But I did it! I'll be back in a few days and endless thanks to Mae for pre-reading this for me!

It's unbeta'd so please forgive any errors, they are all mine.

Stay safe!

Chapter 9

As much as the true horror of being face to face with her ex-boyfriend and once best friend was well and truly real, her only thought was of her son probably next to Luna inside. She turned to Draco with a pained expression. "*Liam.*"

"Shit," he bit out, pushing past Harry and disappearing into the kitchen.

Her vision blurred at the edges and she forced one foot in front of the other. Harry stopped her, gentle fingers on the crook of her elbow. "I'm so sorry, Hermione. We didn't know..."

Forcing a weak smile on her face, she nodded and pressed inside.

"There she is!" Ron's voice boomed through the small space and she winced as he crashed into her, crushing her in a hug. "It's been too long, Hermione."

The smell of stale beer on his breath made her want to gag and she carefully extricated herself from his meaty paws. "Hello, Ronald."

Quickly, she scanned the room and saw Draco with Liam on his hip disappearing down the corridor. Her heart surged with relief.

"Ron, come on, mate." George tried to tug him away but Ron only faltered, his feet remaining planted in front of her. "You're pissed and acting like a right fool—"

"I'm not pissed, Georgie. I had a few pints, a few fans wanted to pay their respects."

"Bloody hell," Hermione groaned. "Go home, Ronald." She pushed through the wall of people surrounding her, dozens of eyes intent on her.

He snorted and followed behind her. “It’s been six years, Hermione! You can’t spare a minute for your best friend?”

Hermione choked out a mirthless laugh. “You forget— you’re not a friend.”

“Fucking really? One mistake, and you throw away almost a decade of friendship?” Of course he had to make a scene.

Molly stomped up, flicking her son on the shoulder. “Ronald Weasley! Language and how dare you talk to her like that!”

“Sorry Mum, but seriously...she thinks she's too good for us or something. Can’t even greet an old friend.”

“Again, Ronald, you are *not* a friend.”

Liam’s shrill scream sliced through the air and sobered her. She reeled, searching the room and found two matching shocks of blond hair near the fireplace. Draco was hiding his face in his palm and Liam was tense, hands balled into fists and mouth open in a wild yell.

Slowly, a disgusting smell permeated through the room, resembling pickled slugs and gasoline and that is exactly the moment she spied James a few feet away with a manic smile.

“He threw something at me, made me stink!” Liam pointed an exaggerated finger at the eldest Potter child and Ginny was yanking her son up the stairs a moment later, apologizing over her shoulder and screaming for George to fix it now.

Features flattening, she turned to find George just over her shoulder, lips pulled back in an apologetic grimace. “It’s just a Dung Bomb. Hold your breath til I get back.” He rushed through the Floo, muttering apologies to Draco and Liam as he went.

“Oi,” Ron said, stepping forward and pointing towards where Draco was comforting Liam.
“When did the Ferret procreate?”

Harry’s features pinched tightly. “Please Ron, I’m begging you to shut up.”

Barking out a laugh, he rocked on his heels. “What? I didn’t know he knocked someone up! That’s a fucking crime to not know? We’re all lucky I haven’t punched the poncey prat just for being in my sister’s home.”

“ *Ronald! Language!*” Molly shrieked.

Liam noticed Hermione at exactly that moment and left Draco’s arms to rush into hers as she dropped to her knees. “Mum, did you see?”

Smoothing his curls, she nodded. “I can *smell*,” she said with a small smile. “Don’t worry, George will be back with something in a moment.”

“I don’t like pranks, Mum.”

“Shh, shh, I know...”

“What in the fuck is happening? Am I actually that drunk?” Ron gawked, his jaw slack.

With a soft growl, Molly stepped forward and slapped her son on the back of the head.
“Ronald Weasley, I swear to Godric right now, if you curse in my presence one more time I will light you on fire in the yard. I don’t care how much of a big shot you think you’ve become; I’m your mother and I will make you rue the day you tore yourself into the world if you don’t wisen up this instant.”

Ron rubbed the back of his head with a twist to his mouth. “Yes, Mum.”

George stepped back through the Floo and no sooner had he appeared than he tossed a small bag of powder at Liam’s feet, which erupted into a cloud of smoke that filled the room and effectively neutralized the smell.

The room erupted in coughs as the guests batted the air around their faces. “Seriously, Weasley?” Draco sneered.

“What? At least he doesn’t smell like sh—”

“Well,” Hermione interrupted, “Thank you all for this *lovely* get together. I speak with full confidence when I say this is a birthday I will *never* forget.” Snatching Liam’s hand, she tugged him towards where Draco stood by the Floo, a handful of powder at the ready.

Ron’s hand snapped out, grabbing her arm too tightly. “One minute here...” His brows furrowed in disbelief. “Is that your son?”

Wrenching her arm back into her possession, she pressed forward.

“Mione, is that your kid?” Ron rushed after her, skidding to a stop in front of her. He always was a tenacious git.

“Yes, Ronald. This is my son; his name is Liam. Please, remember that he is only six, when you speak next.”

“*Six*? Who’s...” Confusion flickered over his features as he visibly tried to do the math in his head. “Who’s his father?”

Draco came up beside them as Liam lifted his chin and sniffed. “I’m a Malfoy.”

“Cheers, mate.” A slow grin spread over Draco’s face and Hermione groaned. This was all the absolute worst case scenario, a nightmare she couldn’t have formulated in wildest dreams.

A disgusted sneer twisted over Ron’s face as his gaze snapped to each of the three of them in turn. “It’s a bit hypocritical, don’t you think? For you to get mad at me for Romilda when you were slagging it around?”

She didn’t *think* . Her palm shot out, connecting with his jaw as a collective gasp echoed through the room. She’d nearly forgotten they had an audience until then.

“Don’t ever speak to me like that again.” Hermione turned to Harry, a tear threatening to break free. “Thank you for tonight.”

A moment later she was through the Floo and back home with her family at Malfoy Manor.

xXx

While Draco took Liam to bed, Hermione wandered barefoot towards the library, her heels hanging from her fingers. Every damn thing about this trip was getting away from her and while in so many ways that was wonderful, it was also unnerving.

And Ronald. She snorted and poured herself a drink. Behind her, the door opened and she pinched the bridge of her nose and turned, an excuse or an apology already on her lips.

“Listen—”

But her words were stopped when he caught her around the waist, his mouth slanting over hers as his free hand sank in her curls. Her eyes opened wider, surprise keeping her from properly kissing him back. Then, his tongue darted out and drags along her lower lip and she remembers herself.

She set her drink down on the cart behind her and curled around him, her fingers cradling his jaw as he guided her to the sofa. The back of her knees bumped the edge of the cushion and with careful precision, he laid her back, climbing over her. His lips travelled down her jaw and across her neck while his fingers stayed firmly on her waist, gripping her hard in what she can only imagine is an attempt to keep them from wandering.

His teeth grazed her pulse point and she hissed, back arching into him as her body remembered just how much it enjoyed being touched by Draco Malfoy. Absently, she rolls her hips against the hard muscle of his thigh pressing into her and she moans lewdly.

Too soon, reality crashes into her and she fists the expensive material of his shirt. “Draco.”

He stilled, pushing up onto his palms and staring down at her with a knowing smile. “Too fast?”

“A little... I’m sorry. I do want *this*,” she paused to gesture to the space between them. “But we are more than complicated.”

“You’re right,” he conceded and retreated to his corner of the settee, his chest heaving in deliberate breaths. “That was a big night and I just... Fuck, I’ve just wanted to kiss you so long.”

His confession warms her and she scoots closer until her legs are resting against his. “I think we could try... but I don’t want to tell Liam yet. We don’t even know if it’s something—”

“Granger—” He curled his hand around her face, thumb brushing along her cheekbone. It’s something.”

A smile threatened to take over her face and she bit down on her lip to keep it from forming.

“We’ll go slow,” he said, leaning forward to kiss her cheek. “I can do slow.”

xXx

“I *really* don’t think I should go,” Draco argued, hands resting squarely on his hips.

Hermione laughed, brows tugging together. “You have to go! Albus will be crushed.”

“*Weasley* might get beat if he can’t keep his mouth in check, and I doubt he can. It’s not smart for me to be in the same room as the git.”

“Listen, we need to go. We don’t have to stay the whole afternoon, but we should at least stop by for a while for Albus.”

“Alright, Granger. But I’ve warned you,” Draco shook his head in disbelief and reached for Liam’s hand.

They Apparated into the backyard of the Burrow, and Liam swayed on the spot. Draco was on his knees as soon as they’d materialized, checking on Liam as though he were made of crystal. Once Liam had regained his constitution, they made their way round the house to where a pickup game of Quidditch was underway.

“Timeout!” They heard from above and Hermione’s stomach roiled as Ron touched down on the lawn. A fiery blush graced his cheekbones and he had the good graces to appear abashed. “Hi, Hermione.”

“Ronald.” She tucked Liam closer to her side.

“Can I talk to you for a minute?”

“No.” Gripping Liam’s hand and with Draco hot on her heels, she rushed past them and into the house. The rest of the players had returned to the ground and she was not going to force Liam to witness another Ron Weasley spectacle.

“How about me?” Harry called out and she stopped midstep, turning slowly to glare at her best friend. “Can I have a moment?”

Releasing Liam’s hand, she let out an indignant breath. “Is it necessary?”

Harry scratched at the back of his neck with a pinched expression. “Um, yes?”

“Fine. Liam go play with Albus.”

Her song gasped as though she’d offended him. “*What?*”

“Liam Steven Granger, it is your friend’s birthday party, and I’m in a foul mood already. *Please* go and play.”

His little lips mashed together and he stomped over to where Albus was sitting on the grass with his cousins. “My mother is making me play with you.”

Groaning, Hermoine threw her hands in the air and marched inside. Every male in her life was hellbent on driving her to the brink of insanity. She made her way to the sitting room near the front of the house and juttred her foot out as she waited, tapping it impatiently.

Harry had barely made it in the room before she started in on him. “Let me guess, Ron is sorry and you’re best mates all over again?”

“Hermione—”

“Or is there some other reason you’re now interjecting on his behalf? Begging me to be nice, perhaps?”

“You do realize he’s probably going to sell the story of Liam’s existence to the papers, right? It’s been awhile since he’s been center stage, so of course he’s showing up to make a mess of everything.”

Harry dragged a hand down his cheek and shook his head. “I’m not telling you what to do, Hermione. I have my own reasons for being mad at the prat but I know yours outnumber mine three to one. But, Ginny said he’s back awhile... he’s my brother-in-law, he’s my children’s uncle. We have to figure something out because I just got you back in my life and I don’t want his sudden reappearance to drive you back out. Can you be civil? For me?”

With a glower, she acquiesced. “Not even for you... but for your children, yes. But I don’t make any promises for Draco so you may want to pull him aside for a little chat as well.”

“Noted.”

Hermione forced a fake smile on her face and made the rounds, saying hello to all the different party guests and wrapping Albus in a giant hug, “Happy Birthday! Thanks for sharing your special weekend with me.”

“Of course, Aunt Hermione!” He gave her a toothy grin. “Liam was playing... kind of.”

A grin pulled at her cheeks and she ruffled his hair. “‘Kind of’ is about all I can ask of him. You go have fun.”

“‘Mione?” Her features flattened as she stood to her full height and turned to the Weasley at her back. “Can I please have just five minutes?”

She sighed, better to get it over with. “ *Two* minutes.”

They returned to the room where she had her discussion with Harry just a few minutes before, feeling Draco's eyes on her back as the door closed.

"I'm sorry about last night," he supplied quickly, rocking back on his heels as his lips folded together.

"Just last night?"

"You know what I mean, Hermione."

"Do I?" She was being purposefully difficult and she didn't like it about herself but Ron had made her life beyond difficult so she felt he was due.

"I'm sorry for everything, okay?"

"Lucky me, a blanket apology. Do you have any idea how much you've hurt your family? Forget about me. I've read your little book. How do you think Ginny felt when you said that Harry and I were alone for all that time, and that you couldn't be sure what happened? Are you insane? You bloody well know nothing happened."

Ron took a sharp step forward, his brows pitching high. "I was just trying to make something of myself after the war. Once I wasn't Harry's sidekick anymore, I didn't know who I was."

"Well, to be honest, if *that's* who you really are, I have to say I really prefer you as a sidekick. We all had a bit of an identity crisis, but we didn't sell each other out."

"I can't either and... I know it's useless but I'm sorry."

Her eyes fluttered closed and she smiled tightly. "Thank you for apologizing."

As she made her way to the door, Ron called out again. “You and Malfoy are a thing now I take it?”

“It’s none of your business, Ronald. Why do you even care?”

“I just... you deserve better than him. Deserve better than me, too but I thought you had better taste than *that*. ”

Dangerous fury swept through her. “Why on earth would you think I have better taste than that? I spent all those years wasted on you.”

She stormed from the room, hellbent on just seeing her son again and hopefully a glass of wine but Draco snagged her elbow. He’d been waiting for her. “Are you okay?”

“Brilliant,” she bit out. “Where’s Liam?”

His gaze floated over his features and his hand fell away. “With Luna in the kitchen.”

With a tight nod she stormed towards him. She didn’t trust Ron Weasley within kilometers of her son and now she’d be forced to endure his presence for the foreseeable future.

"Mom! Dad! Did you know that Castelobruxo is located in the middle of Amazonian forest? It’s the Wizarding School in South America! Miss Luna was just telling me all about it. Dad, do you have any books on it?”

“We’ll have to check the library, bud. But I’m sure your mother won’t deny you a trip to Flourish and Botts.”

“If you care to learn about Magical Beasts, you must visit Brazil someday,” Luna said wistfully. “Castelobruxo has one of the five best Care of Magical Creatures ensigns in the world. They have a wonderful variety of magical creatures, and the Brazilian Wizarding

community is highly appreciative of other races and half-breeds. Castelobruxo's current headmistress is a half-mermaid. How wonderful is that, hm?"

Hermione smiled but knew it didn't reach her eyes. She couldn't stop her finger from tapping incessantly on the top of the table and focused solely on the slow, labored breaths she was pushing through her nose. She'd been so worried about Draco interacting with Ron that she'd forgotten how much she hated the sod herself.

"*Half-Mermaid* ? How is that possible?"

Hermione's ears perked up. "Spare the exact details of the creation of the hybrid breed, would you Luna?"

"Of course," Luna said distantly, watching as Ron entered the room and pulled the chair out across from Liam. Everyone in the room tensed and quieted.

"Hello, I am Liam Granger. How do you do?" Her son sniffed and wrinkled his nose. "Mum makes me say that last bit, so you don't have to tell me if you don't want."

"Liam—" Hermione tried her best to force cheerfulness into her voice, "It negates the fact that you ask when you tell people I make you say it. Also, you don't have to ask him how he is."

"Him? Or everyone?"

"Just him."

"That's odd. Why?"

Hermione pinched the bridge of her nose. "Because I said so."

"So I still have to say it to everyone else?"

"Correct."

"Just not him?"

Hermione groaned and threw her hands in the air. "Yes! Just not him... consider it a pass."

Liam eyed Ron warily. "What's wrong with him?"

"Too much to count," Draco muttered from behind her and the jab wasn't missed by Ron.

"Piss off, Malfoy."

"Eat shit, Weasel."

Hermione's jaw dropped and she reeled on him. "*Draco!*"

"Sorry..." Draco held his hands up in defense. "Old habits."

“I still don’t get what’s wrong with him,” Liam said, studying the man across from him with great intent. “He looks just like the others.”

“Nothing’s wrong with me... I’m your friend’s Uncle.”

“I wouldn’t call them *friends*,” Liam said quietly and Draco tittered in quiet laughter. When Hermione reprimanded her son, he had the audacity to appear shocked. “What?”

“I’m getting a migraine.” Hermione stated and left the table, passing Ginny who was deep in conversation with George. Without a word, she grabbed her friend by the elbow and dragged her to the yard.

“What’s going on?” Ginny asked with an air of expectancy.

“Why is your brother such a pain in the arse?”

“I wish I knew... I’m sorry if he’s giving you a hard time. There’s one in every family but ours is so big I swear we got at least two.

Hermione stared up at the overcast sky and sighed. “You know, there was a time when I thought I was going to be a part of this big, beautiful family. I thought for sure I’d be the next Mrs. Weasley, and I’d have little red headed babies with you. Merlin, how time changes things. I’ve lost one of my best friends, I’m snogging Draco Malfoy...”

“*You’re what?* Oh my, let me grab Harry. He’s going to want to hear this...”

Hermione laughed and shook her head. “Just fill him in later. It happened last night after the party.”

“And did you... you know?” Then she made a horrifying creaking sound from the corner of her lips that sounded like cheap mattress springs.

“Ginny!” Hermione barked out a laugh and clamped her hand over her friend’s mouth. “Do you have no shame?”

“None. Now tell me what he was like...”

“We did not sleep together; I hate to disappoint you.”

“Well that’s fine. Tell me from before, when you made Liam!”

“Yes, yes... it was all well and lovely and happened seven bloody years ago so, you know. I don’t know what I’m doing...” She wanted to crumple into a ball where she stood. Things were getting more complicated by the moment.

“Are you afraid he’s going to hurt you?”

Hermione shook her head. “No,” she said truthfully. “I’m afraid I might hurt him, if I’m honest. That I’ll hurt Liam in trying to make it work. This is so fast and being with him is disarming. I haven’t felt like this in... well, ever.”

“You need to shag him.”

“Ginny! You’re incorrigible...”

“You’re too tightly wound. Regular sex is brilliant for your mental health. Harry and I have sex at least once a week, usually twice.”

Hermione flinched and pulled a face. “Thank you for that. Truly.”

“How long has it been anyway?”

“Take Liam and add nine months,” she deadpanned and watched as horror crept over her friend’s features.

“Oh, you poor girl, I hope it hasn’t like... closed up permanently or anything.” She made a look of concern staring at the crotch of Hermione’s jeans.

“Ginny!” A bright peal of laughter burst from her lips and Hermione was eternally grateful for it. “I assure you, everything is fine. But I deserve a bloody medal for not jumping his bones last night.”

“Just do it, Hermione. You’ve got nothing to lose, and everything to gain. I told you, Draco isn’t the same person he was. He wouldn’t get involved with you if it wasn’t serious. He wouldn’t risk Liam, I just know it.”

Hermione hummed in thought and then said, “Can you do me a favor? Keep your blasted brother away from me.”

“Wish I could, love.”

xXx

Everyone crowded around the kitchen table much like the night before for Hermione’s celebration. However, this cake had been made by Mrs. Weasley and was significantly more proper.

They sang; the cake was divided and devoured. Then Albus was handed present after present. George’s gift was immediately confiscated and Harry gave a reprimanding look to his brother in law. Liam’s book on the beginner Potioneering was placed to the side with a placating smile and finally, Harry and Ginny set a small envelope in front of their son, both of them bouncing with anticipation.

Albus smiled brightly and ripped it open, shouting for joy as he held four tickets to the Quidditch World Cup over his head.

“Alright, I think that’s it—” Ginny announced, her smile waning as Ron pushed to the front of the room and deposited a very obvious looking gift in front of his nephew. “Ron...”

Albus didn’t waste a moment, tearing through the packaging as his jaw fell open. Inside was a small broom with the word *Cloudripper* etched into the side. Hermione’s heart fell as she

watched Albus' parents deflate.

"Happy birthday, Albus!" Ron shouted, a giant smile on his face.

"Ron! You complete and utter arse," Ginny cursed, slapping her brother across the back of the head.

Ron scowled. "I've been home for twenty-four hours and I've been hit three times by three different women and I want it to stop."

Harry removed his glasses and sighed. "And you didn't think we would want to be the ones to purchase our son his first broom? You didn't think he should have something more appropriate than a broom called *Cloudripper*? C'mon, mate," Harry chastised.

"Oh, I get it! Big screwup Ron, does it again. I can do nothing right around you people! I'm getting sick of it. Take the damn broom from him, if he can't have it."

"Of course, I'm going to take that dangerous broom from him, and now I have to be the bad guy on my son's birthday. Thoughtless-stupid-son-of-a—" she muttered under her breath as she attempted to take the broom from her son.

Albus was holding the handle in a vice grip. "You can't, Mum! Please don't take it from me." Tears threatened to run down his cheeks. "Please, I'll do anything! *Please!*"

Ginny knelt next to him and spoke softly, pushing his hair from his brow. "Honey, I promise when you are old enough, I will buy you a broom. Okay? This isn't appropriate for someone your age; I'm so sorry."

Albus' face flushed crimson and he nearly threw the broom at her and jumped to his feet. "*I hate you!*" With tears streaking over his small cheeks he ran from the room, Ron calling out after him.

Harry's hand shot out and slammed into Ron's chest. "You've done enough. I'll handle it."

The party ended abruptly and Hermione, Draco and Liam made their way to the lawn to apparate.

"Well, at least he provides a right good shit show," Draco edged, trying to lighten the mood.

Hermione stared back at the Burrow with a heavy heart. "Why couldn't he have just stayed gone?"

"Pasts never do, I'm afraid."

A/N: Biggest, hugest, monsterooust of thanks to MCal for her attention to this chapter! I wrote it after writing a Thormione in present tense and it was a hot mess of tenses and typos lol

I am still in awe of your support for this story! It makes me smile to know that you are eager for updates and I would be KEEN if I could finish up this rewrite before July!
Send me your juju so I can push through it!

Thank you so much for reading and reviewing (if you feel so inclined)! It means so much to me and I hope I'll be back soon with another chapter!

Stay well!

Chapter 10

“Miss?”

Hermione shrieked wildly where she sat curled in the corner of the sofa. Merlin, she'd never get used to house elves materializing without preamble.

“Poppy is sorry, Miss but the evening post arrived.”

Hermione blinked. “Oh. Okay.” She was not the lady of the house, merely a guest, and as such had not received mail for Draco.

The small elf's ears tucked back, her eyes wide and worried. “Poppy is thinking it's something Miss Hermione might want to see.”

With her curiosity piqued, she received the *Evening Prophet* and her breath caught painfully in her throat. “Oh my god...”

GRYFFINDOR PRINCESS TOUTS THE HEIR TO THE MALFOY FORTUNE; HIDDEN LOVE CHILD REVEALED.

Some six years ago, Hermione Granger, friend to Harry Potter and known war heroine disappeared from London abruptly following a very public break up from then beau, Ronald Weasley.

Speculations on the whereabouts of Miss Granger pointed to the States but with no confirmation or notice, London was left to wonder.

Her reappearance is not unnoticed, nor is the child that she keeps in tow. An unnamed source has confirmed the young boy to be the son of Draco Malfoy, Witch Weekly's most eligible

bachelor and winner of the Most Dazzling Smile last Spring.

It is quite clear that Miss Granger's insatiable appetite for high profile wizards has done nothing but grow exponentially in her time overseas. You'll remember that she dated Bulgarian Quidditch star, Viktor Krum and during Ronald Weasley's tell all he mused over the relationship Miss Granger held with the Chosen One. Then followed the other part of Golden Trio, Ron Weasley.

All of her former flames and Draco Malfoy have been contacted for comment but as of yet have declined.

Who will the fickle Golden Girl choose next? Watch out Ginny Potter, no man is safe!

The paper wrinkled in her grasp as her eyes fluttered closed. Hermione didn't cuss often, honestly.

But, *what a fucking bitch* .

xXx

Hermione was positively seething as she stepped into the Floo and tossed the powder at her feet.

"The Burrow," she snarled.

Moments later she stomped through the grate in the Weasley home, and Molly rounded the corner. The general upset on her face must have been telling because Molly dropped her hands to the sides and shook her head. "Oh no, what'd he do?"

Hermione shook the *Prophet* in her general direction. “Where is Ronald?”

Sighing, she pointed to the stairs. “In his room.”

As she passed, she handed the paper over to Molly and bounded up the stairs two at a time, not bothering to knock as she pushed the door open.

“What in the *hell* were you thinking?”

As though he were being held at wand point, his hands lifted promptly into the air. “I know how this looks... but I didn’t say a word.”

“Do you think I’m honestly going to believe that? Who else knows anything about this situation that would do such a thing. You’ve been up Skeeter’s arse for the last six years, now you claim it’s not you?”

“Hermione, she reached out for a comment and I declined. It says so at the bottom of the paper.” He had the audacity to look abashed and it filled Hermione with self-righteous indignation. *The sod.*

“You’ve spent years making money off your best friends and sleeping with everything that will open her legs. Do you think I’m going to feel bad for you? After everything you’ve done?”

“Merlin-sake, Hermione. I’m bloody sorry. I can’t be the perfect Harry Potter but I’m trying my fucking best. That’s all I’ve ever done and I’m painfully aware that it’s not good enough for you. I’m back here trying to salvage some part of my life. Do you think I’m stupid enough to risk my family and friends for a bloody newspaper article?”

“You’ve done it before.”

He snorted and shook his head, turning back for the window. “You still don’t get it.”

“Enlighten me, Ronald.” She took a hard step towards him, her rage fueling each movement. “We all survived the same shit and yet you are the only one who seems to be drowning in it.”

“ *Exactly!* ” He reeled on her, arms gesturing wildly in the air. “I’m the only one drowning. I’m the only one who can’t get it together. I was a kid when we dated, and that’s not an excuse for how I treated you, but *fuck!* I was watching my little sister and best friend get the life they always wanted, they got married and were pregnant five minutes later. All I wanted was to be something for you but *still* I was in his shadow. You barely tolerated me—”

“That’s not true.”

He gave her a withering sneer. “Yes, it is. You were out the door long before Romilda, you just wanted permission to leave. I wanted to be seen, to be wanted, and that stupid book gave it to me. But I’m not that person anymore, Hermione.” His shoulders sagged and he took a long breath, the fury dying in his eyes. “And I know it’s easier to believe that I’m here for the wrong reasons but I bought Albus a broom because he wanted a broom and I apologized to everyone I bloody could, and I sure as hell didn’t say anything to Rita-bloody-Skeeter.”

The moment following his confession stretched on like a cord pulled too tight and her eyes narrowed on him. He seemed... contrite. Which was strange enough but much the same as when they were kids, she found herself unable to maintain her anger against the git.

“I forgive you.”

“What?”

“I forgive you,” she repeated. “For everything.”

His brows tugged together and he backed up a step, as though he were afraid she might change her mind and hex him. “But... why?”

“I’m so tired of hating you. It’s exhausting.” She turned to leave.

“Hermione?” She paused, turning just barely over her shoulder. “It really wasn’t me.”

She wasn’t sure she believed him but for the first time in a very long time, she wanted to.

xXx

Draco was sitting, with a drink in his hand, staring into the grate when Hermione walked through the Floo. The anger and tension she’d felt even thirty minutes prior had significantly dissipated and she sagged just upon seeing him.

“Hi,” she breathed, trotting to him and falling into his lap.

His hand fell to her waist and he tugged her closer. “Hello.”

“Are you mad?”

After a long drink, he sucked his tongue a moment and shook his head. “Mad wouldn’t be appropriate but I’m certainly frustrated. The owls haven’t stopped coming and Pansy left just a moment ago after tearing into me. We hadn’t discussed this... I’m not sure what I’m allowed to say, if anything.”

“Pansy was here?”

He rolled his eyes and smiled. “Is that really all your picking up from this conversation?”

“I just didn’t realize she was a ‘drop by unannounced’ sort of friend.”

“Pansy drops wherever she damn well please; I’m used to that. The part I’m upset with is that I didn’t even know what to tell her.” Draco pinched the bridge of his nose and sucked in a sharp breath. “This is all so fucking complicated and I can’t even tell my friends that we’re dating.”

Filling her lungs with a fortifying breath, her resolve steeled. Almost every part of their return to London had been outside of her control. This was just another thing that had been taken from her. Another reveal that she wasn’t able to control and enough was finally enough.

“You’re right,” she conceded with a stiff nod.

“I’m... I’m what?”

“Don’t give me that look or I’ll never say it again. I’m sick of everyone else writing this narrative, so let’s just release a statement. You can announce he’s yours at a party like you wanted and... yes. It’s time.”

There were a few beats of silence before Draco finally released a sharp gust of air. “Really?”

“Really,” she said with a laugh. “I’m not unreasonable, you know.”

“Right.” Draco pressed a kiss to her cheek bone and then rested his forehead against hers. “What on earth would have given me that idea?”

That night they drafted a statement together and sent that to the offices of the *Daily Prophet*. After, they penned a note to Narcissa Malfoy, requesting her help in planning Liam’s grand debut.

Hermione had finished packing for her return to America and couldn't help the unease that settled in her belly. America had been a wonderful part of her life and in a short forty-eight hours she would be saying goodbye.

A knock at the door shook her from her reverie and with a long sigh, she flicked her wand at her luggage and it clicked shut. "Yes?"

"It's me," Draco called from the hall.

"You can come in."

"Hello." A smirk tugged at his lips as he crossed the room and wrapped his arms around her waist. "Ready to go?"

"As I'll ever be, I suppose. Are you sure you're going to be alright alone? I can still take him..."

"First, yes, I *would* be fine. Second, it might be a moot point as your friend Potter—"

"Oh, now he's *my* friend?"

"When he's being ridiculous, yes. He's your friend. As I was saying, your friend is trying—and surprisingly succeeding—to get Liam to spend the night at his this weekend."

Her brow knit tightly and she shook her head. "Wait, what? Where is he?"

With a laugh, he gestured for the door. “By the Floo and our son looks as though Potter just sprouted horns.”

She made her quickly down the stairs and into the study, finding Harry and Liam standing side by side.

“There you are! I was just chatting with Liam—”

“*Coercing*, ” Liam said tightly and Hermione’s eyes quite nearly bugged from her head.

“Explain, Potter.”

“ *My wife* ,” he said pointedly, as though the mere mention of her were enough of an explanation, “has asked me to stop by and invite Liam over for the weekend so that you and Draco,” he paused for emphasis again, “could travel to New York *together*. ”

“I think he thinks I’m stupid,” Liam said around pursed lips.

“What! Of course, I don’t!”

Liam sniffed. “I’ve agreed to stay at the Potter’s.”

“Sweetheart, you really don’t have to!” Hermione fell to her knees in front of him as Draco approached and put an encouraging hand on his shoulder.

“I don’t mind staying with you, bud. We’ll have fun just us.”

Liam squirmed and straightened his spine. “No, I think it’d be good for me to *play* with Albus.”

Folding her lips in, she rose to stand and turned to Draco with a shrug.

“Looks I’m going to finally see the Chrysler Building.” He laughed and shook his head as Liam disappeared to pack. The three of them stood staring at the door as he left. “I think he knows what he’s doing.”

Snorting, Hermione crossed her arms. “Oh, he absolutely does. Looks like Ginny Potter isn’t the only matchmaker around.”

xXx

The following day they said a tearful— on Hermione’s end— farewell to Liam. He reassured her to no end that he would be fine, he had his books and she’d hidden his favorite chocolate in his bag with a note that she missed him, but it did nothing to quell the pain of leaving her son behind for the first time.

After she’d composed herself, they Floo’d to Diagon Alley and made their way side-by-side to the International Department of Magic’s Portkey Station. It was a small brick building, boasting plain grey walls and uncomfortable looking chairs in the lobby. Behind the desk was a wiry old witch with lipstick on her teeth and a begrudging finger pointed down the hall as she croaked, “Room Four”.

Once they were out of sight of the receptionist, Draco’s fingers twined with hers and the innocuous touch sent a flutter through her heart.

“You said you and Liam didn’t travel by portkey when you returned to London?”

Hermione shook her head. “We didn’t; he’s not fond of magical transportation, though he handles the Floo the best. He’s really only Apparated a handful of times and most of them have been with you.”

She could see his gears churning and though his lips parted, she stopped him before he could speak.

“I don’t think he’s a squib,” she reassured him, noticing how he visibly relaxed. “There have been a few small fits of magic when he has extreme emotion but it’s not often. I think he’s just not used to it. In New York, we had everything we needed within walking distance. Traveling overseas magically? I just didn’t want to take the risk...”

Malfoy hummed and held the door open at the end of the hall. Inside was a small metal table with a cloth covered object in the middle. Hermione checked the clock on the wall, five minutes until the Portkey activated.

Nearly as soon as the door had clicked shut behind them, it opened again. An older man came in, eyes trained on a piece of parchment. “Granger? Malfoy? Where’re you heading?”

“New York City,” Hermione supplied quickly.

“Declaring anything?”

“No.”

“Are you in possession of illegal drugs or goods that you are smuggling out of the United Kingdom?”

“Merlin,” Draco breathed, rolling his eyes. The other man’s eyes quickly shot up, narrowing on them.

Shoving a hard elbow into Draco’s side, Hermione fixed a bright smile on her face. “Don’t mind him; he’s an arse. No, sir, nothing illegal from *either* of us.”

“Right.” The employee let his parchment furl in on itself and never took his eyes off Draco. “I assume you two know how to use a Portkey. It’s under the fabric, there.” He left without further fanfare, the door slamming in his wake.

“He was cheerful,” Draco muttered from the corner of his lips and lifted the cloth, revealing a spoon. They waited in silence until it began to glow an ethereal blue. Draco counted to three, and they both reached out to touch the cup at the exact same time. Feeling a hook wrap around their middles and yank them into nothingness.

xXx

The trip from the Portkey destination to her flat in Brooklyn was quick but Hermione didn’t miss the awe that Draco tried so hard to hide. He was incapable of resisting the urge to crane his neck to gawk at the massive buildings reaching towards the sky and the bustle of New York City streets.

The cab stopped short outside her building and with a slightly embarrassed smile she exited and gestured for the modest block of flats. “This is it.”

Draco stepped out, squinting in the sunlight. “This is where my son was raised?”

“Don’t start, Malfoy.”

He held his hands up in surrender. “I didn’t say anything.”

“You thought it; that’s bad enough.”

A slow smirk spread over his lips and he stepped dangerously close to her. “Oh, Granger, if you want to punish me for all my bad thoughts we’d have our hands full.”

Her cheeks burned and she tried her best to hide a smile. “You’re flirting with me.”

“I am.”

Rolling her eyes, she started up the stairs. “Well, you’re not good at it.”

Draco clutched at his chest as though she’d hexed him. “I take that as a personal offense, witch.”

Three floors up and out of breath, they stopped outside her flat and she took out her Muggle key ring to open the door. Once inside she started shaking the keys back and forth. “*Crooks!* I’m home, Crooks!”

“Good Godric,” Draco balked. “Is that thing still alive?”

Hermione’s hand shot out to swat playfully at his arm. “Stop that! Kneazles have an exceptionally long life span, on average they live twenty years.”

He snorted and shrugged from his light jacket. “Well, it was half dead when you got it...”

In the most pretentious way possible, Crooks strode from around the corner, his small nose upturned and eyes narrowed.

“There you are, boy! I missed you.”

“*Meow.*”

“Don’t be upset with me... I brought a friend.”

“*Meow.*” He then turned and lifted his tail tall before sauntering back the way he came.

“Merlin, he’s in a mood,” Hermione said with a laugh.

“That thing can’t come to the Manor.” Pointing at the cat’s hind quarters as he retreated, Draco withered. “It’ll terrify the elves.”

“Well, I’m always capable of finding alternative housing, if you’d prefer?”

His lip curled disdainfully. “Any mangy pet of yours is a pet of mine, it seems. Don’t let my father see it or he may kill it on sight.” Draco moved absently around the room, dragging his fingers along the hard surfaces and gingerly lifting the cover of a book on her end table. “Have you always lived here?”

Hermione hummed in response and set her bag down. “First place I found. It’s small, I know... I always meant to move but it just became too much of a hassle once Liam arrived. I’m excited to have a larger home in London where we won’t be on top of each other so much.”

He turned slowly, a smile spreading. “As big as say... a manor?”

“*Hah!* Very funny, Malfoy.” She crossed the room and opened the door at the mouth of the corridor. “This is Liam’s room.”

Draco followed, hands in his pockets and lips folded in as he took in the eclectic decor littered with dinosaurs and outer space. “It’s certainly different than the bedroom he would have had at the Manor. I like it.”

Tipping his head up, his brow furrowed as he noticed the little plastic green stars stuck to the ceiling. “What are these? Are they... are they in actual constellations?”

Truthfully, Hermione had almost forgotten this small detail and with a shy smile she flicked her wrist at the curtains to close them and then said, “*Nox*. Of course they are... as if our son would have it any other way.”

She laid down in the small carpeted space and patted the spot next to her. When he joined, she lifted her head so he could tuck his arm under her and she took a moment just to soak up the surrealness of these two parts of her life colliding.

“You’re here, by the way?” She said a moment later, lifting her finger to the corner just above Liam’s bed where a cluster of stars were neatly aligned. “Draco.”

He stilled next to her as she continued, “I think that’s why he thought your name was so funny. We used to lie in his bed and I’d point out the different constellations and we’d read about them in one of his Astrology books. Draco: the guardian of the golden fleece.”

“Why?” he breathed, disbelief painted in the single syllable.

She turned to face him, eyes travelling the sharp points of his cheek and jaw, landing on his lips for a moment before rising to his stormcloud coloured eyes. “I don’t know,” she confessed. “I just wanted to put you there.”

One hand rose to curl around her cheek, grazing her cheekbone. “You keep surprising me, Granger. I don’t normally like surprises but you are the exception to almost every rule.” With great care, he leaned in, brushing his lips against hers in a timid kiss that she quickly deepened, curling her arms around his neck and rolling him over her.

Snogging in her son’s bedroom had not been the plan but then, courting with a curious six year old always around had its challenges. Plus, *Merlin*, the bloke could kiss. He savoured her, *worshipped* her. Every press of his lips and gentle stroke of his fingers sent her careening towards a precarious edge she wanted to leap over with arms spread wide.

His tongue darted out, dragging along the seam of her lips and she opened for him as he settled his knee between her thighs. It took all her strength not to rip his clothes off and shag

him on the carpet... And she might have done if not for her meddling cat who chose this moment to knock a lamp off the end table.

They both jumped apart, heaving panicked breaths as though they'd been caught by McGonagall in a broom cupboard.

"That cat is a menace," Draco sneered, pushing up to sit tall and offering her his hand.

"He's *protective*."

The moment had passed and she let out a sharp breath and tucked a curl behind her ear. "I need to go to my office to collect a few things. Do you want to come? You could always stay if you're knackered and I can bring some takeaway."

Draco shook his head and dipped his head in for another kiss. "Let's see this city that stole you away from London." Just as he was about to press his lips to hers, they were once again interrupted.

"*Meow.*"

xXx

They spent the afternoon walking around the city. Draco was completely in awe of the MUNY campus and its various points of study. It was the largest Magical University in the world and what's more, it existed right under the nose of the local Muggle community.

She took him to her little office and stood in the hall as she got proper admonishing for not giving proper notice to one's employer and then at her side as she said a misty-eyed goodbye to her colleagues.

While Janet had her locked in an embrace she'd whispered she'd move across the Atlantic for a man with that arse as well and Hermione was quite certain based on the broad grin Draco

wore after that he'd heard every word.

As they made their way from the building, he held the door open but then promptly went through first. "Just in case you wanted to get a look at that arse that's luring you home."

Hermione groaned as she pushed past him. The sod was incorrigible.

xXx

"Granger. I thought you said Chinese..."

"This *is* Chinese." She shoved another bite of noodles between her lips and slurped them up.

"Have you ever been to China? This... I don't even know what the fuck this is. What kind of a container is this? Why is there so much... sauce?"

"It's delicious, is what it is, and if you don't like it then give it over—" She lunged for the takeaway box but he was quicker, rocking back and clutching it to his chest.

"I didn't say I didn't like it... I said it's not Chinese." Draco huffed and balanced a bite of fried rice on the tip of his chopsticks. "You really lived quite a different life here in New York. Eating garbage food, living with degenerates below you."

Hermione sighed. "They aren't degenerates, Draco. They are just young and dress differently."

"Well, my father—"

“I’m not interested in what your father thinks about my life or my cat or my son. Okay? I can make the deductions for myself.”

With a soft *thud*, Draco dropped the container on the table between them and covered his face with his palms. “I’m sorry,” he said after his hands had dropped away and she could see the contrition in his eyes.

“Well, you don’t have to be sorry...”

“I do. I let go of so many ideologies that he tried to push on me; I don’t follow them like law anymore. But, he’s my only reference for what a father ought to be and that’s probably why I’m so rubbish at it.”

“Draco, you’re not rubbish.”

“My father believes in quick fixes: if charm doesn’t work then money always does. That’s how we bought our way back into society again; it’s how we’ve survived. I think that’s why I was over compensating in the beginning with Liam but it’s the only way I know... And fuck, it’s all these years later and I still revert back to *‘what will my father think about this?’*”

Suddenly, so much of the past few weeks clicked into place. “Draco, you aren’t your father and it’s okay that you love him. I don’t mean to be so harsh, it’s just that having you hear is a little strange for me. This is my past and it’s something I’m proud of that I gave to Liam. I know it’s not a manor and a Gringotts Vault but I worked my arse off to make sure he had a safe home and a happy childhood.” An unexpected tear broke free from her lashes and in an instant he was out of his chair and kneeling in front of her.

“Fuck, I’m an arse. Granger—”

Hermione placed her fingertips over his lips to quiet him gently. “It’s okay; *I’m* okay. Maybe we both can have a little more grace with each other?”

He nodded and wrapped his arms around her hips, dropping his forehead to her chest in supplication. “Don’t let me fuck this up again, Granger.”

Resting her cheek on the crown of his head, she returned his hug and sighed. “Same for me, Malfoy.”

xXx

A/N: I promise the wait for the porking isn't much longer y'all lol I would have liked to squeeze it in this chapter but it would have gotten out of hand lol

Thank you for reading and following! We are within a few chapters of this wrapping up and I am still holding out hope I can finish it by the end of the month. Fingers crossed!

Big thanks to MCal for her time and attention on this piece! She caught my pesky little typos and I'm so appreciative. All remaining errors are mine.

Stay safe, friends!

Chapter 11

After Chinese, they lost themselves in a bottle of wine... and then started another. They were tucked into the corner of the sofa, reminiscing about nonsense when an idea struck her.

“Oh! I’ve something you might like.” Flicking her wand at the bookshelf, a single tome wiggled free and floated across the room, settling in her lap.

Draco looked at it in confusion before opening the cover to reveal a Muggle picture of her and Liam in the hospital. His fingertips glided over the curves of his son’s face with deep reverence.

“He looks like me,” he whispered, staring at the pudgy little silver haired boy.

She rolled her eyes and flipped the page. “He always has; it’s been infuriating since the moment I set eyes on him. I mean, he’s beautiful, don’t get me wrong, but other than the curls, he looks nothing like me.”

“Aw, you think I’m beautiful, Granger?” His lips pulled into a crooked smile as he flipped another page.

“I think our *son* is beautiful. *You* are simply alright.”

His body shook with a quiet chuckle as he flipped through the pages. He paused often watching as Liam took his first steps or eating a small vanilla cupcake for his first birthday.

He saw pictures on his first day at daycare; him squealing as he read his first book out loud; more photographs in the park or at the zoo. Each one a representation of a thousand memories Draco would never get to be a part of.

The pain was shared between them, though Hermione knew it was really his to carry. When he reached the last one, a picture of Liam giving an unamused face to the camera on his last birthday, he closed it gingerly and set it aside.

“Thank you for showing me.”

“Do you want more children?” The words slipped past her lips before she could think twice on them and she desperately wanted to suck them back in.

He seemed less affected, shrugging and offering a simple, “Yes.” After tucking a curl behind her ear, he smiled at her. “I’d like to see all these moments for myself someday. Do you?”

Panic chased through her veins and her eyes blew wide. “Honestly? I hadn’t thought it was really a possibility. I’m thirty-two, afterall and up until *very* recently, haven’t had many romantic interests.” She nudged him in the ribs playfully.

“If it *was* a possibility?” Hope brimmed in his silver eyes and she felt it transfer to her heart.

“I would want another.”

A slow smile tugged on his lips and he turned from her with a nod. “That’s nice to hear.”

xXx

They fell asleep on the couch after too much wine and the following morning, after swearing off wine for the rest of her life, knowing it was a bold-faced lie, Hermione sorted through what she wanted to bring to London. Draco was at her side, poking at her worn sofa with a wrinkled nose and avoiding Crookshanks as much as possible.

If she wanted to bring everything, it would be short work. A few flicks of her wand would send the last seven years of her life into neat and tidy boxes. But instead, she wanted to take the opportunity to sift through her belongings. It was cathartic, in a way, even if the majority of the time was spent trying to decide if she was sentimental or simply a hoarder.

As the final tomes stacked effortlessly into a box and Hermione cast a Featherlight Charm on it's contents, she felt a resounding sense of closure.

“Well, that’s that.”

Draco wrapped his arms around her middle, resting his chin on her shoulder. “How’s it feel?”

She thought about it a moment, chewing over the complex emotions weighing so heavily on her.

“Final. I can’t believe I won’t see Liam reading in the corner or burn dinner here again.”

“Thank you for moving back.” Draco’s tone had dropped low and quiet but his arms tightened. Humming her response, she turned in his arms to rest her cheek against his chest. “Let me take you to dinner. I’ve not properly wooed you yet.”

“There will be wooing?”

He pinched her bum and she yelped before scowling at him. “Get ready, love. We’ll make a night of it.”

xXx

They chose a Muggle restaurant a few blocks up and savoured a delicious meal and a bold, smooth Cabernet Sauvignon. Over an empty plate of what once held a chocolate torte and a buzzing between her ears from the wine, Draco sucked on his cheek, lost in thought.

Sighing, she lifted her napkin from her lap and set it gingerly beside her plate. “What is it?”

He winced and finished the last of his wine. “It’s nothing... it’s just I think we should discuss the logistics of your return to England, specifically where Liam is concerned.”

“Oh. Yes, alright.”

“I know you think shit all of the Malfoy name, and to some extent I agree, but there are certain traditions I’d like him to be a part of.” “

That sounded reasonable; Hermione nodded in a silent bid for him to continue.

“The announcement party, of course, but there will be certain social functions that children are allowed to attend, and I’d like him to make those appearances. Charity functions and dinner parties, mostly. He’ll also inherit a seat on the Governor’s Board for Hogwarts; it was stripped from my father but remains a legacy seat to the Malfoy name. I’m not an active member currently. He’ll have trusts from the Black vaults and as he grows, he’ll be expected to learn how to manage the estate—”

“Draco... he’s six. I mean, yes, he’s brilliant, but he’s still six.”

“I *know* but it’s things I learned when I was young, and I know that my past is rife with very serious problematic traditions, but some of them I quite enjoyed. I’d like to share those with him.”

Hermione chewed on her lip and considered their life ahead with a true Malfoy heir. It was... *different* than she would have imagined but it wasn’t wrong.

She reached across the table and caught covered his hand with hers. “I understand, Draco. At the end of the day, if Liam isn’t comfortable with attending a party or anything else, I think the decision lies with him. But I won’t try to sway him either way.”

The corner of Draco's lips quirked into a crooked smile and he caught her hand, bringing her knuckles to his lips. "Who'd have thought you'd be so reasonable, Granger?" Clucking her tongue, she batted him away and fought a smile. "I only hope you can be so reasonable when we discuss the next bit..."

Suddenly Hermione despised the single swig of cabernet left in her glass.

"About the living situation when you return to London—"

"We talked about this."

"Yes," he allowed, ticking his chin to the side. "But I'd like to talk about it again." His silver gaze steeled and settled on her, his brows pinching tightly together. "I'm in this, Granger. I wouldn't do any of this if I wasn't, and yes, of course with Liam," he paused, clearing his throat before matching her gaze. "But with you too."

The confession startled her; she'd been ready for a fight, not a declaration. "I'm— I'm in this too."

"I know the Manor is abhorrent to you—"

"Well, I *was* tortured in your formal dining room, if you recall." His gaze snapped up to hers as she fought a smile. "*Kidding*, kind of."

"We have a smaller country house that belongs in the Black Family, as well as a townhouse in London. It's a bit large for me, so I have my flat."

Hermione squirmed and pressed her lips together. "And you want— what? For all us all to move in together?"

“When you’re ready, yes.” She envied the confidence in his tone and something inside her purred for the simple fact that he was hers. “For now, I’d like to lift the burden of a mortgage from your shoulders and have access to Liam and you. But, ideally, yes. We live together.” It was Draco’s turn to shift in his seat. “I want to date you and take you to parties, Hermione. I want Liam to know we’re together, and I want my friends to be jealous as hell that I got lucky enough to be with the most brilliant witch in recent history.”

Hermione’s nose wrinkled. “Recent?”

A bright, surprising peal of laughter floated through the air and Draco dragged his hand down his cheek and shook his head. “What do you say, Granger?”

Sucking on her tongue, Hermione considered what he was saying, what he was *offering*. “I’ll see the townhouse and we can go from there,” she allowed with a small smile, her nerves racketing around her belly like a flight of pixies.

“See? *Reasonable*. ” He grinned and nodded to the door. “Ready to go?”

Go. She’d be lying if she said she hadn’t considered what waited for her back in the flat and the natural progression of their relationship where physical intimacy was concerned. Truthfully, until this moment she’d been looking forward to it. She still was... but anxiety pulsed through her veins as she nodded and pushed her chair back.

Once outside, they made their way to a small quiet corner and ducked in the shadows, Apparating a moment later into the alley by her flat. Each step she took pushed her nerves to the brink and by the time they were standing outside her door, she could barely stand it.

“Do you want to have sex?” she blurted, reeling on him with wide, terrified eyes. “Because I’m not really sure how this is supposed to go; it’s been awhile. I mean... I understand the fundamentals, of course, but I don’t even know if you want to have sex. I presume you do, but that might be a dangerous thing to presume... Is there a signal or something? A safe word?”

To his credit, Draco tried not to smile; she could see the way he fought the curve to his lips.

Hermione growled and unlocked the door, stomping over the threshold and shouting over her shoulder, “Don’t laugh at me Draco Malfoy. I will hex you.”

“I’m not laughing.” He lifted his hands in surrender. “I;m simply smiling because you’re adorable.”

A soft pop sounded as her jaw fell open. “I am *not* adorable.”

With a few long strides, he crossed the space between them and wrapped his arms around her waist. “You are.” He pressed a kiss to her cheek. “But you’re also beautiful.” Another kiss to her jaw. “And formidable.”

His tongue darted out to wet her pulse point before he sucked on it gently. “You’re sexy and strong and brilliant.” With each word his lips brushed gently over the thin skin of her neck and she keened, whimpering as his hands fisted the fabric of her dress. “And I desperately want to fuck you, Granger... but there’s no rush.”

Draco pulled back, his gaze travelling over her features before settling on her eyes. “I can wait,” he added quietly.

The apprehension in her belly solidified then melted, running the length of her body and warming her from the inside out. Merlin, she was on fire. Like a slow stoke of burning embers that finally gave way to a flame. Her back arched, desperate for every inch of him.

He was being careful— *gentle*— touching her like she was glass and might break when that was the last thing she needed. Skimming her ribcage, he deftly avoided her breast, settling on her ribcage in an infuriating dance of chasteness.

Their lips broke apart and she gasped as he immediately latched onto the taut column of her throat. “Bedroom, Malfoy. I want you .”

An undistinguished expletive slipped from his mouth and into hers as their lips found each other in frenzy. She pushed her jeans from her hips, their bodies only parting when he ripped his shirt over his head. As they stumbled backward into her room, he reached the hem of her blouse just as her hands fell on the sharp cuts of his hips.

Panic swelled inside her and she froze, eyes shooting open.

“What is it?” he asked, fingers digging into her sides.

She’d no idea how to say what it was she was terrified of. “I don’t look the same as I did before.”

He laughed nervously and dipped his lips towards her again. “I know that.”

Shaking her head, she craned away from him. “No, I mean, you’re all hard and rippled with muscle and I’m... well I’ve had a baby. I’m more *soft and rippley*.”

Realisation settled over his features and he smirked and kissed her gently, guiding her back towards the bed until she was falling back. The anxiety of the moment hadn’t yet passed; it crescendoed as he crawled over her and pushed the fabric of her shirt up.

Her eyes screwed shut and it wasn’t until she felt the gentle touch of his lips against her abdomen that she began to breathe again. He kissed a slow trail along her belly, his fingers dancing along the silver streaks striped there, reverently adoring each and every one. His fingers reached her hip bone and squeezed, pulling a gasp from her lungs as he kissed lower.

The air around her thrummed with static energy when Draco pressed a wet kiss against her knickers. She rolled her hips unwittingly as he curled his arms around the back of her thighs and spread her wider. When he dragged a flat tongue over her covered seam, she cried out, gripping the fabric of her quilt like it was the only thing tethering her to this plane.

“You’re perfect,” he purred as he tugged her knickers down and if she could, she’d melt into the mattress. Two fingers slid with ease inside her, her lips falling open in a silent cry as he massaged her clit with his tongue. He feasted on her, their shared pleased noises mingling in the air as he pushed her towards the precipice of her orgasm.

It was only when he curled his fingers just so, pressing into her walls with the pads of her fingers, that she shattered around him. Her fingers dug in his soft hair, tugging him closer and keeping him still.

As her orgasm waned, she realised she was quite possibly suffocating the bloke and released him, her body going slack into the mattress. He pressed a wet kiss onto both thighs before the dip of the mattress signified that he’d stood.

Vaguely she was aware of the sound of his jeans hitting the floor and a sated smile curled over her lips as he crawled over her.

“You look pleased with yourself,” he said, nuzzling his nose against her cheek.

“Pleased by you, would be more appropriate.” Hermione hitched her knees up and pulled him down against her, whimpering as she felt the warmth of his cock against her inner thigh.

“Are you sure?”

Rolling her eyes, she shifted until he was nudging her entrance. “Of course I am, you prat. It’s been a very long time, but I’m not made of glass...”

A slow grin stretched over his lips. “Noted.”

His fingers curled around the back of her knee and pressed it towards her chest and with a single thrust, he sank into her. Hermione cried out, the blunt edges of her nails digging into strips of muscle on his back.

“You’re more fucking perfect than I remember.” His lips brushed the shell of her ear as he dragged his cock from inside her before driving into her again. “Not glass?”

A long, almost embarrassing, moan freed itself from inside her and she violently shook her head. “More.”

“Good girl.” He pressed a kiss to the tip of her nose and then rocked back so he was kneeling between her thighs, cock still buried inside her. With his hands firmly on her hips, fingers digging into her flesh, he fucked her with abandon.

He tugged her bra cup down, palming her breast as his head fell back, losing himself inside her; a string of groans, and grunts, and words of affirmations tumbled from his lips. Even deep in her own rapture, she couldn’t help but study him, the smattering of silver scars over his abdomen that made him even more ethereal in the moonlight.

The column of his throat tightened with a long swallow and he must have felt the weight of her stare, because his gaze snapped to hers. He smirked down at her and her belly flopped, teeth sinking into her lip to keep from smiling.

His hands curled around her ribcage and he tugged her forward so she was upright, seated in his lap. With a flick of his fingers, her bra fell loose around her shoulders and he peppered kisses along the soft curve of her breasts.

The air around them quieted and stilled, blanketing them with an unfamiliar sense of comfort. One hand slid up the curve of her spine and buried in the curls at the nape of her neck, the other banded around her as she rolled her hips.

And as delicious as the sinful ministrations of their bodies were, it was nothing compared to the way he kissed her. He was reverent— *worshipful* . Thousands of unspoken words passed from his lips to hers.

A slow roll of pleasure slid over her skin and chased through her veins as her second orgasm crashed over her. Under her, Draco tensed and clung tightly to her, his forehead dropping to her shoulder as he spent himself inside her.

When they'd both found their breath again, he rolled them back onto her mattress and reached for his wand. With a deft flourish of his wrist, he cast a contraceptive spell and she felt the warm flutter of his magic over her womb.

"That works as well as the vials?"

"Guess we'll find out," he smirked. "It'll be alright, Granger. Besides, the vials didn't work all *that* well or we wouldn't have a precocious little Liam around."

With a resounding roll of her eyes, she turned and propped herself up on her elbow. "You seem very knowledgeable about that spell."

A suspicious, yet amused wrinkle formed around his eyes. "I seem knowledgeable about a simple spell that I've cast once in front of you? I must be knowledgeable about all sorts of things, if that's all it takes to render you impressed."

"You know what I mean," she deadpanned, all her ire waning as he wrinkled his nose and kissed a trail along her shoulders.

"Am I about to get in trouble for not being celibate the last seven years?"

"Of course not! I didn't say that!"

"It's not quite as exciting as I'm sure you're imagining, Granger— both in quality and quantity. You remain the best shag of my life and have held the title since Liam's conception."

A blush covered her skin and she pinched his side in jest. “You’re just saying that.”

“I’m really, *really* not.” He laughed, hand curling around her cheek as he pulled her in for a firm but short kiss. “I *do* have some rather unfortunate news, though.”

Dread coiled in her stomach. “Oh?”

“I think I’m falling in love with you, Granger.”

Her lips tugged into a smile and she rested her forehead against his. “Why is that so unfortunate?”

“Just that now you're stuck with me, because I have no intention of letting you go.”

A/N: Thanks for being patient with me friends! I had a family vacation this weekend and purposefully left my laptop at home to be present and in the moment which cut into a lot of writing time.

Hope you enjoyed this chapter! I’m flying solo on this piece from here on out but want to thank MCal for her time and attention for the first 10 chapters.

Please forgive the errors and stay safe and well. Love you all and I appreciate every hit, review, kudo, and happy thought you give me. Xo.

Chapter 12

Liam sighed in relief as Hermione and Draco walked through the door, jumping to his feet with his bag in hand. “Oh, thank *Merlin* .”

Choking on a laugh, Hermione admonished her son swiftly. “Liam! Don’t say that!”

“But, *you* say that all that time.”

She swallowed, squirming slightly as Draco watched on, waiting for her response. “I’m older; I’m your mother.” Liam blinked. “How was your weekend?”

“Well, Uncle Harry set breakfast on fire, Albus tried to hug me, and I finished three books.”

“I’m so glad you had a good weekend!” Hermione gushed, fussing with a stray lock of hair near his ear.

“That’s not what I said...”

“God, he is your son.” Hermione rolled her eyes.

“Are you together now?” Liam asked, eyes rounding ever so slightly.

“What do you mean, bud?”

“Are you dating now? That’s the point, right? That’s the reason I suffered through this weekend.”

Draco barked out a laugh and Hermione batted at him with the back of her hand. “Let me talk to Harry—”

“So, that’s a yes?”

Turning her palms to the heavens, she let out a long groan. “Yes. Okay? Your meddling worked and we are dating, though to be quite honest we have been for weeks.”

With a huff, Liam’s jaw fell open. “You mean I stayed here for nothing?”

Hermione smirked and stuck the tip of her tongue out. “That’s what you get for being a sneak. Now, you go back to the Manor with your father; I’ll meet you there in just a moment.”

Hermione walked through Grimmauld Place, and found Harry on the back porch watching Albus as he ran around the yard.

“Hi, Harry. What’s Albus chasing?”

“Nothing.” He shrugged. “Literally... nothing. He’s just running. Merlin, our children are so different.”

Hermione laughed and twined her arm around his. “Albus is wonderful, don’t forget Liam also comes with a dose of snarkiness and a handful of self righteousness.”

“How could I forget?” He grinned at her. “You seem like you’ve been thoroughly shagged. You’re welcome.”

She shoved her elbow in his side and bit back a smile.

“I’ve been completely berated and challenged all weekend so you could get laid. A thanks isn’t that much to ask.”

“ *Thank you* ,” she said with a severe roll of her eyes. “We’re going to announce Liam and go public with everything. What should I do?”

“What will Rita think?”

“Oh, piss off!” She wanted to be irritated, but a bright laugh beat her to the punch.

“I *think*... you have always secretly cared what other people think. Blame it on being under constant watch for those years after the war. We all do it to some extent, but you need to let it go. Who gives a shit.”

“*Think of the sex!*” Ginny’s voice rang. Both of them reeled, catching Gin with a grin as she dropped her bag on the floor.” “Don’t go years without it... You can’t do it. It’ll collect dust.”

Harry laughed and tugged his wife into his side. The two of them had found each other as kids and somehow, against all the odds — and there had been more than their fair share—they remained as in love today as they had all those years ago.

“You two have been married over ten years,” Hermione mused, eyes drifting to where Albus was now laying flat on his back in the center of the yard. “How do you do it?”

“It’s funny; people always note the amount of time, like that makes it harder. *Marriage* is hard,” Ginny clarified. “There are different challenges at different stages but... I don’t know. It’s not that we don’t fight, because we do.”

“I’d be more worried if we stopped,” Harry interrupted and both witches turned to regard him. “I just mean, we fight because we’ve something worth fighting for.”

Ginny grinned, her blue eyes turning misty as she lifted onto her toes to press a kiss to her husband's cheek. "It's not destiny; it's not fate. It's a choice you have to make everyday."

The truth of it settled on her as she thought of the weekend she'd just spent with Draco. Their lives were about to change and *quickly*.

But Hermione knew in her heart of hearts that she *did* choose Draco and she wanted nothing more than to make it work.

xXx

The townhouse in London was charming. It was brightly decorated, had three bedrooms, and a Floo and wards already established.

"Why do you *have* this?" Hermione asked, poking around while Liam chose his bedroom.

"I had my own..." he paused to wrinkle his nose, "*issues* with the Manor after the war. I purchased this but it was too much for me; I never got around to selling."

Hermione snorted as she ran her fingers along the cool marble countertop. This place was worth a small fortune with its size and location and he simply 'never got around to selling'.
"This doesn't seem your normal style..."

"Pansy decorated it for me; I'm rubbish at all that."

Her lip curled.

"Granger?"

“Yes?”

“You’re snarling.” He laughed and rushed up behind her, folding around her as he nuzzled his chin into the crook of her neck. “I told you, Pansy is just a friend.”

“I know that. I didn’t say anything.”

He brushed his lips against her cheekbone and his hands dropped to her hips. “You’re right, love. You didn’t *say* anything. She’s keen to see you this weekend.”

Hermione stilled and tried to remember the proper rhythm of her breath. They’d decided on a smaller dinner to introduce Liam to the world for now and Narcissa had not wasted a moment in getting the event sorted. “Pansy’s coming?”

“Of course; she’d throw a fit if she wasn’t. You two will get on... trust me.”

Hermione forced a smile on her face. “Brilliant.”

xXx

Hermione’s eyes widened into saucers at the sight before her.

Dozens of plates floated through the air and around hundreds of floating candles. There was *technically* a dinner table in the room but it was so massive, and in the adjacent room was a quartet of stringed instruments setting up in front of what she could only assume was a dance floor.

And there, in the middle of the chaos, were two blonde Malfoys.

She cleared her throat, her anger bubbling to the surface.

Draco turned, chagrin plain on his face. He lifted his hands as though he were being held at wand point. “Granger...”

“I thought you said dinner?” She tried in vain to keep the ire from her tone even in the presence of the Malfoy matriarch. In a few long strides, Draco was at her side as Narcissa waved at her.

“Miss Granger! How lovely to see you again! I went to the liberty of having robes sent over from Twillfit and Tattings; I’ve had them placed in your room.

A furious blush colored Hermione’s cheeks and she was grateful that Narcissa turned to resume her duties so that she didn’t have to unpack that ridiculousness. Instead, she folded her arms over her chest and arched a brow at the abashed Malfoy in front of her.

“Mother got a little carried away...”

Hermione huffed and gestured to the room. “You think?”

Turning on her heel, she made to march away but Draco caught her gently by the elbow and stopped her, casting *Muffliato* over them.

“What were you thinking?” she hissed.

His features flattened into a glare. “Don’t be rude. She’s excited, and it’s a big moment for her.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Granger, be reasonable. I walked down here all but fifteen minutes ago. I didn’t realize I had to run to tattle on my own mother with such haste.” With a growl, he dragged his hand through his pale hair. “Besides, it’s not your party.”

Hermione’s jaw fell open. “He’s my son! You’re going to be parading him like one of your peacocks for your Pureblood friends, and you can’t even let me know?”

There was a beat of silence before he screwed his features up and shook his head violently. “*What?!* Let’s start with: he’s *our* son, Granger. Do you run everything by me? I heard you the other week planning his birthday party with Ginny, of all people. You didn’t consider that you should tell me about that?”

“So what, this is you getting even?” She stepped away with a sneer.

Draco pinched the bridge of his nose and let out a slow breath. “Will you please stop acting as though I’ve been a part of this for weeks or some other shit. I’ve known for *fifteen* minutes and you forget, Granger, you didn’t just take those six years from me. My mother has been on my arse for years to give her a grandchild; she’s missed all those birthdays and Christmases, too. She’s excited... It’s not as nefarious as you seem to always paint it.”

Hermione’s lips were still parted and Merlin, she tried to think of a defense but nothing came. Blast it all, he was right again. Her mouth ran dry and she tried to swallow. “You’re right.”

The words slammed into him and he faltered dramatically. “Sorry, what?”

“I’m getting sick of saying that to you.” She rolled her eyes. “I’m sorry.”

A slow grin stretched over his face and he wrapped his arms around her waist. “You’re adorable.” Slanting his lips over hers he kissed her senseless until she was melting into his touch and nearly purring.

A loud gasp tore them from each other's embraces and like two red-handed teenagers they backed away from each other as Narcissa gaped at them.

"Are you two... Oh, thank *Merlin!*" Narcissa nearly cried from happiness and hugged Draco fiercely. "I thought you were going to be single forever."

"Thanks, mum." Draco rolled his eyes and Hermione couldn't help but chuckle and announce her departure to get ready for what was now the social event of the season.

xXx

Much to Hermione's extreme displeasure, the robes Narcissa had purchased for her were stunning. Thick crimson satin pleated around her waist into a full skirt that fell just below her knees and her shoulders were exposed by a wide boat neck.

It was the single most stunning piece of clothing she could remember owning; as she slipped into her black pumps, she felt a trill of nerves flutter through her limbs.

A soft knock at the door pulled her from her thoughts and she absently called over her shoulder, "Come in."

In the reflection of the mirror, Hermione watched as Draco entered, stilling upon sight of her. A blush blossomed over her cheeks and she turned, smoothing the fabric of her dress over her thighs.

"Granger," he choked out, stunned into silence.

"You clean up quite well yourself." She meant it. He'd foregone the traditional long cloak in favor of something more modern and the expensive charcoal fabric was tailored to fit him impeccably.

“Wait until you see Liam.” Draco smirked. In a few long strides he crossed the room and made a circle around her, studying her carefully. “But despite how good the Malfoy men look, you will, as always, be the center of attention.”

She rolled her eyes in good natured fun and turned back for the mirror. “So how do these events normally go? Do we go in together or do you have a parade before?”

“We’ve decided to forego the parade this time for the matter of time.” Her gaze shot up to the mirror, snapping onto him. He seemed quite amused with himself as he came up behind her. “No, Granger. No Parades. We’ll wait for most of the guests to arrive and then we’ll enter. They’ve already begun filtering in.”

“Merlin, so this is happening.” She felt suddenly like she might wretch on the rug.

Draco’s hands rested on the curve of her shoulders and he pressed a kiss to the side of her neck; it did nothing to quiet the pixies having a party in her belly. “You’ll be brilliant. How quickly you forget you’re wizarding royalty.”

“Not here I’m not...”

“You are, and my mother wouldn’t be so foolish as to invite anyone who won’t be anything but polite. Now, I have something for you.”

Hermione’s brows tugged together. “For me?”

Humming, Draco reached into the inside of his jacket and then wound his arms around her. He flipped open the black velvet box in his hands, presenting a stunning matching set of diamond jewelry. It was simple in design but the value was evident in the size and the way the light bounced off the facets of the teardrop diamonds.

“Draco...” She could feel his chest rumble in a chuckle against her back as he floated the box in front of her and then lifted the necklace onto her chest. The diamond was the size of a sickle and hung just under the hollow of her clavicle.

She couldn't resist the urge to brush her fingertips over its surface, overwhelmed by both the gesture and the beauty of the piece.

“You really shouldn't have,” she said quietly. “It's too much.”

“If I listed all the reasons I had to make amends, and all the reasons I have to thank you, trust me, you'd see this is nowhere near enough. Try on the earrings.”

With a long breath chased by a stubborn smile she put on the earrings. “They are so beautiful, Draco.” She turned to look up at him. “Thank you.”

“*You* are so beautiful; you make these baubles look good.” Draco caught her hands and lifted her left to his lips, kissing her knuckles gently. “I thought maybe I'd buy you the matching ring for Christmas.”

The world stopped. Visions of a life that she had long since given up having, one with more children and a husband who loved her, danced across her mind. Fat tears welled along her lashes but she remained horribly, *horribly* speechless.

Thankfully, words weren't needed as he pressed his lips against hers, his hands winding around her waist. His tongue darted out, seeking entrance that she readily gave and soon, they were lost in the gentle dance of their lips.

The door opened and they shot away from each other much as they had earlier when Narcissa had caught them. This time, however, was far more dangerous because their six year old son was eyeing them suspiciously.

“What were you doing?”

“Nothing,” they said in quick tandem, their chests heaving in sharp pants. Then, Hermione noticed her son and the way his curls were carefully combed. His bow tie was white and sat perfectly under his collar, unlike the crooked one he usually boasted.

“Oh, Liam.” Her voice shook as she stared at him. He’d been so small just yesterday, how was he so grown already? “You look dashing.”

“I look ridiculous.” Liam tugged on his collar with a grimace.

“If it makes you feel any better—” Draco said as he crossed the room and came to crouch in front of his son. “My mum used to make me wear these blasted things at least once a fortnight.”

“That doesn’t make me feel any better.”

With a sharp laugh, Draco placed his palm on his son’s shoulder and rose to stand. “Yes, well, it was worth a shot.”

“I don’t want to talk to people.”

“You don’t have to, not really,” Draco assured him. “Just your normal ‘Hello, how are you? No you don’t have to answer because my mum makes me say it...’”

“ *Draco!* ”

Liam grinned.

“There will be a few other children as well for you to play with.” As soon as the words had left Draco’s mouth, he seemed to think better of it. Liam’s grin fell to a glower.

“I don’t *like* playing.”

Draco canted his head to the side a few times. “After dinner you can have pudding in the library all alone? How about that?”

As Liam considered it, he gnawed on the side of his cheek before nodding sharply. “Deal.”

xXx

“Ready?” Draco asked, filling his lungs with air.

Hermione and Liam looked at each other and nodded. “Ready.”

With every step they took, Hermione’s heart thundered more aggressively and she clung to his arm like a buoy. As they rounded the corner and crossed the threshold, charming music lilted through the air and several dozen people turned to watch them enter.

There were a few whispers— fewer smiles. But she wasn’t sure if it was their entrance that chased the happy smiles away, or if their faces simply looked like that. One man appeared to have sucked a lemon.

It felt like a nightmare; like at any moment she was going to look down and find herself stark naked in front of the wizarding world’s most elite.

Even in yards of beautiful fabric and an impressive social resume, she was still lacking what these people valued more than all. And despite the way her hair had been meticulously tamed and her eyelashes painted dark, she was dragged into visceral memories of her childhood with bushy curls and buck teeth, always too smart for her own good. Always the outcast. Always something to prove.

Draco must have sensed her anxiety because he leaned toward her and pressed a kiss to her cheek, claiming her in front of everyone. It was silly, really, the physical response she had by the touch, but it bolstered her courage and her chin tilted a fraction higher.

They made their way to where Narcissa and Lucius stood at the front of the room, the former with a bright, proud grin; the latter looking remarkably like he *also* sucked a lemon. Perhaps it was a pureblood trait.

Narcissa leaned forward to kiss both of Hermione's cheeks and then took her son in turn. Finally, her attention fell on Liam and the pure joy on her features even softened Hermione's disposition.

"You are everything I imagined when I thought I'd have a grandchild," Narcissa said, her eyes misty. "You look so much like your father."

"Thank you," Liam said kindly, his lips folding into a small smile.

"Your grandfather will make a small announcement and invite everyone to sit down for dinner. Are you ready?"

Liam's cheeks were painted bright red as he nodded and reached for Hermione's hand, his chin tucking into his chest.

"Lucius," Narcissa said, gesturing for him to step forward and address the dozens of eyes on them.

He sighed, long and heavy but his hand fell to his wife's lower back and the two of them stepped forward. "Family and friends," he paused, eyes floating to where the Potters stood, "*guests*, there has been some speculation... but we are proud to officially announce the addition to our dynastic family. I'm sure many of you know Miss Hermione Granger." Lucius gestured to where she stood and a quiet, welcoming applause sounded through the air. "Then I'm happy to introduce you to the heir to the Malfoy estate, my grandson, Liam Steven *Granger*."

He said the surname like it'd been soaked in vinegar but it was drowned out by the *Oh* 's and *Ah* 's and applause of the room.

“We invite you all to sit for dinner.” As he spoke, the first plates arrived, and everyone began finding their space at the massive table.

Thankfully, the Potters were seated to her left. Draco was directly on her right with Liam on the far side of him next to Narcissa, who was glowing. It was clear she thought of her grandson as the sky the stars were hung from, and Hermione could only imagine what a doting mother she'd have been to Draco before— well, before everything had gone so badly.

Ginny fell into the seat next to Hermione with pink cheeks. “Hermione, would you like to see a magic trick?” she whispered too loudly.

Biting back a laugh Hermione nodded, and then gaped as Ginny drained the rest of her champagne flute. The redhead then proceeded to giggle as her flute was magically refilled. “Isn't Magic just lovely?”

“You're going to be smashed if you're not careful...”

“I'm always careful. And currently I'm carefully getting smashed enough my children don't notice but my husband gets a good shag tonight.”

To her left, Draco choked on his soup and Ginny grinned.

“How on earth did you have such darling children, Gin?” Draco asked when he'd regained his constitution.

Ginny leaned her elbow on the table and smirked. “Well, you see, Draco... When a man and a woman love each other *or* they imbibe in dangerous amounts of liquor in order to make my

brother jealous—”

“ *Ginny!* ”

“Oh, he knows I’m just kidding.”

Hermione blushed and took a small sip of her soup, her eyes drifting along the table until her gaze fell on Pansy Parkinson, sitting next to a strapping young man.

Pansy’s glare tightened and then returned to her dinner companion. The rest of the meal was eaten in companionable conversation and as the pudding was delivered, Hermione was surprised that Liam didn’t immediately sprint from the room and to the library.

Surprisingly enough, he was chattering away to Lucius who seemed mostly unaffected as he ate his meal in the most aristocratic way possible.

“I did a quiz in my Aunt Ginny’s magazine when I stayed at their house,” Liam said loudly. “And I think I’ll be sorted into Ravenclaw.”

Lucius choked.

“I like blue a great deal, and I’m not supposed to brag, but I’m quite clever.”

Dabbing his lips with a linen, Lucius turned to his grandson. “Don’t be ridiculous. Ravenclaw does not have a monopoly on cleverness. Slytherin house is the *only* house for a young man such as you. They aren’t just cunning, though it is well known that we are—” A few guests chuckled quietly. “But we are ambitious, my boy. Strong leaders and resourceful at heart, you’d do Slytherin house proud.”

“I’m not a pureblood,” Liam said plainly, his shoulders lifting in a shrug. “Most Slytherin’s are pureblooded and my mum’s—”

Hermione cleared her throat. “Liam, why don’t we talk about it later?”

Liam turned, his brows falling low over his eyes. “Why?”

“It’s not polite dinner conversation.” Her cheeks flamed as she felt the weight of several stares on her.

“What’s not polite about it?”

Eyes fluttering closed, Hermione begged the universe to throw her a goddamned break.

It was Lucius who spoke next and Hermione watched as he sniffed in the air and raised his voice. “I know I speak for my family and every Slytherin alumnus here when I say we would be proud to have the son of Hermione Granger in our house.”

There were a few beats of silence followed by several “*here-here*”s. Lucius continued, “I dare say Miss Granger would have made quite the Slytherin herself.”

Hermione released a breath she didn’t realize she’d been holding, and the table again fell into ambient conversations. Under the table, Draco gently squeezed her knee and winked at her then finished off the rest of his pudding.

xXx

Dinner ended and everyone made their way into the adjacent room where the quartet was playing. Hermione was snagged by every passing guest who wanted to thank her for her time in the war and tell her just how *darling* their son was.

She was genuine in response but after the twelfth or so time, her cheeks had begun to ache from forced smiling. Finally, the Pennyworths said their exuberant goodbyes, and Hermione sagged in relief.

“I don’t know how you do this,” she groaned, eyes searching for her son and finding him in a pair of matching armchairs with his grandfather.

“It’s the smiling, Granger. You’ll notice I don’t. Another reason Slytherin’s are superior: self-preservation.” He smirked and then put his champagne flute down. “We should dance—”

“Draco, darling!”

The fine hairs on Hermione’s neck rose, and she steadied herself, wondering if she ought to maybe force one more smile.

Pansy blew in, lifting onto her toes to kiss both of Draco’s cheeks and began fussing with his tie. Hermione’s nose wrinkled.

“Granger,” the Slytherin witch said without taking her eyes from Draco’s tie. “Nice to see you again.”

“You as well.”

Draco sighed and stepped away from Pansy’s touch and finally the witch turned to smile wanly at Hermione. “Your son is darling.”

“Thank you; I’ll have to introduce you.”

“I’ve met him actually.” The bridge of her pug nose wrinkled. “He’s precocious for a child; so much like Draco.”

Hermione's lips pulled into a tight smile. "I didn't realize you'd been introduced."

"Formally, at the very least," Pansy said dismissively.

Childhood grievances rarely remained dormant, and Hermione had to swallow the fury that was fighting to make itself known. "Maybe we should go and find Liam."

Draco nodded but Pansy's arm shot out and wound around Hermione's. "You go on, Draco darling. Let us girls have a chat."

This was quite literally the *last* way she wanted to end this evening and Draco seemed to sense it as he stared at her for his signal. However, Pansy Parkinson would be a semi-permanent fixture in their lives if that matching diamond ring were indeed on the horizon so it was best that they iron out the wrinkles now.

"That's fine, love." Hermione stepped forward and curled her fingers in his lapel, pulling him in for a firm kiss before releasing him. He grinned against her lips and excused himself, winding through the party to where his father and Liam sat.

Pansy snorted and her arm fell away. "Marking your territory, Granger? It's hardly necessary."

Reeling on the small witch, Hermione's eyes flashed with her anger. "We should clarify things, Pansy. Draco and I are together now and plan to be moving forward in our relationship. I understand that, unfortunately, that means you will also be in my life."

Slowly, Pansy's full lips pulled into a lopsided smile. "That would be correct."

"Then please understand that where my son and relationship are concerned, you are not. We can each endure each other's company for the sake of the Draco; I'm mature enough to keep

the past behind us if you are.”

A flame burned behind Pansy’s dark gaze and her smile turned to a grin. “You know,” she said, looping her arm again through Hermione’s, “I think we may get along after all.”

A few moments later, Hermione excused herself and came up to stand by the chair Draco was seated in next to his father and Liam. Her attention was still on the party at large; she barely registered the conversation between the head of the Malfoy family and her son.

“Your complexion is far more suited to green than blue, and Salazar, red will wash you out; yellow will make you look sick.”

“I definitely don’t want to be in Hufflepuff.”

“Thank Merlin for that,” Lucius sighed.

“What else?”

“The dungeons are far nicer than any of the other accommodations. I know you must think that because they are in the dungeons they’d be less than fair, but Slytherin has the most benefactors. And the views are one of a kind.”

“But the views from the tower...”

Lucius snorted. “The same view you can see from any window above the third floor. Furthermore, I know from experience that the beds are more comfortable in Slytherin house.”

“What kind of experience?”

That caught Hermione's attention and her head snapped over to where Lucius sat considering the question. "Just... experience that a young Slytherin man comes by, experience that comes easier when you're a Malfoy. Besides, all Malfoys are Slytherin's. It's proper for you to be also."

"I'm a Granger."

"Perhaps, on your birth certificate, but you've got Malfoy blood in you, so you'll most likely be in Slytherin anyway. Just as your father and I, and my father and his and so on."

"My mum is the first witch in her family."

Hermione tensed, her fingers curling on Draco's shoulder, who turned to press a kiss to her fingers. He seemed so unburdened, so unafraid. It was disconcerting.

Subtly, Lucius looked at her, his chin dipping just so slightly before he turned back for his grandson. "That seems to be becoming the norm these days, so you'll fit right in. Those are the issues of old men; I dare to say they won't affect you in the slightest."

Liam didn't miss a beat. "Will you tell me more about Hogwarts? I'd like to visit, but mum says it's not open for visitors."

That wasn't *precisely* true. It was likely that a firecall to the headmistress would yield an invitation to the school, but she simply hadn't gotten around to it.

"Another reason it is good to be a Malfoy. We can go at your convenience, my dear boy." Lucius' cheeks were tinged rosy as he smiled. "I'll show you all around myself: the Dungeons, the Great Hall, the Quidditch Pitch—"

"Gryffindor Tower?"

Hermione choked back a laugh as Lucius' lip curled. "I suppose, if you must. It would be good to see the vast differences in the room and board."

She was about to speak and defend her old house but the Potters bumbled by. "We are going to run to the loo and head home," Harry said with a hiccup.

"Brilliant party, truly. Thank you Lord Malfoy." Ginny bowed deeply, fighting the laughter that wanted to burst through her lips, and Hermione could only roll her eyes as they skittered away.

Snorting, Draco rose to stand, buttoning his suit jacket out of habit. "Are they really going to the loo and leaving?" he asked with an arched brow.

Hermione shook her head. "Not likely."

"Are those two about to have intercourse in my house?" Lucius balked and, truly, she tried not to laugh. Both her and Draco remained silent until Liam asked what intercourse was, and then they burst out into raucous laughter.

"Let me take you for a turn on the floor, Granger." Draco held out his hand and she took it, winking at Liam first and then allowing herself to be led onto the dance floor.

They were the only ones dancing at first but soon after a few others couples joined. Draco was an exceptional dancer, he had an air of confidence that couldn't be learned. The grace in which he moved was something she was sure was borne onto him. And after a few moments, she was lost in the slate gray of his eyes and the feeling of his palm pressed against her back.

"I think another Granger has thoroughly charmed a Malfoy," Draco said with a crooked smile, nodding towards where Liam and Lucius remained in close conversation. "He's got some magic in him, that's for sure, because I'll tell you my father was never half as interested in me as he is in Liam."

“I’m sure that’s not true,” Hermione said seriously, sensing the pain behind the simple words.

“I assure you it is, but that’s alright. I’m glad it’s Liam in good favor. How was your talk with Pansy?” Draco’s fingertips slid marginally lower, just south enough that her eyes tightened on him and he had the good graces to look innocently away.

“It was fine; I think we came to an understanding.”

He hummed. “And what understanding is that?”

“That I won’t be tolerating her conniving, backhanded attempts to kick me from your life.”

Draco pulled her closer and rested his cheek against her hair. “She’s just protective.”

They swayed in silence for the remainder of the song. As the melody faded she pulled away, staring up at this impossible man with new eyes. “I think I’m falling in love with you, too, Malfoy. You better not make me regret it.”

Grinning he bent down, hovering his lips over hers. “I’ve already touched down after the fall, Granger. No regrets in sight.”

His lips pressed into hers as he pulled her closer still. She was gloriously drunk— partially on champagne— but also with the high of being his.

xXx

The guests waned until only a handful were left. Liam was in Draco’s arms, his head resting on his shoulder as he released a long yawn.

“I’m going to take him to bed.”

“I should head up as well,” Hermione said with a smile, and thanked Narcissa *and* Lucius for a truly lovely evening.

Lucius cleared his throat and nodded, then spoke to Liam, “I meant what I said; I’ll be happy to take you to Hogwarts whenever you’d like. And I suppose you could come to the country house for a weekend if...” He looked at Hermione, and she could see the way his pride had been dented and reformed in falling for his charming young grandson. “If your mother would allow it.”

Smiling Hermione nodded. “That would be fine. We’ll sort the details.”

“Goodnight, Grandmother,” Liam said with another yawn. “Goodnight, Lucius.”

The eldest Malfoy blinked and pursed his lips, gripping his walking stick firmly. “I suppose Grandfather would be fine. So it’s not confusing.”

Draco tried to hide his smile and shook his head. “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, Grandfather.” As the three of them retreated, Liam said loudly, “I like him even if he’s cranky.”

xXx

Draco took Liam to bed and Hermione disappeared into her ensuite. They’d be moving to the townhouse in a few days but these past few weeks she’d come to regard this as home. She loosened the zip on her dress, shrugged it from her shoulders, then laid it gingerly on the back of her arm chair.

Tying her hair up with an elastic, she made her way into the bathroom and flicked her wand at the tub until it was filled with floral scented suds and warm water.

Hermoine always was a clever girl, and when the door to her suite opened, she grinned in spite of herself. She'd chosen the lacy black undergarments purposefully and when Draco came into view over her shoulder, her skin burned under the heat of his stare.

"Merlin, Morgana, and all four founders. You will be the death of me, Hermione Granger."

Laughing to herself, she unclipped the back of her bra and then slid her knickers to her feet. Emboldened by the champagne, she turned and arched a brow in his direction before slipping into the porcelain tub. The suds kissed the top of her breasts and brushed against her nipples until they were hardened peaks.

Draco hadn't moved.

"Are you going to sit there and watch or join me?" She laughed, her fingers running up and down the tops of her thighs.

"*That* is a very good question, love." Draco yanked at the knot on his tie and pulled it from his collar, tossing it carelessly to the floor. His cufflinks were next, meticulously freed and then placed on a small table near the door. "Will you touch yourself for me?"

Hermione's sex ached even as a panic swelled up inside her. "*What?*"

"I want to know how you got yourself off all these years. Show me. *Please?*"

Whimpering, Hermione squirmed in the large tub. She'd never done *that* in front of anyone before. Thank Merlin for small mercies and champagne, because she dredged up enough courage to dip her fingers below the water and easily found her swollen clit. She pressed into it with the pad of her finger and gasped as her head fell back against the edge of the tub.

Draco toed off his shoes and smirked as he crossed the space between them and perched on the side of the tub. Her skin was on fire, her chest heavy from lust and the exhilaration of being watched as she brought herself closer to the edge.

Her eyes snapped open when his fingers brushed her kneecap. The flutter in her belly couldn't be quieted as he dipped his hand deeper, the sleeve of his shirt soaking and clinging to his muscular forearm in the sudsy water as he found her core.

With a sharp breath her hands flew to the edges of the tub and gripped against the seamless surface as he slipped two fingers inside her.

He pumped his fingers inside her and his thumb pressed into her clit. With a few mindful ministrations her walls clenched around his digits, her lips falling open in a silent cry as she rode his hand.

After an eternity, that ended too soon, her orgasm waned and his hand slipped from the water. Her eyes fluttered open, watching as he shed his clothing, his erection thick and hard already as he eased into the water across from her.

Hermione smirked and shifted, crawling over his lap and resting her hands on the edge of the tub behind him. His hands worked under the surface of the water, slotting his tip at her entrance and she sank down, sharing a pleased moan between them.

With each roll of her hips, the water rocked, sloshing over the edge of the tub and smacking the tile floor. Draco moved with ease, his hands helping her find a perfect rhythm as his mouth assaulted her breasts, sucking and teasing her nipples until she was curling her arms around the back of his head and riding him so hard that half the water had left the tub and all hopes of being clean were gone.

Clean wasn't what she wanted to be anymore; she wanted the feeling of her kiss-bruised lips and Draco's fingers digging into her slick skin as they sought a joint release. Their hips met thrust for thrust and soon they were tumbling over an unreachable precipice, their bodies tensing as Draco spilled into her with a few stuttered pumps of his hips.

She turned boneless, sagging against his chest as he trailed kisses over her shoulders. “I love you,” he confessed quietly.

Hermione smiled against his neck and rolled her hips once more. “I love you, too.”

xXx

A/N: I hope you enjoyed this chapter and thank you so much for reading and following along! I want to shout a big thank you to epically BOREDRAVENVLAW for beta'ing this chapter and coming on to help with the rest of this silly little story. She's a gem and she's writing a WIP called A House in the Country that you should run and read!

Thank you again and I'll see you soon!

Chapter 13

The weekend of their visit to Hogwarts came, and to say that Hermione wasn't looking forward to it was an understatement of massive proportions. She *was* rather keen on seeing her old school again but she could already feel the Gryffindor bashing begin.

At the request of the Malfoys, she, Draco and Liam would accompany them back to their country house for the night and breakfast the following day. Which meant that Hermione would need to keep her wits about her for an extended period of time.

Narcissa stepped through the Floo first, still fixing her glove on her hand and looking regal in her Slytherin Green robes. Lucius was next, looking much the same as he always did, his eyes searching until they landed on Liam, and at that point a broad grin stretched over his lips.

Upon noticing Hermione's Gryffindor garb, Narcissa blanched. "Oh, dear. I'm so sorry but our seats are in the Slytherin section today."

"I figured as much," Hermione said with a smile.

"Maybe Draco has an extra jumper or scarf..."

Laughing, Hermione shook her head as Draco wrapped an arm around her waist. "That's quite alright; I'm sure I'll be permanently exiled if I don't at least represent my house colors."

Lucius arched a curious brow at his grandson. "And you, Liam, who will you be rooting for?"

"The winner, of course."

Snorting, Lucius seemed to consider the statement. “You can’t simply decide your allegiance based on who is doing best. That’s...” Furrowing his brow, a lopsided grin worked its way over his lips. “That’s positively Slytherin. Yes, my dear boy. That’s exactly the right mindset to have. And as it were, Slytherin has a fit team this year! I believe we will wipe the pitch with lion blood.”

“*Lucius!*” Narcissa exclaimed, startled. “That’s horribly inappropriate.”

“Sorry, Darling. Let’s be off. We can tour the grounds at our leisure, and of course, as a former Governor we have some exceptional seats for the match.”

Lucius pulled out a small handkerchief where a thimble was tucked away inside. A portkey.

“Mum...” Liam started tugging on Hermione’s hand.

One look at her son and Hermione knew what he was thinking. “Would it be possible to Floo or maybe Apparate? Liam’s not porkeyed before.”

Draco sank to his knee and put his hand on Liam’s shoulder. “Bud, how about I hold you? It’s going to feel like you’re being yanked a bit, like someone is hooking you by your belly. But it’s fast and much more stable than Apparating. Take a deep breath and squeeze me. Before you know it, we’ll be safe on the ground.”

Liam considered Draco’s offer and nodded, throwing his arms around Draco’s neck, his entire body shaking slightly.

For the span of a handful of breaths, Narcissa stared doe eyed at her son but quickly remembered herself and the five of them stood and reached for the portkey. Then, they were gone, being tugged across the country and landing on the bank of the Black Lake.

No sooner had they landed than Hermione was reaching for Liam, his eyes wide and brimming with excitement. “Are you okay, love?”

“I— Yes, I think I like that.” Then his gaze caught on the castle and she could see the awe etching into his features. “Hogwarts?”

Draco nodded and set Liam on his feet. “Hogwarts.”

xXx

From the moment Liam set foot on the hallowed grounds of Hogwarts, he had been quite nearly vibrating with excitement. As they crossed the lawns he repeated every fact he’d memorised, pausing only to heave in a sharp breath.

They worked their way through the castle, touring Slytherin and Gryffindor commons— although the Malfoys didn’t enter the latter— the trophy room and of course, the library. He was enamoured with every brick, every portrait, and certainly every ghost.

They had breakfast at a small table in the Great Hall reserved for parents and visitors of the game. Liam was bouncing up and down in his seat as Lucius filled him in on this year’s seeker, the very best Slytherin player since Draco. As surreptitiously as possible she peeked at her boyfriend, finding his cheeks pink and his lips fighting a proud smile.

“I can say quite confidently that this is a sight I never thought I’d see,” a familiar voice interrupted. “How time changes things.” Headmistress McGonagall looked exactly as she had when Hermione sat in this hall as a student.

Tittering on a laugh, Hermione quickly rushed to her feet and was surprised when the Headmistress took her in for a deep embrace. “It’s lovely to see you again, Miss Granger.”

“You too, Professor.”

At that, the elder witch clucked her tongue and released her. “Poppycock. It’s Minerva, now.” She then turned her attention to the rest of the table. “Good morning to you all.”

“Are you...” Liam gulped, his eyes round as he stared up at them. “Are you the Headmistress?”

“I am. And you are?”

“Liam Granger. How do you do? Normally, my mom makes me ask that, but I mean it this time.”

McGonagall pursed her lips in amusement at the small boy. “I do very well. I’m pleased to meet you. Hogwarts will be happy to have another bright child in it’s halls.”

“I’m trying to decide what house I’d like to be sorted into,” Liam said seriously.

“Well, lucky for you, we have a rather stinky old hat that will decide for you when the time comes. Any house would be lucky to have you.” Minerva gently grabbed hold of Hermione’s forearm to garner her attention. “Maybe you could come back round for tea at your convenience.”

There was a seriousness in her tone that caused Hermione’s heart to flutter. All of a sudden she was an eleven year old all over again. “Of course, is everything alright?”

“Quite.” Minerva’s lips fought a smile. “Madam Pince is retiring at the end of this year. We may have an opening for you if you’re interested.”

“Absolutely! Yes, of course. I’ll owl to set up arrangements once we’re home.”

“Brilliant. Enjoy the match and,” she dropped her voice low and winked, “ *Go Gryffindor.* ”

As Hermione took her seat, Draco leaned into her. “Do you think you’ll take it?”

“It’d be a good fit! I’ll have to think on it.”

He brushed his lips against her temple and gently squeezed her knee. “You’ll be brilliant at whatever you choose to do.”

After breakfast they made the long trek to the Quidditch pitch, Liam bouncing with each step like she’d never seen before.

“Dad, I hope I can play Quidditch too! Just like you. A seeker.”

“You’d be brilliant, I’m sure of it. The best Slytherin—”

“Or Gryffindor!” Hermione interjected.

“Yes, or Gryffindor,” he amended with a roll of his eyes, “that Hogwarts has ever seen.”

Liam's eyes lit up as they exited the stairwell and he took in the full size Quidditch pitch. “It’s so much bigger than at Uncle Harry’s!”

“Indeed! Wait until the World Cup; you won’t believe your eyes, my dear boy.” Lucius clapped him on the shoulder. Here sit next to me.” Liam sat sandwiched between Lucius and Draco as she tucked herself under Draco’s arm.

In a sea of green and silver, Hermione couldn’t help but think Minerva’s previous thought rang more true than ever. How time changes things.

“Here they come! Here they come!”

xXx

As if sitting in the Slytherin section hadn't been torture enough, Hermione also had to endure a Gryffindor loss. To his credit, Draco didn't boast *that* much, but Liam was beside himself in pride and awe for the game.

After the game they made their way to Hogsmeade for lunch, and Hermione couldn't help but slip into the newest branch of Weasleys Wizards Wheezes as Liam's grandparents stole him away to Honeydukes.

“My almost sister!” George's voice boomed through the shop, his hands raised high as he made his way towards her and lifted her off the ground in a giant hug. “Have I told you lately what a prat my brother is to let you get away.”

Hermione laughed. “Not lately. The shop looks great!”

“Thank you. I usually stick to Diagon but on game days I come out here to give Ronnikins a hand.”

Her mouth ran dry. “Ron works here?”

No sooner than she had said the three innocuous little words than she noticed another flash of red hair. “Hey, Mione.”

“Ronald.”

“Try not to be a stranger, Hermione. And here,” George handed her a box of Wizard's Wheezes, “for Liam. Now, I'm going to leave you two to have this incredibly awkward conversation, but speak up. I'll be listening.”

Shaking her head, she accepted the gift. “Thanks for that, George. I’m sure Draco will appreciate all the madness you’ve concocted in this box.”

With a small wave, George disappeared, and she was left with Ron, who was squirming where he stood. “How are you?” he asked in a quiet voice.

“Brilliant, actually. I didn’t realize you were working here.”

“George needed a manager for this branch and said I was a shoo in what with the red hair and all.” He rocked back on his heels, fists buried in his pockets, and suddenly Ron was the boy she’d always known. “Hopefully soon I’ll be out of Mum and Dad’s house; it’s humiliating living there as a grown man.”

Hermione could think of at least a dozen things that Ron Weasley should be humiliated about, that not being one of them. “That’s not humiliating at all.”

His lips pulled into a lopsided frown. “Do you think we could get together sometime—”

“Granger,” Draco drawled, causing Hermione’s eyes to flutter shut. Of all the times. “I was worried you’d gotten nicked by a Weasley, but seems I’ve caught you before this one had the chance. Hi, Weasel.”

“Ferret,” Ron returned in an equally tight grimace.

“You were saying, Weasley?” Draco chimed in, his voice dripping in saccharine as he put a possessive arm around Hermione’s shoulder.

Ron squirmed more and Hermione glared at Draco before shrugging his arm off.

“I was just *going* to ask if you could get together sometime and catch up. Just as friends—”

“That’s bloody obvious. Fat chance there, Weaselbee.”

Indignation flared to life in Hermione’s chest and she reeled on the man next to her. “Excuse me! Don’t answer for me like that.”

“Come on, Granger...” Draco groaned like a petulant toddler.

“Ron, I’ll have to think about it. Maybe you, Harry and I can get together sometime. I’ll let you know, alright?” Ron nodded and she said her goodbyes and stomped from the store with Malfoy hot on her heels.

“Slow down!”

“That was so embarrassing! You’re acting like a seventeen year old marking your territory and making my decisions. You seem to forget that I’m not a witch who let’s a man decide anything for me.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “I would never forget that, and I wasn’t trying to make a decision for you. I shouldn’t have—”

“No. You shouldn’t have. And if I decide to go, then you should be supporting me, not fighting me. You see Pansy all the time apparently and I don’t say anything at all.”

“Right.” He snorted. “You don’t *say* anything but you send glacial waves whenever her name is brought up. Besides, it’s not the same thing. I’ve known Pansy since we were children; we dated as children. You were with Weasley for five years! The only reason you picked me that night from any other bloke in the room was because you knew it’d piss him off the most.”

Hermione's shoulders fell in defeat. She could feel those words slam into her and any ire was quickly replaced with remorse for not rectifying this slight sooner. "Draco, that's not at all why I slept with you that night. How could you possibly think that?"

"I'm not daft, Granger. Let's go."

"No." It was her turn to reach for him, pulling on his cloak to bring him closer. She took a moment to look up at him, studying the hurt in his features with as much humility as she could manage. "I wanted to sleep with you because you were actually charming that night. I had fun with you; getting drunk off good firewhisky and eating those gods-awful snacks in bed. You were sweet to help me and, not to mention, you looked so fit in your boxers."

Draco choked on a laugh; she continued, "I... I fell in love with *you* because I want to be with you. Even if you are horribly irritating and completely self-absorbed, and—"

He silenced her with a firm kiss, his hands closing around the tops of her arms. Lifting onto her toes, she melted into his embrace. When their lips parted, she whispered, "I love you."

He kissed her again. "I love you, too,"

"*Gross !* Don't *do* that! We're in public..." Liam cried, his lips contorted in pure disgust.

"Sorry, bud. You will someday learn... never let a chance to kiss a pretty girl pass you by."

"With *that* I have to agree," Lucius added and swiftly leaned down and pressed a quick kiss to his wife's lips.

Narcissa's cheeks turned pink and she playfully batted at his arm. "Lucius Abraxas Malfoy! What on earth has gotten into you! I swear, I've never met this man before. We should check him for Imperious or Polyjuice..." But the corner of lips were curling in an amused smile and Hermione could tell she enjoyed this new version of her husband.

“Let’s get back to the house,” Narcissa added. “I’ll have the elves start a fire in the backyard.” Clucking her tongue, the Malfoy matriarch led the way home.

xXx

The seaside cottage the Malfoys now resided in was quite charming. Nestled next to the cliffs so they could stare out at the ocean while the gulls were lazy on the beach below.

Hermione stood at the fringe of the yard, buried underneath a blanket and an oversized cable knit sweater. Her tea was a bit hot still, and she held it gingerly in between her hands, breathing in the strong aroma.

“Cold, dear?” Narcissa’s clear voice broke the silence, and quickly a subtle warming charm glazed over her. She sat down next to her in one of the large chairs, staring out at the three Malfoy men sitting around a blazing fire. “I love seeing my son so happy. I have to thank you for that.”

“Oh, I don’t know that thanks are in order.” Hermione sat in the chair next to her. “Afterall, he makes me very happy as well.”

From the corner of her vision, she saw Narcissa nod. “Are you having a pleasant weekend? I was surprised you both agreed to come up here.”

“I am, actually. I admit, I wasn’t expecting to. There was some history, with Lucius and my friends. But, that’s all in the past. Forgiven.”

“Do tell, how do you forgive so freely? Not that I object to you doing so, but Lucius hasn’t exactly done anything to warrant it.”

“I don’t know,” Hermione said seriously. “I give it because I would want it returned, I think. Like with taking Liam away, hiding him from Draco and in turn all of you. I can’t imagine if something like that was done to me, but Draco’s been so gracious. Well after a few early setbacks, of course.” She smiled at the memory of them arguing at the Potter’s back door all those weeks ago. Merlin, they’d come far.

“Forgive an old woman for prying, but are the two of you something serious? You know my son, he’ll never tell his poor old mother any details.”

Hermione laughed and sipped her tea, listening to Draco and Liam laughing in the yard.

“We are,” she said simply. When she turned to the older witch, she was smiling brightly.

“Well, I’ll leave you to it. Thank you for entertaining me, dear. Don’t forget to cast another warming charm. It wouldn’t do to have you get sick.” Narcissa gently squeezed her shoulder as she passed and made her way into the house.

For all these years, Hermione had been without family outside of Liam. It was yet another part of her life she’d given up on.

But since her return to London, she kept finding family in the most unexpected of places. She wasn’t quite as alone as she thought she’d be.

A/N: The next chapter is the last of them and I’ll be posting it riiiiight meow. Thanks BoredRavenlaw for your eyes on this before posting! You’re a gem if I ever saw one.

Chapter 14

CHAPTER 14

The following weeks leading up to Christmas and Liam's birthday were dreamlike. Hermione and Draco got on like they never had, enjoying every moment of early love. And while Liam and Hermione settled into the townhouse and Draco went back to his flat, he was with them more often than he wasn't. If either of them had ever envisioned a perfect life, they seemed to be living it.

When Liam's birthday party arrived, keeping Draco, Narcissa, and, yes, even Lucius, from turning it into a gala of epic proportions was difficult. However, she was able to talk them down and managed a small but full party at the London townhouse.

Liam requested a Hogwarts themed affair, and upon entering everyone was sorted by The Hat, which was Liam wearing an oversized mockery of the Sorting Hat.

He had far too much fun mis-sorting everyone who came by.

Hermione was in Ravenclaw, and Narcissa ended up in Gryffindor, which bristled her to no end as she donned her red and gold scarf. Lucius and Draco remained firmly in Slytherin. And when asked which house Liam would be in, he stated that, "It wouldn't be fair for The Hat to have a House, so he would remain neutral until his selection on his first night at Hogwarts."

Hermione laughed from the fringe of the party, her fingers hovering over her lips. For a boy who didn't much like people, he seemed to enjoy the spotlight at his first *real* birthday party. With every day that passed, Hermione knew she'd made the right decision.

The Potters arrived and Liam was currently in a standoff with none other than James Potter, who was staunchly opposing The Hat's decision that he was a Hufflepuff.

Liam smirked, his eyes sparkling and Merlin, the child looked exactly like his father. "Sorry, James... The Hat doesn't lie. Here is your scarf."

“I’m in Gryffindor!” James sputtered, his cheeks flushed bright pink. “My entire family is Gryffindor!”

Shrugging, Liam thrust the scarf at the eldest Potter. “Time to shake things up, Potter.”

James turned to his parents, gesturing for them to intervene.

“It’s his birthday, James,” Harry pressed. And finally James relented and snatched the yellow and black scarf and hid behind his mother.

“Albus, answer these three questions to learn your house. One: what is your spirit animal?”

“A monkey.”

“Interesting. Two: what is your favorite color?”

“Orange.”

“Three... What is your favorite food?”

“Cauldron Cakes.”

“The Hat says... *Gryffindor!*”

“Bullshit!” James shouted and both Molly and Ginny had him snatched up quicker than Hermione thought possible. Truly, Hermione tried not to laugh but it was a lost cause. Draco settled behind her, resting his chin on the top of her head as he wrapped his arms around her middle.

“Another round of Potter against Malfoy, how will you handle it?”

Chuckling, Hermione pulled a face and turned to look at him. “Me? Hardly seems my problem.”

“It will be if you take the position at Hogwarts.”

A smile twitched on the corner of her lips. “Merlin, you’re right.”

“You still haven’t told me what you’re thinking of doing.”

Quickly, she looked away, unable to keep eye contact. “There are a few things I’m still waiting on; I want to see how they pan out first.”

“You have secrets,” he said with an amused smirk, his fingers lightly digging into her ribs as she squirmed and giggled.

Her gaze travelled over to their son, sitting on his throne in a mangy hat with the broadest grin she could remember him ever wearing. “For now,” she said, her hand drifting to where his was splayed over her belly.

xXx

On Christmas morning, Hermione left the bathroom with her stomach in knots and her teeth freshly brushed. Shaking away the nausea rolling in her body, she fixed a smile on her face at the sight of Draco splayed belly down across her bed, naked and snoring.

She tiptoed to his side and crawled over his back, her lips at his ear and fingers in his fine hair. “Draco?”

He grunted and pouted.

“Draco, love? It’s Christmas. I have a present for you.”

His pout pulled into a smirk and he rolled so she was now straddling his lap. “Does that mean Christmas sex?”

Laughing, she shook her head and said, “Probably later but something else for now.” She stretched over him and reached for her wand. Sitting back over his lap, she smiled at the confused twist to his brow.

“Please don’t tell me this is when you kill me.”

After severely rolling her eyes, she pointed her wand at her belly. “*Gravidate Revelio.*”

Magic poured from her wand and entered her body, the warming feeling of the spell searching for its target. When it found her womb, a soft golden light wrapped around her and the magic glowed and pulsed.

Draco’s eyes blew wide, and he pushed up on his elbows, gawking. “Is that—”

Tears sprung free, slipping past her lashes and over her cheeks. “You’re going to be a father... again.”

“Holy fuck. Oh my— Right. Yes. Pregnant. Baby. Father.”

Hermione laughed and swiped at her cheeks. “Is this happy stuttering?”

“Are you kidding me?!” He was sitting up in an instant, arms banding around her waist.
“Good Godric, witch. How much more are you giving to me?” His fingers slid into her curls and he pressed his lips hard against hers until he broke free laughing. “I’m in love with you.”

“I love you... but you’re rubbish at contraception charms.” Draco rolled her on her back and settled between her thighs. She could feel the hard ridge of his erection against her sex and she keened, knees lifting over his hips.

His tongue swept inside her mouth as his fingers roamed freely, slipping up her satin camisole and finding her sensitive breasts.

“Mum!” A small fist beat on her door and quicker than she thought possible Draco was off of her and scurrying off the far side of the bed. Hermione laughed and sat up right as Liam entered without further warning. “Dad?”

“Hi, Bud.” Draco said from the place where he cowered, only his eyes visible. “Merry Christmas.”

“You said we had to wait until six o’clock to open presents, and it’s four minutes past.”

“Okay, love. We’ll be right down.”

Liam turned on his heel and left the room just as Hermione fell flat against her back again. Draco’s laughter spilled through the silence as he crawled back towards her, kissing her upside down for a moment before pulling back to grin at her. “Do we tell him?”

She shook her head. “Not yet, it’s early still. A few weeks, I think.”

“Will he be happy?”

Hermione grimaced. “I told you, Malfoy. No matter what we think might happen, Liam always has a way of surprising us.”

xXx

Hermione, Draco, and Liam sat around a beautifully decorated Christmas tree surrounded by discarded wrappings and bows.

There had been six Christmases and Hermione wasn't one to brag, surely, but she'd done a good job on each one. It'd been just them but she made sure her son wanted for nothing and received every last thing on his list.

She never thought it could get better than seeing his face as he opened present after present.

But it did; it got better when you had someone to share it with. Draco was beside himself, nearly vibrating with excitement as paper was torn from each and every box.

When they were down to one last gift each, the static in the air shifted and Hermione felt excitement thrum through her veins.

Liam went first, tearing through the silver wrappings and discarding it haphazardly as he revealed a small, child-sized broom. The box read *Nimbus 500*. His silver eyes darted to his parents, his mouth falling open.

“It's for beginners, so you'll be able to take your time,” Hermione said with a smile fighting its way onto her lips. “And you're not to ride it *at all* without your father or I present. Is that understood?”

“Yes! Yes, Mum!” Liam was on his feet, broom placed reverently down as he sprang into her arms and whispered his thanks, then he was off to Draco to do the same and Hermione's heart felt overrun with pure joy.

The last present in Draco's lap was from Hermione *and* Liam. He gently lifted the red wrappings and found a beautifully stained, thin wooden box with his initials engraved in it. His fingers drifted lightly across the top and finally lifted the golden latch.

Hermione's heart galloped inside her ribs, running away with her as she waited with bated breath.

Two pieces of paper were inside and Draco read them aloud:

Dad,

We never knew how much we missed you until you were with us. Thank you for being a part of our family and we hope you will stay forever.

Love,

Mummy & Liam

Draco fought to swallow, tears brimming at his pale lashes as he unfurled the second roll of parchment.

Even though Hermione wasn't looking at it with him, she'd studied it a dozen times. She knew it by heart, although now it had a single— *official*— amendment.

Where Liam's birth certificate used to say Liam Stephen Granger, it now had a hyphenated - Malfoy at the end.

Draco's features pinched and crumbled; he hid his face as a torrent of tears took over his body. There was little stopping the quiet sobs that escaped her even while Liam stared strangely at the both of them.

“I thought this was a happy gift.” His brows pinched in concern.

“It is, my love. It is.”

Hermione picked up her gift, a small box. Her heart hammered at its suspicious size. He’d said, afterall, that he wanted to buy her a matching ring for Christmas, and it was, alas, Christmas. Anticipation raced through her veins and when she finally opened the small leather bound box, her breath left her in a huff.

It wasn’t a ring.

It was a... a snitch.

“Oh!” Hermione blinked and picked up the small golden ball, forcing a smile on her face. “It’s... it’s a snitch.”

Draco laughed and held his hand up. “Is it?” He smirked. “Toss it here.”

She did just that, and he caught it deftly from the air. Once in his palm, the stitch opened.

Draco stood and Hermione’s breath rushed from her lungs. He was on his knee in front of her, Liam at his side.

“I’m in love with you and despite the lovely *gifts* you’ve given me today, I’ve had this wrapped and under this tree for weeks. You are my perfect match; you are my constant challenge. I want to be better for you, *more* for you. Everytime you come into my life, you’re a whirlwind; you steal my heart and this time I don’t want you to run away with it. I want to marry you, have babies with you, give you everything I have and share our lives until we are old and grey and bickering. Hermione Granger, will you marry me?”

Tears coated her cheeks and before she answered she looked at Liam, the only man in her life for all these years. “You knew about this? You’re *okay* with this?”

““Course.” He grinned. “I helped pick out the ring.”

“Sneaky little Slytherins.”

“That’s not an answer, Hermione,” Draco deadpanned.

“Yes, you git! Of course, I will!” Hermione shot from her seat and barreled into him, tackling him to ground and covering him in kisses as Liam groaned from over them.

xXx

“*Draco Lucius Malfoy!* How dare you keep your old mother in the dark like this... it’s not right!” She chided, as she gripped Hermione’s fingers and gawked at the stunning diamond sitting on the third finger of her left hand. “Hermione, please say I can help with the planning!”

Hermione lips pulled into a smile and she nodded eagerly in the foyer of the Manor. “Of course, Narcissa. I dare say you can do it all.”

An excited squeal shot around the room as Lucius shook his son’s hand in the background and led him towards the dining room.

Narcissa prattled on about wedding aesthetics and a possible June wedding as the Floo roared to life. Completely overdressed and her chin tilted high, Pansy Parkinson strode through the grate and smiled falsely when she saw Hermione.

“Cissy!” She cooed and kissed both of Narcissa’s cheeks. “Granger. Happy Christmas.”

“To you also,” Hermione said with a nod.

“We were just celebrating the very recent engagement of Hermione and Draco.” Narcissa gripped Hermione’s fingers and lifted them into Pansy’s face, who grimaced when face to face with the diamond.

“Narcissa,” Hermione said kindly, “Would you give Pansy and I a moment to catch up?”

“Of course, love.” Narcissa kissed her cheek and escorted Liam towards the dining room where a handful of other guests were waiting.

With a long suffering sigh, Hermione fixed her glare on Pansy. “I know it was you who leaked Draco and I’s situation to the press.”

“No, you don’t.”

“No, actually I do, and I won’t have you do the same with our engagement. I know that you meddling in the happiness of others is a bit of a pastime; but it ages you, Parkinson. Let it go.”

Pansy’s lip curled.

“Now more than ever, I am going to be in your life for the foreseeable future. Would you like to agree to a cease fire?”

“What does that mean?” The witch said with a wrinkle to her pug nose.

“It *means* that we let everything go and you stop fighting me. It’s not worth it, Pansy.”

Her dark eyes rolled in the back of her head and her lips mashed together in thought. “Fine, for Draco.”

“No.” Hermione shook her head. “We end this for *us* . Things are going to keep changing, and if you can’t be with us then you need to leave.”

“You can’t— You can’t just kick me out of Draco’s life. Trust me, many a witch has tried.”

“Actually, she can,” Draco’s voice sounded from over her shoulder, and Hermione turned with a grateful smile, sighing as his arm settled around her waist. “She’s going to be my wife, Pansy. If you can’t respect her position in my life, then you can go.”

“Draco—”

“No.”

Pansy dragged her tongue along her teeth and then wrinkled her nose. “Fine, we’ll be *friends* .”

Next to her, Draco snorted. “Don’t push it.”

xXx

Three weeks passed and Hermione’s fatigue and nausea skyrocketed. Even Liam noticed and even though Draco tried to distract him and Hermione tried to hide it, he, *of course*, figured it out.

“You’re sick.”

“No, not sick...”

“You’re vomiting often and you’re cranky and tired.”

Hermione flinched. That was true.

She sought out Draco where he sat on the couch and a silent conversation passed between them. He nodded and with a long breath she relented.

“Liam, we have some news we were hoping to wait a little longer to tell you.”

“You *are* sick.” His little jaw trembled.

“No, love.” Hermione smiled and her hand curved around his cheek. “No, I’m healthy. I’m just pregnant.”

Liam blinked. “Pregnant?”

With a small laugh, she nodded and her other hand rested over the barely there swell to her abdomen. One hand on each of her babies. “Pregnant.”

His small brows tugged together and he turned to Draco with a stern expression. “You really are rubbish at contraception charms.”

THE END

A/N: Well that's all she wrote! Well.. I wrote. Thanks for reading along and if you're interested in a much sloppier and far more random plot threads that amount to nothing version of this story, check out the original! This one did end up deviating a great amount but I thought it didn't call for the unnecessary angst.

A big thanks to BoredRavenVlaw for her help on these last few chapters and to MCal for her eyes earlier on.

This was the second story I ever wrote and reading it back through has been a J O U R N E Y lol but I'm so glad I can share a version with you all that I'm more proud of and I hope you've enjoyed reading it as much as I have writing it.

See you soon!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!